

Mother Tongue

A Boston University Beacon Publication

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*The Beacon is committed to creating and fostering a space that uplifts young voices at Boston University. With that commitment, all contributors, regardless of their position within The Beacon, are subjected to the same anonymous review process. It is of the utmost importance that each piece is selected based on its content rather than the author at large.

Two Tables Down

Today is the youngest I'll be,
And tomorrow is a 2-7 hand,
Yet peaking through the manmade hills,
I see the river,
And begin to understand,
That is good enough,
For now.
I went to the chapel yonder,
Between the house's of knowledge,
And it was empty,
The preacher was outside,
Faring west,
Towards the cattle,
I was looking east,
Past the crucifix.
I don't know if it was prettier like that,
I didn't see Him there,
Yet for what it's worth,
I'll throw Him a chip or two,
When I'm done.
The Earth's-she's a'changing,
The trees turn away from the city,
Towards the moon,
And the deers are sprinting,
Into the Ocean,
And the fox is drowning,
In his Pearls.
I never was one for hate,
To wish pain on another,
Yet somehow I no longer know,
What to love,
Somehow I no longer want,
To love them.

And it's empty now,
I am only a skull,
With a cigarette,
Here tonight,
As I stare at you,
Two tables away.

The Idea of Control at 98 Mayflower

Isn't it such fun
in the velvet room we play –

plush drapes refract
red light that shatters to dance
on a white linoleum floor
like fireflies

in the morning, when
it is good, then dims;
the slow overture of a lethargic star
in the velvet room, where we play.

And then it's cascading red
is that of the machine –
it hurts the fireflies
(pop, hiss and sizzle)

in the hot air falling to
the white floor
overcome – light to fade,
in the velvet room, where we play.

Isn't it such fun

when it is late and lightless
to pluck with velvet fingers
a firefly

and raising its brief reality to
velvet lips
bite down decidedly
so a little less life flashes

to taunt you, to define
what is you and
what is the velvet machine
in which we play.

The Couch with the Drinking Problem

In the house
Had this couch.
It was old and tattered
Never wanted to get clean.

It smelled
With an odor
That would sting everyone's nose
No scent could relieve it.

It ruined everything
Nothing looked good in the house,
When the couch was around
Everyone hated it.

Then, one day,
Its influence expanded,
Like a malevolent force
It began to spread.

First, it tainted the carpet,
Absorbing its essence,
Leaving behind stains
That refused to fade.

Next, it infected the curtains,
Draping them with its foul touch,
Turning vibrant fabrics
Into dreary shadows.

The coffee table succumbed,
Its surface marred and scarred,
No longer a centerpiece,
But a victim of the couch's curse.

Even the walls weren't spared,
As the stench seeped into the paint,
Leaving behind a lingering reminder
Of the couch's presence.

Birch

In Bryant Park sun-wane, light fractured
against dappled leaves as though it shone
between train cars, imitating the
glint of your eyes...fierce as November winds.

I heard the din of city chimings
in the brief spell and exit of words,
your words, hurried and caffeinated –
words tuned to sirens and my soaring mind.

You've a premium on all my words,
shares in my portfolio of thought,
leaving the intangibles to my pen;

such was the cost of passing Time Warner.

In Central Park I surveyed the moon
shining slanted between those twin spires,
my eyes – wells — watching the horses trot
with the approach of morning, our embrace.

On a borrowed couch, that same dull ache,
reminiscent of the vacant hum
of streetlights, the spinning up of leaves,
the whirl of my bag's zipper on the bus.

I've since retreated to strange corners,
retracing my loaned palms, exhaling
bated breath with averted eyes; I
pled to angels on library murals.

As I walked between worlds, you were
the line on which I balanced. Below, a
mess of concrete and steel to be made
sense of...not least your civilizing force.

