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This thesis is concentrated around a speaker coping with hostile and volatile relationships both internal and external. The primary tension exists between the mentally-ill speaker and her fragmented memories, emotions, sensory experiences, and personalities. The poems in this collection rely on the coastal landscapes of the Canadian North Atlantic to visualise and give texture to the speaker's experiences and emotions. Other subjects, including grief, romantic loss and miscarriage, sexual trauma, self-harm and suicidal ideation, and an encompassing sense of isolation will colour the reader's perspective of the speaker's narrative.

THEORY OF MIRRORS

by

Amy Elsie Parkes

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Approved by

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For my father

APPROVAL PAGE

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Diptych

My attempted dyings make her meagre
exhibition: the knotted loop in a braid

of bedsheet; disassembled razors;
foxed labels from hoarded barbiturates,

antiseptics, a bottle of bleach. My slow
disappearance disguised under glass

and all my other secrets she kept
listed neatly. In the museum of natural

history, she's at the edge of my decaying
boreal. She always begins my unmaking.

She's hungry like a logging river
with flooded banks, an ugly churned

rush of rumours after my eulogy.
Look: she pools in the thick bruises

under each of my eyes. The sickly
bluegrey where I have gone to rot,

where she has been prying and I
doubt I belong. *Please no further.*

My pleading echo—a velvet rope. My life-
less wild in this glass case. It's foggy

with her fingerprints.

3824 Novalea Drive

sixty-three years of sun drip
for that uniform you can
& its house where you were
gold bars onto shoulders too old
remember this photograph
the last to live with him

man's jaw too sharp
to a wife he hasn't yet
you from the years
to stand to speak
his uneasy posture & young
for that sofa the wedding
met & you the wrong age
he needed help to dress

a filmlife fracture with
stark in Polaroid foreground
three decades' infidelity
your inheritance his
your-father-before-you
& fuzzed in the dim back
a milk shoulder & fox stole
confessions you keep them too

& staring over his shoulder
staring at his eyes
recognising you
half up the gangway
not-your-father
in your face without

sun-stained wallpaper in your
childhood's kitchen fresh coffee
spits & gurgles in the percolator
but you cannot hold
your dead father's hand
another anachronism
he has no missing fingers
as he lifts the coffee cup

Clockwork

Once, I tried to sleep
in the room with the grandfather
clock. My pappy's uneven
pendulum knocked in my chest
all night. Some troubled analogue's
ambered gears have remade my dead
in the living: I look just like my
Great Nana Trapp—I have only
seen her last photograph. The one
before she knelt in front of the oven
and made a wish to its pilot light.
I know my sister leaves her every
light on, she ignores the sundial's
steady repetitions. For fragile
brightness, our *nannu* swallowed
a lightbulb. It was impossible to pull
from his throat while curve & jaw
were intact. He tried to stop time
& hold everything still.
Still as our grandmother, Alice—
his mistress—who perfected
her silk nightgown flight halfway
between a balcony & her tender
fruit trees blushing the lane. Tonight,

I will mangle the wall clock
to stop its counting. My wire

cutters will turn its hands
to mute Lavinia's stubs. Like her,

I am obsessed with confession.
I remember my mother,

her sad eyes & the knife
block. My father measured

the seconds before he stepped
in front of a shrieking bus.

going nova

and I will shatter just to see
a brilliance of so many
shards singing hymns
I knew but have forgotten that

memory scrapes against my tongue
the way dusk drags the sun beyond
a vast and swiftly tilting horizon

I wake up naked under
constellations I can't name
these ambulance lights like stars
will go nova if I look

away in another hospital
where strangers will tie
cinderblocks around my ankles
I am pulled from the sky

Portmanteaux

Another of me feigns sleep in the sandfrost,
all mottle & shade. She knows & fears something
with teeth is hungry & hunting. Naked shore hardwoods
swallow the dim. Still it lours through branches & slicks
raw ice over root gnarls. Another of me prowls barefoot—
the one of me who never sleeps. Cracking teeth echo.
Brush skeletons smear charcoal on the beach snow
& deadened dune grass furs the slope like a breathing
animal. Weather-bleached driftwood knots make jaws
for my nightmares. She cannot imagine the creature
but the broken howls & rotted mouth chases
me awake. Another of me spends her memory
on this salt bay washing smooth over my head.
She's the one of me who won't swim. Midwinter carves
hard wind, air so cold it's gone thin. Nothing
between me & the world. My throat hollow without
all my voices. I thread us all back into one body.
Another of me is a hand on my shoulder. The weather
darkens & I alone climb a black tree. One tugs away
my shoes. One coils rope. One practices closing my eyes
& one breathing underwater. Another of me steals
down from the moon. I can feel the heat of her breath.
Another of me stalks away.

