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These poems incorporate myth, persona, science, and the personal in order to explore the ways we construct narrative and meaning. By examining these different narratives, they also to call into question the way these narratives shape the self

CREATION MYTH

by

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Approved by

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APPROVAL PAGE

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*Meridian*: “Watching Bats from My Kitchen Window After You’ve Left”

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Daphne to Emily

Beware *rooted, grounded*—  
the way their soft consonants  
nestle into your tongue. Beware  
*dissolve*, which sounded sweet  
as I said it beside the tree  
branches, a fistful of sand  
splitting in my throat  
and settling just below  
my ribs while my legs slowed.  
It's easy to be careless  
with your prayers. It's easy  
to say *transform*. Don't  
ask to change, even as pin  
pricks dance into a wild thrum  
under your skin, even if  
you'd like to disappear. Don't  
mistake my helpless form  
for a *gracious* one, silence  
for *radiance*. Be specific—  
be no one's shade  
in the forest, no ring  
of laurels. I would've  
liked to become a monster—  
rows of teeth, hunchbacked,  
hands thick with veins,  
sauntering, savoring the lightness  
of my impossible weight, the way  
even a god would have run.



I.

Possum

In this story I live without you  
and my therapist talks like Rumi—  
says I should set a table

for what he calls *energy*  
waxing into fullness  
in the back of my throat

when I speak, that I should crack  
a window and reach for it  
as though it were a lost dog.

I keep hearing,  
but still haven't seen  
the animal crinkling over

grocery bags in my cabinet,  
clinking its claws on dishwasher  
metal, growing less afraid

of my tread on the tile. Despite  
its persistence—the distinct  
small taps it makes in the night,

I say it's the neighbors  
through the wall. I close myself  
in my room, pool corners

of my apartment over with colored  
fabric cut into patterns but never  
sewn, listen to a woman swoon

over someone else's beauty  
in a song. When it appears  
one evening—dishwater gray,

thin-toothed, rat-tailed—  
I don't believe it. I pace  
the hallway. The fabric flutters

up, dusty. When men come

to put the trap on my floor, they show  
me the small hole, shrug

when I ask why it came up,  
how I went so long without  
noticing. It's ordinary

and impossible—what can live  
here, nameless and out  
of sight, what can rise

without knowing  
what it wants, walking  
around, almost silent.

## Watching Bats from My Kitchen Window After You've Left

What if I begin unfolding  
into flight at dusk—wings  
of stretched skin changing me  
into something not quite bird  
beautiful, making me so small  
that gravity can no longer pull  
blood to my head? What would  
end the dizziness of feeling  
pitched upside down like the light  
of beady-eyed stars cartwheeling  
to the earth, would stop the space  
in front of me from opening like a cave  
tangled in strands of silk, the future  
moth-like in its mouth, a white blur  
of fluttering? I want a voice  
that feels through the night's  
topography. I want to hear  
the distance between another body  
and my own. I pocket the low  
buzz of the dishwasher,  
my own humming, the rattle  
the forks make when I close  
a drawer. I let the sounds loose  
into the evening. The echo  
comes back, comes back  
again and again, each time  
still carrying your shape.

## Evolutionary Theory

Even in my bathroom, where I fizz  
the tub full of drugstore lavender  
and sit until the water turns cold, my body  
changes. My fingers shrivel, whiten  
like the underbelly of a frog, wrinkle  
to get a better grip in this submerged  
world. And now I wonder  
if there could have been humans  
whose hands didn't prune, envision them  
alongside the short-necked giraffes  
and hook-beaked sparrows in biology  
textbooks, hypothetical and failed, peeled  
from the mouth of the earth like old  
skin, like the absent eyes  
of cavefish. Every kind of loss  
should be that clean and obvious—all scale  
where socket should be, a whole  
being no longer trying to see  
what isn't there. I'll chart myself without you  
in colored stages, like the creation of whales—  
each gone land limb an important  
undoing, legs becoming fin. I'll regrow  
gills. I'll molt memory, scrape away  
the pictures on the refrigerator, let nature's  
thumbnail cut the circle of my mind  
you're looped through, become raw  
skinned, bright as any animal  
reimagined from its teeth.