Saga of Stars

drift far, stay close
barred to the tether and bound together

piercing rings shackle, calm ores flow
helical thoughts spiral our pace, below the surface is our headspace

uncover volatile layers, conceal humble cores
portrayer of a thousand flames, yours to trail and claim

dusty lies collecting, pure promises blazed
protecting each other's memoirs, dazed by our aching scars

salt(water)

a gentle stream of water
past the bay into the basin
sweet persistent “shh, shh”
from the river above
into the vast ocean
down below

it flows
moving and continuous
as my mind swims too
moving and continuous as
the feelings ebb and flow

you'd like this
would say i have lovely
language

*oh how i love it
you're too humble you're*

and i would shush you gentle
to change the subject and
call you baby to placate the
ebb and flow of my heart

sweet persistent “shh, shh”
not unlike my heart when i'm
under you

*i know what you can do
i know you*

and yours is persistent too
and a gentle stream of affection flows
from you above to me down below

something wells up from deep within
it's unfamiliar we both don't know it
but we let it happen it happens we
can salvage this we can make it work

let's just come back to this tomorrow

but the day stretches long until it is not
today but tomorrow

the ocean grows
but i have never seen water like this
it is salty *oh god why is it salty*
and i am choking and my eyes burn and
i reach out for you but the ocean
beats me back and the streaming turns to
a roar *please don't go i need you don't*

washed up
stranded scorched by the sun *who*
are you
the light is new *when's the*
last time i've seen you

and the thought
reminds me of you so i move but you're
nowhere to be found *oh you where are you*
there's nothing to flow nothing moving and
continuous it's so haunting and i'm still here
you where are you who

the sand cuts deep and i miss the
sweet persistent "shh, shh" of *you*
and the feeling of being under you i've lost
you and i can't get you back
you've been washed away and i've
washed up *you get up and i am*
no longer under you this is new

the water returns this is
ocean water it flows from up down
trailing my cheeks it is *new*
it is
the continuous *not ebb but*

flow of

salt water

not water

Soluble Woman

She was utterly unremarkable in every way. She was born on a Thursday afternoon, curls slick and diaphanous; mouth wail-shaped, and hungry. Like her birthgiver, and the woman before that and the woman before that, she was a sculptress: she ran a fine-toothed comb through her character, trimming and shaping until she was whittled down to the satisfying mold of the objectively bearable. Her adolescence was inconsequential, consisting merely of the obligatory acquaintance with her role as female—she who vanishes.

Fortunately, she ripened into an ordinary woman of ordinary routine—dull, vain, and insipid. She too quickly forgave herself for lacking adventure with excuses of having staled beyond adventuring age, and paid penance with rigid routines of meager satisfaction and mediocrity.

She sweetened her scones with butter and marmalade, and her evenings with vapid romantic comedies and amateur stargazing, tracing shapes in the sky with the prowess of a finger-painting toddler.

She was contentedly absorbed by her trivial town, taking far too much fancy in the futile attempt of distinguishing it: “The weather here is truly like no other!”, “Oh, aren’t the trees just beyond comparison come autumn?” Such pride was only sensible considering her dwellings, perched upon an ocean-crested hill which she would gleefully descend each morning to graze the coastline. Some days, her return would be punctuated by grains of sand tracked from the shore, a coarse grit that would stubbornly embed itself in her proudly knitted rugs, but a reminder, she mused, of the side of her that was once wild and reckless.

And the trees *were* decidedly appreciable come autumn, branches sun-dipped and outstretched, their eye-catching nature remarkably surpassing that of her own qualities.

Upon each monsoon, she took credit for the rain, and thought herself particularly adventurous each time she would wrench ajar the glass pane beside her nightstand and welcome

the drowsy dew. She would hold her robe fast to her chest, but allowed the wind to nip at her ankles like her mother before church—of “etiquette” and “modesty”—and revelled in her whimsy.

She fancied herself a chef, taking far too deep of pride in the identical sandwiches she would heavy-handedly assemble each afternoon (swiss cheese and two slices of cold-cut turkey on rye), tossing the occasional crumb to a bluejay whom she addressed by name (“Francis”, although she could hardly tell whether he was one bird or multiple of the same), and privately preening in her benevolence.

After her meal, she took to crosswords, or knitting, for no purpose beyond remembering the utility of her fingers, thin and nimble like chopsticks; or she would dance in her kitchen, delighting in her silliness through timid, feminine motions—incessantly mindful of her own womanness, even whilst alone.