Warnings Posted at Pompano Beach

Wet sleek pelicans—still
growing into huge shoulders and deep keels,

faithful to their hunger—
vanish fearless into the water.

Of us, they are more like you.

A beach attendant opens a blue umbrella beside me.

Shade blooms. The birds drop
into the waves three foam crests back

from the dragging ocean's dead seaweed
roil. Don't, says the stranger. My hands feel sunhot.

But he can't see my fingernails
revisiting scars from your latest disappearance.

He means the red king tide; warning me
away from its sickly wind. He can't see my heart

& the trench where you sway
like an anchored buoy in heavy surf. You insist:

Trust me. You say
I mean it this time. You say I am here. Look.

I Said Bones

a doctor rhythms a penlight
over my pupils & inside of me
a moth batters itself to dying
trying to reach the light I forgive
the moth but not myself not
for what my mother accused me

*told you
I've told you*

*the women in my family
we all have them* my mother said
to the doctor said *on the left side*
an extra bone in the orchestra
of the foot my mother pointed
to the gift she gave me
& not my broken places

*don't touch
that I've said
how many times have
I said to you*

in girlhood I broke both my feet
here said the doctor look at her
crushed parts *look at my hands* said
my mother she ignored what she could
not control she showed the doctor
the uneven lump the thumb strange
my mother has better things to do
even when I'm hallucinating her

*how many times
how many times have
I told you
have I*

how are you feeling asks a doctor
uncertain I look for my mother
but she evaporates I look hard
at the remembered maps of my feet
tilted moth's wings delicate drawn
into the light it was so easy to forgive
a bone moth for burning itself alive
& trying again a doctor says tell me

*have I
I've told you I said
how many times
have I said*

so I say bones I say my mother's
bones I lift my hand the snarled
skin & a calcified knot she keeps
changing my body to liken hers
a doctor looks at those scars
says tell me what you can see

*what have I
have I told you
how many times
have I told you*

shards of my mother's voice snag
& glitter in my throat so I say
forgive me for burning myself
the doctor touches my mangled
hand I say can't you see
my mother's bones inside of me

No Black Dog

Smoke lifts from dead fires rained out
in thin spires & in my unyielding boreal

no sounds move. This place
no refuge. A loon's haunting could

make this air familiar but it hangs empty.
So alive & black in the windless chill,

a cow moose breathes. Steam rises from her
steep withers, broad back. Always she comes

to me & always in this tall blue fir forest.
She does not always come gently.

I follow her through the wind-
torn pines, cold brackish coastal fog.

Her soft broad cheek to my temple, tender
to my skin. As all moose, she's volatile.

Dangerous. But she is mine
as I am hers. One day she will kill me

& I will be grateful—for all our moments.
(Even that one, even then.) For now, she walks

softly, sighs; she comes gently & I rest
my hand on her granite shoulder.

interview with my astronomer

sorry for my unstable

orbit & ways I trembled
the sky & yes I will

shame my nova I'm sorry

sorry for my bed
littered with raw diamonds

I was the tilting wind
that moved the constellations

you scarcely believed
I was alive then

& sorry for the messes I left

in my wake sorry I will
keep leaving

first my body flushed
& slick in its hollows

unforgivable crests at wrist
& hip precarious on the horizon

of a glittering concussion

after hours in the observatory

my chest glows at this time
of night always
the same blood and cream

of ugly craters named *Aristoteles*
Egede Eudoxus
Tycho but the strange map

recedes there is always—
eventually—
forgiveness
where my skin heals

Ursa Major

My mouth to his mouth—

We are too close. One day
the Great Bear will swallow the world.

His mouth to my mouth—

Show me the closeness.

So I show him his body inside
my body. Soaring heat and ancient rush.

My mouth to his mouth—

All of me?

His mouth to my mouth—

*All your collapsing fragments.
All our shards of spilled light.*

My brightness overwhelming, throat
& exposed throat. His brightness
answering before the sky knew auroras.