Sarah Prays to the God of Abraham

I've made a hymn of rags  
wrung out by my bare hands,

a prayer of my own skin  
pulled tight with child, then emptied—

miraculous. My God who's always called  
the God of man. My God who lifted me

into his story with the same thought  
I give the spoon I can reach

without looking—listen. I've prophesized.  
I saw Abraham and Isaac leave, knew

they'd return, chests puffed wide  
and empty as a shawl

swept into a storm. I know sacrifice,  
transformed flesh, could show them

my hips—thumbprint of husband,  
stretchmark from son. I know

their want. Anything taken up  
by the sky flies in the wind's

teeth. Anyone becomes sacred  
on an altar, given away. I offer my body

to the blue flame of each morning.  
My ear, turned to the sky, burns

clouds to ash. Do you see your world,  
the way it blackens, effaces

me with the slow soot  
of night? And what angel

of yours will you send to stop  
the trajectory of its knife?

*Doubting Thomas*

—Caravaggio. Oil on Canvas. 1602.

I like the apostle who wouldn't believe  
until he saw Christ                    cut-up  
and un-dead, who wanted  
the wounds,                    the wreckage  
of rising.                    I want to trace

                  the angle your bent elbow made  
on my couch while the Nabisco  
factory spit sweet smoke  
into humidity, while your hands broke  
me open beside  
                  the naked evening. Come back

and prove that I existed  
                  with you—transfigured  
like a sheet blown alive  
with wind,            transfigured in the way  
                  I knew you'd rattle me loose  
by leaving, but stayed  
and let the streetlights' bright fingers  
run all over my face, my shoulders.

I stepped through the spot  
                  of night between us  
and touched your jawline, your arm.  
I like Thomas  
                  because he understood  
that nothing ends            until it opens

into a gap wide enough to reach through,  
that the abandoned believer doubts  
                  not God, but the body—  
the body sifted through,            untouched,  
the body unstitched each morning  
by the sun's gangly arms.

---

No—  
if you come back, you can dig  
through my ribs, smooth a white tomb  
into my wrist. I sing  
through the crack of my footsteps  
on the floor, the sound of my breathing  
alone. My veins bloom  
beneath my skin—blue  
split ropes, rogue as a string  
of perennials—always weeping  
their color up from the dirt,  
wagging their petal tongues.



The Truth Is

It's a terrible show & I love it—

all the drama cut & re-mixed  
like music, sleek-haired women  
fighting for a single man, always one

in red who says *I didn't come here  
to mess around*. Me neither,

girl. I'm here to claw any dull prize  
from the world's fist & flaunt it  
like a summer home, to showcase  
my life like it's the backstory of a contest  
I've already won: the apartment

not clean enough, my healing salt  
crystal & inspirational quotes,  
every man who never loved me rapt

with my winged eyeliner. Let the host  
say *can you imagine—once some nobody*

*wearing sweats until noon, crying  
in the shower over the New Zealand Gannet  
that died wooing a replica of itself.*

Look at her now—chosen, cheekbones  
glossed sharp enough to cut the sun. See—  
even the sad girl can be made worth

watching. Tune in to see a contestant's  
tears sparkle, a glass of Prosecco  
at her lips. This morning in the real  
world—highway traffic, commuters

slowing to see a sedan on the shoulder,  
the crushed hood caving into itself. I was taught  
once, that if in trouble, I should scream  
*fire* instead of *help*.



III.

But even in the movies, the women know—  
    look over their shoulders  
and claw themselves with car keys  
    before the hero detectives tape  
their pictures to the crime board.

    Even my grandmother could feel the bulbs  
with her fingers as they grew, was told  
    she felt nothing.

        And even if someone believed her,  
who could have stopped the great whoever from turning  
        its lightning eyes to her?

IV.

*This is a     timely warning                     of a crime on campus*

*It is estimated                     that one out of six women*

*attempt                     a safe way home*

*are encouraged to take precautions*

V.

Look—I brag  
with each snap of twig

    beneath my feet. I'm nettle  
    tongued, clean

as the break in a bone.  
I'll take whichever goddess

hates my unholy arrogance.  
I'll hold the glowing world  
in my teeth.