She existed no further than the borders of this panopticon, priding herself in her meticulously groomed lack of any undesirable trait, and dismissing the fact that, in such preoccupation, she similarly lacked all discernible identity.

It was such plainness, such lack of subscription to anything notable or distinctive, which rendered her character so paper-thin and soluble; and, thus, the ideal object of his fancy.

He is a pleasant, marketable man. He carries himself with proud stature, each limb placed precisely upon the next—a looming cairn. He is prompt and impervious. He radiates all which is virile and fiercely caffeinated (one cream, no sugar). He is a dependable importer of Italian suit jackets, each iron-creased sleeve studded with a silver cuff link. He wears his tie ticked two notches to the left, and matched precisely to the color of his socks. He is inconspicuously sharp and pervasive, like sand. He is the perfect width for embracing her and the perfect height for changing the batteries in her smoke alarm, and she was positively taken with him.

Expectedly, she dissolved into him like tea leaves to kettle-scorn water.

Together, they were indistinguishable. They tasted of toasted rye and one cream, no sugar. They cracked every window, taunting the weather, and greeted Francis each morning. They indulged in a few too many romantic-comedies and teasingly sabotaged each others’ crosswords and all too eagerly ridiculed all which was peculiar, or, rather, different than themselves.

Together, they fused like vertebrae, no longer able to discern where one ended and one began, dividing only into the distinct form that was him.

And when morning comes, he emerges from his dwellings upon the ocean-crested hill,
remarkable and satiated and whole.

He tightens his tie two stars to the left, and counts the notches in a marmalade sky. He
holds his suit jacket fast to his chest, for the autumn brought a bitter, nipping chill—but, oh, aren't
the trees just beyond comparison?—and begins his descent.

Puppet Deer

And the deer
With limbs, severed,
But held together
By stone and string,
Slowly disfigures itself.

Her head leans into her chest,
With legs folding into themselves.

Thus, she stands
Crippled and in wait.

She is crazed!
Hurry, go on,
Tell it what to do next.
Grab and tug at the fool,
The one with a catatonic gaze
Will she unravel?
Tell it not to.

Fixed

I grow weary when
The roots of my medallion crack,
When the sand has rusted,
And the threads of tulle have greyed and fallen--
When it all begins to lack sense.

For restlessness imparts disease
Upon those minds
With the tapping of dunes.

Unable to care,
The help lies within mine hands,
Folding linen and
Caressing lines of life.

Officer

My children sit in the window, tiny hot breaths and forty fingers
pressed on the pane glass. I count them all. I leave my boots
on the porch, hollow black holes frozen overnight, preserved
for tomorrow's shift. The children titter-tatter to the door, feet
slapping hard on the tile. I man handle my keys, fearing
a thump as they race to me, though I am not all there.
My gun stays locked up at the station.

I set my patrol bag down. Each child governs a limb.
Rose takes an arm. Oliver takes a leg. Hannah takes an arm.
Henry takes a leg. I carry all of my branches through the terrain
of plastic bodies sprawled on the rug, their disjointed arms and legs,
the flipped over race cars, and the HESS trucks surveilling the scene.
The wail of sirens, the whistle of the bullet, the weight on my chest.
I carry them, my children, over all of it.

Dinner is ready. It always is. My wife hands me a distasteful mug
and plate full of love. Meatloaf, asparagus, and potatoes; something balanced.
I have not forgotten her. The complacent plums beneath her stagnant eyes,

and how they raisin when she half smiles. Her pale lips, thin as a thread.
We're aging hard and fast, consumed by the chaos of my absence, a sometimes empty
mattress, my horror stories to accompany the croaking bed frame.
Tomorrow I'll be on nights again. With each turn, each shift, we'll be alone.

Tonight I will hold my wife, caress her hair with a clean hand and two dirty fingers,
pointer and middle, the same two that pumped a small ribcage 120 times. She breathes full
and I think about the breath I lost. She does not know a child died today, and I do not tell her.
And so she sleeps and I slip away to watch our children. Barricaded by rainbows and starry
night, I whisper their names and fight the urge to shake them awake
in the pause of their deeper inhales.

Come on, stay with me now.

Cysts

I.