My mouth to his mouth—

I am a star falling, I am burning, I—
I—

His mouth to my mouth—

*Show me what you are. Show me
constellations of our scattered bones.*

So I open my chest for him, open
my mouth for him, all his
salts on my tongue.

My mouth to his mouth—

In our bed we can see
only seven points of light.

His mouth to my mouth—

*Ours the names of two
hundred other dark stars.*

Above us, the Great Bear,
opening her mouth—

Theory of Mirrors

For FR

We snuck into the Hall of Mirrors
while the carnie's back was turned.
I know you watched my reflection
tender a kiss to your bristled throat.

The warped mirror-eye knew us:
too tightly bound, our edges aching

for the stretch. Strange glass

abided our reflections—
looked through us. On the other side

of the fairgrounds, dancing horses
whickered. Even so close
to touch their velvet lips, we only

found their shapes by their halos
in the exhibition lights.
You said the black, black gleaming

was most alive thing you'd ever seen.
I said my heart a trapeze for you.

I won't wait forever but I will be there
when you are brave. But you
misunderstood me—you must have

made wings: gutted pillows
and our duvet in shreds.
Scant handfuls of down

clung to the shadows in our
torn-apart bedroom. A corner

of our fractured mirror showed me
the curve of your Achilles' tendon.
It said you'd already turned away.

Girl Finds a Garter Snake

I crushed the wild strawberries, stained my bare feet,

pleaded with absent foxes, *Forgive me
my larceny*. I made myself part of the morning

dew moving, alive. I knew to be tender,
I knew to touch wildness with soft hands

but the snake tried to vanish as I watched

its purposeful inward curl. A bright
tooth glinted, certain and lightsharp.

Ahead hung the red cliff and the sun scattered
off the deep cold where I had taught myself to swim

against the tide in case I should ever need a way out.

I pushed through the tangled acre of deer apples
and untamed thorned roses. This made my hands itch

to rend my skin in its vulnerable places.
My voices all said: *Gently*. But I know

only one version of me. *You are an animal
like any other*. I learned this compulsion

for reincarnation from a sun-doped field
and the snake dead in my hands.

to wolf lake, willingly

I go to the lakeshore
willingly I wait in
the frostdead reeds

& spill my strange
marrow in the water
my echo lured out &

plashing from the dark
a wave rises the disjointed
rank mouth—the necrotic

dog I have named
my name it will feast
on my poisoned hands

& jealous leaky heart
my disguised bloodlust
in the medicine dream

I will die again
tonight I'll sleep
like the guilty

confronting again
a night that keeps
me sick & alive

le mal du pays

northeast faces naked on jack pines, red
pines, the silver birch & tamarack trees.
shredded limbs watched the hollow-eyed granite
lakes, streaked strange & bigger than the hidden

dusk. unbalanced colour, smeared muskeg, grey
gneiss reminded me of every dead thing
I have ever seen. now my old home in
every frame. this exile the loneliness:

one more thing I have taken for granted.
seven pairs of hands painted what they mourned.
lost between the palette and the canvas,
I want to go home. once, I crawled into

the national gallery for escape—
I was careless then.

Malagash Peninsula, Nova Scotia

plain sailing twilight tourists ripped dune grasses

*

fed matches starving sparks veined smokewind

*

stricken dinghies listed hull-rot useless

*

burning grieftide swallowed fat waxed summer

*

horizon red alive

Vultures

Clinging to the bar of my shower curtain. Vultures
with stooped shoulders.

At my bathroom counter
more crowd me. They are not here to beg

for scraps. They are here
for salvage.

One carves her beak into my soft
places. I inherited

snarled scars from her. She indulges me
so I ask her for one more. *Please*

do not leave me. Vultures lift
like smoke, vultures watch.

They wear thick char
on their heavy wings. Bald heads

like the hot embers, the burnt skin.
I am unprepared— No knife. I am unpracticed

She hears my thoughts, touches my empty palm,
is never wrathful. Her posture lumbbersome,

she mothers my ruins so carefully.
Pooled on the floor it looks like red feathers.

Little Aubades

I

in the garden. Humid
canopy vault, his flush

measured sky & hour,
sweating his own red

heat. Nimble, I cut
where his gaze lingered.

I climbed the dying
tree, pruned cancer

vines. Sunrise caught
me, his rays hot

on my skin & nothing
between us.