Emily to Persephone

I'm stuck on  
your myth, golden  
goddess child gone  
wrong—unstitching  
it, imagining you  
knew who you were  
meant to be and picking  
up the pomegranate  
anyway, shaking  
your hips beside the god  
of death in some wild  
party of the underworld,  
teeth stained red.  
Here, Fortune's Spindle  
snakes its way up  
chestnut trunks for miles,  
their roots unanchored  
with the groove  
of its choke. I want  
to coil the world's  
sides, to dig in, to feel  
the chill of a shadow  
step straight through  
me—no lesson or lost  
girl crying for home  
all through the night.  
Always, I've heard  
there are two sides  
to your story. Tell me  
which one is right.

II.

Magic Act

A storm stuffs my yard's bare branches  
down sleeves of ice, and you train the sun to lie  
down beside you so that your shoulders split the sky  
while it slips from dusk. You unzip  
the street along yellow lines, turn  
clouds to tulle-thin curtains tight across the moon, open them  
into a dove's wing— night a fluttering  
hand motioning look *here here*. Then  
like a coin in my palm,  
you  
disappear. Go ahead—  
cut me in two. Find the card I've chosen  
tucked under your tongue.  
I want to be what burns  
in your hand, a rose  
behind your ear, the string of ribbons  
you pull from my body,  
as though I am thin air.

Charybdis

Sure, I'm nothing  
    beautiful. Unladylike  
        with my growing gut  
    of salt, swinging hips  
twirling my dark  
skirt open, my mouth  
    a maw—churning, defiant  
        in the way it wants  
    its own growing.  
Guts and salt, swinging  
hips, no delicate face, no  
    sweetness stuck  
        in my myth's maw.  
    I'm churning, defiant,  
in your way. I want  
this impossible body,  
    a voice this loud,  
        indelicate. I'm no sweet  
    face stuck in myths,  
no weeping goddess-  
girl. I'm not here for you  
    to dote on my impossible  
        body. A voice this loud  
    drowns out song  
and longing. You  
    can call me weeping,  
        goddess-girl. I'm not here  
    for you. Dote on  
the shore. Say I'm  
    nothing, beautiful,  
        unladylike. You can  
    call me out, drown  
in song and longing.  
    I twirl my dark  
        skirt. I open  
    my mouth.



## The Arecibo Message

—*Arecibo, Puerto Rico*

And then the earth was given an ear  
of aluminum paneling in the void  
left by a sinkhole, beside the moss

and Pearly-eyed Thrashers  
twitching their feathered heads in the trees.  
Scientists created a transmission

in binary—formulas, atomic numbers, the outline  
of a man. *This*, they wanted to say, *is who*  
*we are: this double helix, this distance*

*from our sun.* On the balcony  
above the dish, my phone signal cuts out—  
the nearest cell tower tiny as the spots

stucco houses make along each wooded crest  
where the horses eat Emerald Feathers—  
the sunken ear silent, as though

it's also waiting, as though some other-being  
in a blue smear of galaxy has already  
collected our human figure

and spent nights deciphering, wondering  
what to send back. Or, no one contemplates  
our noise of ones and zeros. No one

asks about the silence  
of standing over a radio dish  
in the middle of an island, thinking

about who lives in the yellow homes  
along the curved streets, and if they  
would understand my broken Spanish,

if they look out over electric lines  
and Arecola blooms in their backyard  
and ask who might be listening. Anything

beyond us may be a swatch  
of absence and loose rock, but  
here I am, stumbling

over *soy, eres, es* in my head,  
and ascending a new body  
of land. I'm taking up park maps

and switchbacks, my shreds of language,  
listening for the frogs hidden in the forest,  
their throats swelling with sound.

Wednesday Divinations, Midtown Assistance Center

Ed, who claims psychic abilities, returns  
from his solo vacation to New Mexico

to volunteer, and today, instead of stones  
meant to emanate an aura or a plate

of flea market ammonite fossils, he brings  
a Ziploc of baby orchids, only to show me

that they are leafless, the width  
of a matchstick. We are late into May,

when food stamps run thin. *Lady*, a man  
says on the phone, *I don't have no family. Who*

*else can I call?* Ed's clairvoyance  
blossoms here—he sensed my pen would fall

just after it rolls from my desk. Or, he asks  
to touch my boss' pregnant belly

because he feels an energy he can't quite  
put into words. I bag groceries for a woman

who calls me *honey*, sit close enough  
that our knees nearly touch as she tells me

about the ex-husband who shattered  
her windows. Later, in the pantry, I break down

boxes, shelve cans of potatoes. Ed studies  
his own palm lines, closes his eyes. I'm not afraid

that I too will end up alone, but that one day  
I'll choose loneliness the same way I decide

to ignore the drip in my ceiling  
until it becomes just another piece

of my home. There's no magic to how, before  
it rings again, I start to reach for the phone.

