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A Daughter in Parts is a collection of poems that explores the many contradicting roles of women, and the many facets of being born a daughter.

A DAUGHTER IN PARTS

by

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Approved by

Committee Chair

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For my grandmothers: Alice Blankenship Edwards and Virginia Little Smith

APPROVAL PAGE

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A DAUGHTER IN PARTS I

In one life she tells the story and in another—

Daughter as crème brulee, sweet
shell and your spoon precariously
above, ready to tap, crack,
taste and swallow.

Daughter as sword swallower, as fire-
eater, smoke breather. Daughter as sacrifice,
as edifice, as cough drop swallowed by accident.

Daughter as shrine to her mother's
high school yearbook, as yardstick,
as match. Daughter will catch-
as-catch-can, as mausoleum
to her father's unabating ambition.

Daughter should not touch
or be touched, daughter encased
in glass behind red velvet rope.

Daughter as voodoo doll struck twice
across the mouth, frantic
closures, forced errors, pins
in all that rag doll soft.

Daughter as clean as a whistle and whistle-blowing.
Daughter as doormat, as dirt trap as gravel pit.
Daughter in deep shit.

Daughter as vacuum, as void, as collection of cars
across interstate lines, as green-lawned cul-de-sac,
as dead end, as alley.

Daughter alone in too many alleys.

Daughter as Bougainvillea vines, as spider web laden,
as dove, as falcon, as cry that threw stars to sky.

Daughter as town-crier, always crying, daughter
with the ocean and two eye holes, seeing
too much, eyes that cannot shut.

Daughter as window, as lighthouse, as lightening.

Daughter is light-as-a-feather and stiff-
as-a-board, daughter as ten-dollar whore.
Boys are coming, so Sally-bar-the-door,
daughter who keeps mouthing more, *more*.

Daughter as spectacle, as spit-
cleaned, as splatter on the curb.

Daughter wants your head served chilled on a platter.

Daughter as storm-drain, as wrong turn then sharp pain.

Daughter as too much matter. Daughter, daughter, what's the matter?

Daughter as louse, garden mouse, spigot.

Daughter darlin' in the thick of it.

.
Daughter as pit, pistol, plight.
Daughter as pistoning from daddy to daddy.

Daughter awake all night every night.

YOU ASK IF LOVING ANOTHER WOMAN IS EASIER

As if I found, improbably, in the midst
of a rocking sea of stubble, right angles,
large shiny boots, and stock options
 some sacred feminine shore

As if she was the land that sprouted my feet

As if when holding her breath in mind with mine
As if a pomegranate spun song

As if when I sat beside her
in a staff meeting I didn't watch
her pen move across the page
like it was the Fourth of July

As if the nape of her neck did not conduct electricity

As if she wasn't a mouthful of jam,
a saucer of silt

As if I didn't laugh even when cruelty edged her voice
 As if I could refrain

As if I did not pee more furtively when she was in the stall beside me

As if her shoulder blades were nesting doves, her earlobes question marks,
her spine composed of prayer beads

As if I could fall asleep without counting each knot in the rosary

As if my sex, pulsing and open, in her hands
 was any less fragile,

 And it was not

GREY STONE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CHURCH
Durham, North Carolina

Mostly I'd think about sex
or I'd pretend to take notes
and instead scrawl poems.
I'd hide in the last row
reading *Catch-22* or *Jitterbug*
Perfume from under my bible.

It is a precarious balance
keeping competing words
quiet in your lap.

Mostly I'd think about kissing
girls at sleepovers or men
in the aisles around me: a lustful
waiting, half-conscious state
that left me dazed and wet
when the last amen finally struck.

I sat egg in carton
with the rest of my kin.
Very obedient, nice
to be filed up like that;
safe to incubate
with all those bodies
warm round you— Or maybe

that is a trick of now? When I am alone

in my kitchen at midnight
by cold windows leaking sound:
cars, trains, wet pavement.
Barren of that Sunday safety
(some benign congregation of memory)
for a flicker, I miss it:

that boredom, those bodies in a building
all facing one way.

PORTRAIT OF MAMIE NEUGENT, 83 YEARS OLD, WASHING HER HAIR

Photograph, David Spear

My hair like milk, like miles
and miles of white road
through tobacco leaf. Out

of the braids and into the wash
bowl but first: swing, hover, unspool.
My hair like water falling in itty bitty waves,
like unspinning cotton, letting it down
like I was young, like I am still a girl-thing,
like I am some maiden in some field, princess
of silver white snow, letting down the ropes, cracking
open the door, sliver of sky like a shard of glass.