II

His warm palm
 cupping the arch

of my small foot
 & I curled my fingers

behind the sun's
 ankle. Hard angle

& heavy ridge. Steam
 dripped out of my hair.

He came stealing
 down from the sky.

III

He spread his gold
over my lips

& into every leaf.
Wet lilacs opened

in his sheets & he
bloomed into me.

A sweet leaking
gem. I showed him his

body inside of my body.
He lit up mine under

his wait. The sun folded
me into his

bed.

IV

My cheek to the throat
of sunrise, sleepy flush

& his gold bristle.
Ours a dark winter

bath sloped by white
glittering drifts. Wind

greedy,
howling in the sill.

V

His light turned
sinewy in the cold.

Deeply inside me, red
& alive—a brightness

Still our joining
made its wet dying

streak down the slow
length of my thigh.

Low, cottoned & gauzy
clouds thickened

in my eyes. His gold only
a silhouette at my edges.

VI

He set his toothy light
to my every new mar.

The sun dragged his
tongue over the sounds

I couldn't open
my throat to give him.

He couldn't read
the purple carving-aways.

Each scab a letter
in our daughter's name.

VII

New red
 horizon broken

on the vast of his shoulders.
 I was curled

as ampersand. Sunrise
 kissed me & climbed

out of my bed, he only
 & always clines west.

His freckles salt-
 burnt, fading how stars mimic

the morning's vanishing.

VIII

I wound myself
 into his hollows,

not to the depth
 of his sloe winter

solstice. Grieving—
 naked—I surrendered

the sun. I left him.
 My feet bare in the snow.

Beachcombing

Red silt beach at night—
in my palm our daughter's
fussy collection of smooth
hue-strange pebbles.
A siren moved through salt-
mist, the shale cliff shed
dark flak. It tossed me

out of bed toward our unlit
bathroom. The pebbles turned
a fistful of pills I swallowed
uncounted. I ignored the voice
that was not you and not

exactly me; caught
your mirror-face, sleep soft.
Your tight mouth wondered
if you know me at all.
Uneasy and secret. I cannot

answer the question you buried
beyond the low tide. I cannot
say this without claiming your
tender fear. But darling, it's better
like this, I'm better like this.
Promise.

borderline personality

I opened myself &
she prised away every imperfect scab
with her scoured hands
I unlocked the cage
of my ribs but there was nothing
inside me—she found no knots of nerves
or ligaments strung tight
to puppet my performance
instead just mangled evidence
that I was something gone
wrong
in her arbitrary body
all the skin with scars
in the older scars
carved out into
some other shape of her
that will have to master this
unbeing

Burning House

Don't try to save the dog
from a bear. Swim out with
the riptide. In September

the canals run flooded
& too fast. *Are you*
paying attention. They said

Do not go back
into the burning house.
You said these are old

wives' tales from a poor
farmer's almanac. You
my come-from-away.

As careful children in museums
where staff hid paper keys
in the exhibits for us—*Are you*

paying attention—we
redeemed our proof for small
treasures. Rock candy

& tiger's-eye marbles.
Each year, they taught us
how to save our siblings

from batteries & thin ice.
Long flights of stairs
& sweet-smelling bleach.

They said *Do not go back*
into the burning house—
you touch me better.

Winter in Florida

Thick leaves shushed against the siding with night winds. I felt the sound inside me, maybe like she

was hearing it, too. I imagined her smell, maybe like milk & citrus. You fed me from your fingers

wet gems of the Florida sunsets we watched from a little rented cottage. Our bare feet gifted sand & crushed coral to the scratched wood floors.

Our wet hair & salted skins made us all dream in underwater panorama. My body knows

your sleeping hand on the curve of my thigh, knows we made her divine and unlucky. Today I counted her last heartbeats.

Now my body is home to none of us

three. You're taking me to the clinic on that boulevard, the one shaded by orange trees—boughs buckling

with fruit.

The Butcher's Daughter

My mother tallied under the cloud
of her breath one fault

over & again. *Fat*, she accused.
Too much fat. She wanted a world

admiring her
work. Deft wrist & clean scale.
My mother wanted the starved

& praising.
Look how she made me—

hollow belly, naked tongue.
My hunger only wolfs itself.
She carves away where I spoil.