Rebekah Prays to the God of Isaac

Fine I'll be your promise I'll be  
the virgin the girl who shows up  
just in time a jug of water  
on my hip I'll kneel I'll say  
*drink* dress in gold cover myself  
in a veil *to couple to join*  
I'll be my namesake *secure* your tree  
of holy men holy sons fasten  
even the sand to the little path the breeze  
makes lull smoke into perfect  
plumes marry the right man  
I'll sprout from the stem  
of the glass he tilts to his mouth how  
easy it is to tangle sun  
bending through glass  
easy to hold  
so many futures  
in my hands  
at night I lie awake  
I say *Rebekah*  
until it's just sound until  
its meanings  
dismember  
in the air  
  
*Rebekah*  
*to link to tie*  
  
*& to bind Rebekah to snare*

I'll Admit to You Now that Parables Reduce the Individual

to lesson, that they value the prodigal son  
only for his father's mercy, the tax collector

for his symbolic corruption. And maybe the morning  
bus did conspire against you, along with the weather,

most men, or anyone who might have a damn  
problem with the way you said *shit*

*I look hot in this.* Maybe it wasn't so crazy  
that you met half some country's consulate

in a bar and brought them inside while the rest  
of us slept because *they were, like, so nice*

*you guys, and the really had to pee*  
or that you told me *my god, you are a modern*

*woman* and *let it go.* Still, I don't know what to do  
with your friend who died, her pelvis shattered

by a truck. I can't sort through each space  
you left for me—the hours you abandoned us

at Mardi Gras, the weekend with the guy  
who bragged about getting kicked out

of boarding school, the day your student  
couldn't pay for his son's surgery

and you closed yourself in your room.  
You're probably on the train in Chicago

now, vanishing into crowds of people  
on the street. Let's say God loved no one

for their conversions, but instead for their cursing  
and bad jokes, their weak knees. The world

feels like a clock someone wound up and left  
out on a porch in the rain. I'm trying to stop

circling the gaps I find here, to live  
without giving each hurt a name.

North Carolina By Train After You've Left

I've smoothed my life flat  
as a field of soybeans and split

it down the center  
the same way a train undresses

the woods, cuts through secret  
spaces as though they are the open

rooms of a doll house. At each  
cross-section, I find you

hidden like a ring of tents  
in a thicket of bristle-still trees

or sitting in the shaded corner  
of an overpass, your image

as stubborn as shed door ajar  
and rust-stuck in a backyard

beside a plastic toy car left  
too long in the rain. And what

do I do with you, with your fingers  
crisscrossing each dip in my spine

past a glass-smudged pane, your now  
far-away body lacing its soft shadow

into thick underbrush? A man stands  
by the tracks, waiting

to spray a broken line of bright  
paint on the pavement,

and a woman claps her hands  
to her ears. I want you

to remain at the track's edge—  
face almost in eyesight, feet

marking the ground while we  
pass. Or, I want the noise

and tremble, something to confirm  
the weight of what travels through

me, the nearby shudder of houses  
and dishes and glass.



## Sacred Things

If God kisses dirt so He can breathe  
his beings into being, or grows the world

into a lotus flower blooming  
from his belly button, if the universe

sticks in the back of his throat  
like a piece of fruit,

if he touches his apostles with tongues  
of flame, if the heavy song of a church

organ spilling into air is holy  
as the negative space left by nails

struck through an ankle, if an open-face  
flower drawn with rice chalk

is swept away by strangers' feet,  
if *hymn* and *amen*, *aum*, *I am*, *hallowed*

*hallelujah*, if ashes sketch into crosses  
on my forehead, if the gilded sliver

of a saint's finger bone glints  
behind glass, if a whole sea can split

straight in half, if a downpour in the desert  
floats over flat land like a ghost—

then my skin cells are also divine  
when left on your sheets while I shiver

from stepping out of sleep, coughing  
in front of the mirror, my feet

on dimpled linoleum. Tell me  
that the sun might mark me

with blisters, that red dirt will write  
itself into my hands. Press your mouth

to the hollow of my neck while I count

the beats inside your breathing. Say

we'll stay outside as a storm  
steps closer, until it reaches us

with its gauzy jaw. Point to our  
outlines on the ground

after it passes. Show me my body  
taking space away from the rain.