My dog went into surgery today,
the living one. My mom's scans came back benign.
I find myself trying not to write
about Women, searching
for the lumpier foundlings in my chest and feeling altogether
too fibrous. A sack of fat,
a pocket of pus. I've gained weight
and my overcoat covers me, I am habitual
at removal. I cut off
taffy friends, blunt ends
at my hairdressers' hesitation, and then
the Women -

II.

It's like the sugar cane mounds in *Ipojuca*, swelling
from the earth. Stoic hills hacked
down by machete. An annual mastectomy.
the stalks laid out like sinews or something
in that vein. Some people think I harvest love
and I'm worried
they're right.

III.

Kyky had six fingers. She used to
tie my shoes (bunny-bunny-through-the-loop)
our own Barnum and Bailey's spectacle of wood chips
with impish kindergarteners forming the ring.
She was so cheerful about the thing and let me hold
the bump to carpool. That sweet,
sebaceous thumb. I didn't hear the metal clang
when it popped against the monkey bars.
We talk less than
we did once.

IV.

The day I got the scar splitting my kneepit,
Kyleigh's mom took off work to see me in the PACU
with a baby blue stuffed elephant. I remember
the anesthetic like some giddy candy high and I feel
behind my leg for the imprint. The mass, excised;
the infection, discharged. I guess the steeper hill
to climb is this subdermal,
grief at large, protruding.
I never see it.

We stay in touch.

The Rot that I Mock

Oh building,
You are in disrepair,
Rotting and caving in.
Oh building,
Why isn't your mother home?

You're laughing at me
And the clouds are not amongst themselves.
They touch the emptiness,
And the rhythm of your mocking does not falter.

Oh building,
You are soon to crumble into nothing,
Will your mother be home soon?

I will step on your flattened body.
See how you laugh then,
Decrepit and abandoned.
Oh building,
Will your mother be home then?
When you are dirtied for years,
Derelict from when they left you.

Ouroboros

(mouth to tail)

I am ravenous and I am edible
You taste of ripened sweetness,
Of tooth-twined pith

I am unsexed and painted more terrific than I am
Alabaster, bone-smooth, and iridescent
Yet holier only in the way of

the Sun in your eyes, of the Earth beneath your fingernails;
Of proximity to You

I am no warm-bodied lover
Your fingers cannot sink into the contours of soft flesh,
Cannot thread through my own and weave something gentle, something human;
You will never know of me such bare-footed tenderness
She, you reason, is owed to you
Mouth of pomegranate and toothless desire, metonymy to the delicately feminine
She is fate-woven of yearning flesh and familiar rib and you absorb her again and again as
though pious reclamation of what was always your own

Loving her is poetry
Yet, loving me
Is perversity
An alkaline, sodden-skin type of love;
A moulting desire of the exotic Thing—
Nocturnal and sun-scorn

Still, when you make use of me,
We try its shedding on for a size and
We speak of carnality through forked tongue
Soft and warm and human
You plant in me a garden
And remind me I am sin

I was never woman to you.
I am androgynous desire
I am foreign and faceless and starkly unwoman and thus guiltlessly wanted
But I remain—
Soft-jawed willingness
Engorged by your sin,
Metallic and serpentine and pungently familiar

I confess:
I am coiled in wait

An Edenic permanence
And I can devour devotedly and
Whole

(tail to mouth)
Of tooth-twined pith
You taste of ripened sweetness
But I am edible,
And I am ravenous

matricide

“Now that it’s done, what do you have to say for yourself?”

here lies the enemy and the protector
whose body was both a heaven and a hell
a child is left with the dreadful thoughts—
both the grief and the regret

here lies the woman of my baptism
whose body became a sinking ship
that i tried to make a home out of
but it now drifts as a memory untold

here lies the woman whom i cursed to eternal sleep
who, because of me, is no longer liminal
whose life i took without any hesitation
without my body banished to a crucifix
or an umbilical cord wrapped around my neck

here lies the woman
whose child is now with freedom.
rest in peace, my dearest heart—
who i forgot. the most fucked-up childhood
can now rest beautifully.

here lies the woman, both bruised and kissed
blood to blood—papers and papers
here lies a woman who's not my mother.