When I ate her voice—
& nothing else—my mother
gave me fresh cuts to carry

for the bright window of her butchery.

I see my mother in the reflection
& my eyes are trained like her eyes.

& the knife in my hand like her hand.

Bullfighting

FR

Heart like a	pendulum.
Heart like both the starving hammerhead and her	prey.
Heart like a battering ram, like a bird and a	window.
Heart like an emergency. Like smoke in an empty kitchen. Heart like a fire	escape.
You asked me one question, a question like	water spilled from a faucet.
I can only give you my heart My heart for you the charging bull.	in answer.
	My heart like the bullfighter, gored.

the florist

your hands filled
with those flowers & strange how more

blooms between us how your kisses
linger in the green spilling

two dozen mauve daisies in an old moonshine jar

*

I saw my father weep for the first time
in a hospital & he refused my visits
we were both cowards

when he could stand he went on painful will & crutch
toward a shelf of piled blooms & forgottens

I watched him tender the cut flowers & the pots

a nurse said *I've never seen a bouquet last so long*

*nearly dead I was sure
this old man brought them back to life*

*

at the threshold of my door you lay
a beardy kiss on my nape & watch as I repot

the little fuchsia into orange clay & I love you
more for not asking why

I am named for the florist my great-aunt who before
& during the war tasked my father

to pick the new dewcold forget-me-nots
with his slender boy's hands

After the Acquittal

I omitted many things.

The deep rank smell that clung to my clothes after;
the other smell under
my skin after

I burned everything—

I did not deliver the letter
I did not write to his house.

Everything

is my fault. Each
clear thought swung like a fist.

My bruises, my handprint
smearred on the foggy mirror;
he let me shower—
blood and clots of hair still in the drain—
before

he took me home
to navigate barefoot.
Trying not to hurt myself
on my shatters, on the sharp toothy mouths
and the gossip.

He did not say *I want
to see you again.*

I was not mentioned
when he did not testify.
He tried to make me disappear.
I cannot wear leather belts anymore.

He wasn't the one
to leave my body as evidence.

midwinter horoscope

says not enough snow, says thin sun, says keep
the hunting knife under the bed.
look over your shoulder. says
again. says new moon, says body in the lake,

midwinter horoscope says he comes back.
says he leaves
before sun-up but he comes back. says sorry,

says deadbolt and empty war chest and wet
kindling. says pack ice in the harbour. says howl
in the threshold and jawbone rising out of mud
frostmelt, says altar.

midwinter horoscope says floods
on the causeway, shattered window, says night
cracked like buckshot. says old teeth
in a child's palm and bad harvest and riptide.

midwinter horoscope says he leaves. says his
face to the sun. says he's laughing.

Abacus

We were dozing and careless when the rain
started. You pulled down the wide canvas hammock
and we fucked in the garden.

The green vault dripped, it didn't hide us from
your neighbours' windows. That made aliveness
slur in our chests. We condemned what made
us two distinct bodies, reimagined ourselves in one
thousand postures—
never found the limit of our skin.
Your long fingers tangled in my wet hair.

Torn blades of grass clung to the soaked warm canvas
beneath us, the rain made it one dark
muted colour. I still found bruised white petals
pressed onto my calves, the long wings of your back.

A breath was bitten tight in your lips; neither of us
knew if you'd found a new name for God or for this.

By the last light I counted your ribs again just to be sure.

Hand Writing

I say give me your hand and align his long thumb to my heartline I show him where I am still alive I hear his voice behind his handwriting my lover a man of uneven longhand of an accent that bends scratches into lilt who folds back quilts from his bed for me again I always drift-and-fall in from his gravity. I always hear how light twines around the weight of his hand as he skims graphite dances. I speak and he watches my voice waft out of the room. He undresses me gentle my nails over his broad chest I steal small shivers he says *Do it don't stop eat them* says *You're the only one allowed. You're my only one ever.* My lover shells letters into the ridges of my ear with his lips reads my carved skin I press my thumb against his sealed mouth open mouth wet hot tongue. I give his cock my secrets straight from my throat my lover moans I know what he means bodies pressed together all this time and my fingers mapping his mouth I can touch the words right off his tongue.