III.

## The First Siren to Drown Herself After Odysseus Sails Past

Wing-beating her weight  
over black waves,  
she counts  
jagged rocks, calculates  
the depth  
she'll crash  
through, but this ending  
is still better  
than the dreams  
where her voice swells  
like a sponge  
behind her tongue,  
where a ship slices the shore  
and her mouth flies  
open shut  
open like a broken  
sail, while seamen  
footprint her bone  
-washed beach, dig  
daggers between  
her breasts, steal her  
part-beast body.  
They stuff her claws,  
pose her  
elegantly, extended  
as though she's offering  
herself, replace  
her eyes with glittering  
ovals of blue glass, trophy  
-hang her from the bow  
pluck quills to pick sand  
from their teeth.  
Far from men

imagining her  
into fine feather and skin,  
she used to dance  
on her talons, think  
of Persephone  
below the earth laughing  
with shadows.

She squatted, slurped  
oysters' soft bodies  
from their shells,  
let salt sun itself  
on her chin. Listen—  
the men sing too.  
And her own song  
keeps slipping  
to wind.

Leah Prays to the God of Her Father

"Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel was beautiful"  
—Genesis 29:17

My father gave me  
over, the shroud  
of evening so thick  
it thumbed me  
into nothing  
more than a trick  
of the eye. My husband  
tried to cheat  
the sting behind  
his lungs— what  
the first man named  
*lonely* before you  
built someone  
from his rib. But  
like you, I saw  
the future—waking  
up the wrong  
sister, living  
in his house, stepping  
into drapes of night  
so the air could wish  
itself into the line  
where my thighs  
meet, collect under  
my breasts. I remained  
quiet, couldn't fix  
the way his hands fooled  
me into believing  
the morning might  
not come, couldn't craft  
a new companion  
from my bones. Men  
teach me to pray  
to the God of floods,  
to their Almighty  
Lord of sons  
and land. But I know you  
already, God of my plain

face, of my untouched  
skin, God who created  
the space in this bed where  
a different woman  
should have been.

## Dream Leaps

Let's say the ordinary world works  
this way—that you see sneakers  
on the floor & begin running  
through the dry-gold grass  
behind your old elementary school,  
the linked fence just barely ringing  
like china shoved together  
on a shelf. Like the loose quarters  
you find in the dryer, you find a woman's  
face in your mind & she's there  
too, ankle-deep in the ocean—the field  
now all wet sand & you're running to her  
or from something, the wind spider  
soft on your face while the sand  
swallows your legs. Let's say  
you can tell your friends about all this  
at work & look it up online. You can  
search, *woman, silence, consumed  
by sand*, can say *I had this strange  
reality the other night where someone  
was burning churches in my home  
state*. You can search *school,  
shooting, a shopping mall, recurring  
or running from* & someone  
will interpret it for you. Or, you'll laugh  
it off. You won't be worried  
when everyone shrugs, shimmers  
& disappears, won't worry about  
the silence growing from your mouth,  
how the empty chairs keep swiveling.



## The Speed of Light

—*to my brother*

*Imagine an ant*, you say  
as we split sandwiches  
at the table, windows already December  
dark. *Imagine it at the end*  
*of this placemat*, the way it  
would look out over warp  
and weft and see an eternity—  
its insect brain unable  
to untangle each ridge of weave  
or envision an end. You  
brush crumbs off the brown fabric  
square, which is now  
space-time, and fold it so its edges  
touch. We watch  
the invisible ant step from end  
to end. Then you let go,  
and the cloth sprawls open.

Younger sibling of physics  
and logic, of the universe mapped  
out in ten dimensions,  
you say that this is how we might  
move faster than light, say  
*did you know black holes*  
*would sound like static*  
*between radio stations if we*  
*could hear them?* You  
explain that scientists saw matter  
squared and knew it could be  
negative, anti, ready to annihilate,  
its other. Anthony,  
so much of the world seems  
this casually violent, reeling  
up on the TV in the coffee shop,  
scrolled over, regular

enough to warrant the usual *how*  
    *did we let this happen?* Alone  
in my new city, I often feel far  
    away from everything,  
a soft pang stuck somewhere  
    in the back of my throat  
like the throb of prodding burnt  
    skin with my tongue. Tell me  
again that darkness hums  
    static while it drinks fistfuls  
of light. Say there's evidence  
    that we might pass over  
fields of life woven too wide  
    to cross. And when  
we can't move, what will bend  
    to close the space beneath us?

I'm Afraid of What Exists Beyond the Ordinary World

like the Pentagon searching for UFOs—  
the universe more than just our rodeo

of television noise and mall salesmen, miracle  
shampoo. Though I know it's just distance

that makes the night sky appear manageable—  
turning perished suns into something small

and twinkling, undead. A religion teacher I knew  
once said *but doesn't some part of you feel*

*eternal?* And I do feel alien  
to whatever part of me goes by a name

I don't know—whatever part of me is not the sick  
lung made sack of spit, not a buzz

of nerves, the skin a lover stopped wanting.  
Like the stargazer or the guy watching

for light and pinning up snapshots  
in his desert trailer, I'm desperate

for any kind of definition—even a cruel god,  
a bad horoscope, a man

keeping my voice in the most distant orbit  
of his mind. How do I shrink

to fit in the diagram  
I want to make of the world,

to place myself neatly in someone  
else's hands? All the time I hover

over myself and never land.

I Try to Skip Past the First Week After You Leave Me,  
Only to Discover the Nature of Time

Unlike a line or dimension, time's pinned  
through me like thread, so that when I rise  
away from my stack of unwashed laundry

and oatmeal bowls, I begin to take it all  
with me. The mailman from this morning  
and his small puffs of breath dangle

behind me, pull at the strings woven through  
the visible veins in my elbows. His tomorrow-self  
hangs in front of me, reaching into the mailbox,

fixing his hat. I rise and time parabolas  
below me. The neighbor's dog poking his head  
out the window into next week's stretch

of rain is swept up into the arch—pasts  
and futures on either side of my axis, facing  
each other mid-air. I can see the park

you and I hiked through, your arm tight  
around my waist by the bridge, mouth pressed  
to the top of my ear, words traded

out on your tongue, given over to anything  
you said, like my body defined in dark  
contrast to a winking skyline, the taillights

of your car growing smaller. I can see all the way  
back to before I met you, to the night  
my friends and I went to the bar full of biker chicks,

how it was funny that I looked like I belonged  
there in my leather jacket and dark lipstick  
despite nervously picking at the skin

around my nails. I watch as I rub the red lips  
off into a cloud of smudge on my face. I watch  
for somewhere I belong in the future, for my nails

to be un-chewed, my jaw to be as tough  
as those women smoking out front, alone  
in that bright cold and breathing into it,

taking up space with their rings  
of smoke, larger than I ever was  
beside you and shivering

in a parking lot or on my own  
under a wide apartment ceiling. Time scrapes  
backwards on the wood floor and frictions

into spark. Moments rise and grow,  
and in my panic I don't know if I want  
to skip backwards or forward. I turn

clumsily and strung to the ground  
like a backwards marionette. Mailman past  
and mailman future flail into each other

and letters scatter—postmarked  
yesterday, today, tomorrow. Next week comes  
in glances of morning and night. I turn

and time digs into my wrists as I try  
to grab hold—suspended in place,  
arms wrenched into awkward wings.

The Letter I Might Write You Now from This Mountain Home in the Blue Ridge

This weekend my friends and I drank  
our mouths purple, dealt cards  
of our futures—*the star, the lovers,*  
*the fool*. Ridiculous, I know, but I wanted  
to believe it—there, on the table, a woman  
pouring water at her feet—illumination,  
renewal. The dark stopped

up the windows, covered the fir trees  
and wrens. We talked about men—  
about so-and-so's ex, L's boyfriend—  
still three states away. Then L took a drink  
and said *but Emily is the most alone*. Not too far

from my home, there's a drowned town  
and the legend of a woman who walks  
on the lake at night looking for her lost lover,  
her sadness blown so wide inside her she floats  
over the water. She and the lake are both called  
*the lost one*—Jocassee. This sounds nothing

like me, but that night when some of us  
heard mice scratching through the walls,  
I thought of her. Ghost girl  
carving his name over and over  
into the siding, tired of the blank  
pool of the lake always looking up, its giant  
eye eternally eyeing her—*poor girl, lost*  
*one, the most alone*. But now I'm telling a story

I know isn't true, and I'm writing you  
just to say that I sat a long time out  
on the porch today watching the nuthatches  
peck through the woods. The air had that pine  
and dirt smell of fall. The wine I drank was good.