from the adulterer

after the sun dragged the heft of its waist from the water

*

unsorry for blonde gossamers forgotten in a fragrant bed

*

never forgive me—us—for burning the orange trees

*

wet shoulders score the light down a salt-cracked sky

*

I was in love despite the grey songbird dead on the lawn

To My Predators

I am keeping
a secret. I swallowed all
my milk teeth

long ago. I
am still biting my tongue
bloody. I am

still turning
to face my predators. Pale
& sleek

& abundant. (You,
in the corner of my eye, always.)
A man

leaves the most
infectious bite—the mouth
makes wounds

within wounds.
I collected every tooth
you left

in my skin.
A hidden part of me festers.
How often a man

is a man
like you. Maybe I shouldn't
have been a girl

of that age.
Maybe I shouldn't have
been a girl

alone. Now
I am coaxing out all
the teeth

that swim in
my belly. I am spitting back all
the gore & bones.

I am poisonous.
Other strange men have taken me
into their mouths & died.

Skinny-Dipping

in the winter. The thrill burned our insides
like a long-held breath. Stiff dune grass
sliced my bare feet. We shivered and
laughed, flung our shocked bodies dare-
deep into the Northumberland. New sun
glittered harsh in the hoarfrost
on dead driftwood snarls; it wasn't snowing
yet. I howled to the empty pinking
sky. The air curled into soft fog:
our tight hungry breathing.

My hair ribbons of ice down my back.
I licked my lips to warm them and tasted
the whole ocean—even the flashes
and ripples you made, even the ricochet
of your voice off the cliff. You inhaled,
your chest opened at every rib.

You slipped under the dawn-flat dark. I held my
breath too, the whole time you were gone.

Elegy for the Anniversary of My Father's Death

There remains a quality missing
from the North Atlantic Ocean

sunsets. My father a faint echo of his voice
once ringing down our long red silt beach.

Bedridden and translucent,
my father's Mediterranean skin was sunless—
worn, bleached, lined as driftwood.

My father the final spill of an ocean swell
run ashore. A crustacean graveyard, a hundred
dead ocean fragments disguised for the tide
to take them away, too. My father's bones
are buried at sea.

The Hermit

For JWW

The wind caught me
last night. I saw the black
engine dragging its burdensome mile.

I did not know he lost all
his daughters when they were still small.
Under the cracking plea of steel

to steel his voice came to me:
be always careful
at the empty tracks.

I do not often chase the dead
though paper graves,
but I found him.

The spring I was seven and almost
dying, he made me a valentine.
The curl of smokesmell silver

birch bark reads
SWEET A—
in delicate solder iron burns.

It was from the skin of the tree
under which he buried
his youngest girl.

I do not know how he learned
to sing, or how my father met him.
I didn't understand he loved me.

I didn't know his first name then,
not that afternoon he taught me
how to whittle with a man's knife.

Choose Your Ending

You can choose not to tell your father
how you'll kill yourself.
When you stand together over your mess
there'll be nothing left, not even to say.

If it doesn't work the first time, you might
try again;

beg his face to come back from the wrong side
of the mirror
& try again.

But in another story
you manage to hold yourself together
until your lover
says he won't love you anymore.
Then you scream & cry
& gash your thighs. You forget
anyone else has ever loved you
You forget your father.

There is a version of this story
where you pick a bathtub full of ice.
A meal of barbiturates & bleach.
You'll hallucinate your father, but you can
not hear him, & you'll never
have seen him so young.
You'll begin to drown
while you're still awake
& it hurts.

In one version of this story you're not there
& he dies alone.

It makes you crazy.
Like if you could undo
your seams he could forgive you.
Like you would take yourself apart
to rebuild one body where you exist together
again, & he would
still forgive you
for using his knife.

But in that one you're ashamed.
So, you start
another story;
to starve,
the slow way to die,
so no one notices.

In the better-&-worse
version of this story, you don't tell
your father—
he's the kind of dead that stays dead.

The Cat

I again counted my knees, the stray
ankle twisted over the edge of the tub.
Third ice water bath & barbiturate stoned.
Three cups of bleach. My three perfect
islands rinsed away easy,
all blood & bile & forgetting.

Cold in porcelain apology, my arms
archipelagoes, my mouth choked
on a thick heart. My hands made cups:
I poisoned myself with salt, another
sickness for surviving. Nine days

starved & sleepless. Nine braided loops coiled
in a bedsheet. I crushed bruises into my throat.
But the cat perched on the bathroom counter
& miaowed three times. She nosed the faucet.
She wanted water.