Rachel Prays to the God of Jacob

Don't forget that I was a shepherd  
before becoming the pretty girl  
of anyone's story, even yours.

My hair clung to the smell of dry grass  
and dung, stuck to my cheeks with sweat—brown curls stubborn as the bulbs  
of calluses budding at my feet.

I was a woman moving over the water  
of a well, swatting flies from my face. I walked, and dirt bowed beneath me.

Do you worst,  
or your best. Empty or fill me. I travel plenty  
of barren fields. I never worry over the rough  
landscapes of my own body—  
blood rust-dark in the cracks of my fingers, wet salt  
above my lip. I've looked into the long gap  
of the well while dipping my bucket. I've already watched myself break  
into soft edges, seen how beautifully I am erased.





## The Moon Has Earthquakes

but no tectonic plates,  
and while you're sleeping you forget  
most of what you dream.

Your eyes cut side to side  
under their lids. The pigeons  
roosted over the back porch

are never mistaken  
for anything holy, though they're doves  
of the ground. Near the edge

of a canyon, some people fear falling,  
others worry they're going to jump.  
It's just the mind always needing

a story, a reason for seeing safety  
when you step away. You checked  
on your mother after talking about car accidents

at lunch last Tuesday. You know bad  
things come in threes, let yourself feel  
less nervous if the radio plays music

you like. It ended between you  
and the guy you didn't love,  
but you keep making it

into some kind of tragedy, spooling  
yourself up in the soft thread of how  
comforting it was to have someone

touch your wrist. *To spool*  
means *to wind*, but also  
*to unwind*. Feelings can't last

too long, your best friend is sure.  
This is meant to be soothing,  
though you'd like them to become

bright and symbolic, sharp,

wide-winged. When you were a kid,  
your mother promised birds

would find the ribbon  
from the balloon you lost  
in the grocery store parking lot

and stitch it into their nests.  
You repeated her words the way children lull  
answers into their minds, so taken

with her weave of ribbon, you forgot  
your empty hand hanging beside you—  
stuck half open, half shut.

## The Truth Is

My most used emoji is the one that's laughing  
& crying at the same time & last week  
I dyed the ends of my hair purple.  
I'm that edgy now. My hairdresser  
asks if there's *anyone special*. I had one  
date with this guy who held a decent job  
& liked coffee shops. We saw a drunk girl  
in a leather skirt—heels hobbling down  
cobblestone, her thin bird-arm linked  
through a friend's. He rolled his eyes  
& said *do you have a skirt like that?*  
I got an online dating profile. It says  
*loves dogs and mimosas*. It's not a lie,  
but I'm such a liar. For example, I told that guy  
*Yes, I have a skirt just like that* because  
he pissed me off & I say things like *I'm fine*  
*with whatever* or *this may sound*  
*stupid, but*. I'm concerned I'm nothing more  
than a very nice young lady & soft in the hands  
of whoever will take me. I might give in  
to superstition—plant the statue of a saint  
in my mouth, upside down, to try & sell  
my shack of self, my untenable tongue  
while someone in the corner whispers,  
*she doesn't really believe in all that*  
*right?* But the truth is I believe fully  
in the not miracle of my dog-heart—  
always sighing in a warm room  
of comforts, resisting the instinct to bury  
whatever small goodness it finds.

## Creation Myth

The birds perched in my mouth  
are unnamed and scale  
footed in pre-constellation  
night. I'm an itch  
in a god's brain, a dark stretch  
of water watching a spirit  
step over my body,  
waiting for something  
to touch me, to say  
if I'm dust or skin. Feathers  
curl out from under  
my tongue, taste like the center  
of the earth, like air in the cool  
hours, ocean husking  
its torso from the sky. I want  
to be believed, to untangle  
myself into clean  
orbits. Or I want to be the scatter  
of rogue lights stepping  
out of an explosion  
when the universe first  
uncurls its fist, or the moment  
before forever, the pocket  
of a cosmic giant, a hum  
held in someone else's throat.