Anoint me from the bowl, prepare the soap: see
how much there is to unwind and scrub clean?

Clean it till it shines, till it squeaks with all that clean,
then dry it till it feels soft and lighter than the best of pillows.

All this bounty, all this light, all this milk and honey.

Count the waves of my hair like rings
of a tree. See how long I've grown?
83 years and still I make long, strong,
white rope; shooting lightning
down my back. My hair will last
even when I am gone and in the ground,
there my hair will be, pushing white
bright rivers across the land.

PREPARATION AND DESIRE

She painted her face
to go to the dance
to catch the man who
wanted it all. Or

she put on her shine
to go to the house
with the woman she
couldn't stop wanting
through long winter months,
a crimson slash blazing
through a gray skyline.

She kept showing up
(at the dance, at the house)
waiting for wanting
to pull her in orbit:
waiting for purpose
to rise to the top,
for it to become
like a pep rally
or potluck, something
with an outline or
discernable end.

She wanted to be
washed in centuries
of light, craved sentinels
of assurance, sure and sweet,
posted at each elbow,
for every foreseeable
trip, insurance for the rip
in her stockings. She

needed order: like placing
a polished pearl on the palm
of her tongue. She wanted
teeth of starlight, hair
of honey. She hoped

to be so beautiful
she was beyond any use
whatsoever, or, so
fundamentally and
continuously useful
that her name would begin
to sound beautiful
to anyone who heard it.

She designed a nest
of warm with high thatched
walls, with baubles, gifts
in every hollow
and wrinkle. She wanted
her shell to be lovely
and also, at the same time,
needed the carapace asunder—

needed to be eaten
like an oyster, to be
the swirl of ocean down
someone's throat, to be held
inside another body
to be inside the played
piano. She wanted
to love so deeply
that she wouldn't mind
 it when her body
 broke and slid.

GALATEA (AS STATUE) CONSIDERS PYGMALION (AND HIS PLANS)

You were no longer interested in women
so decided to make me:

carving me from ivory and your first
morning thoughts, chiseled down
from your painful past, your last
lover's words and too quiet mother,
shaped my breasts *just so*, made
my lips full and left slightly open.

.
How could I not (in some small way)
love you, after so many hours of toil?

You labored to bring me forth
(sincere eyes and steady hands)
through days into nights into the first
cracks of morning lighting the room
again in shards. The nights you spent
hammering were better than prayer.

Born of you: you, my maker.

Then the morning you hoisted
me upright, with light filling the air
and coating the dirty floor, light
flooding in, light looking me eye
to eye. I thought you were going
to kiss my cold mouth, so urgent,
(reverent, really) the skin of your
face flushed like a peach.

You looked at me like new and sky
and a hundred birds flying straight
up at once—

but an idea sparked
the current, spun you
and sent you
to the box
with the chisel

to finish
my hair
making
it wave
just so.

A weight settled
in my chest, maybe
the same way a love
might fill ribs and have
to shine through? The size
of it the same but heavy
instead of light and no shining
out, just a sinking that bottomed
my tailbone into an anchor.

STAYING IN

There was an old woman
who spent nights collecting
piles, winnowing the sacred
into mason jars. It is very
difficult, dear reader, to funnel
the whole universe down
your bathroom sink.

It requires tools and a rather
delicate force, applied over
time, while hair falls out
around you or grays and whitens
on your very own head,
and your face begins to sag
and fold in ways you couldn't
have planned, where strange
hands become your own
and you must labor and labor.

The woman did not want
to forget anything. She was
old, you do remember, so she
made high piles of paper and low
mounds of sawdust, wound
rubber bands around mustard greens,
arranged spools of twine, sage leaves
going silver, socks and neat goblets
of ash, tall structures of orange
peels, feathers and stones.

She ordered things by color
and divination. It took a long,
long time but soon each room
had what it needed:
 candles, music hanging in the air,
 a spider web tucked in the corner.

She has taken the time. She has locked the door. She is waiting for crone magic to come.

ODE TO SEVEN PAIRS OF PANTIES WORN AT THE SAME GODDAMN TIME

You are my last seven
lines of defense. You:
the seven veils I will
never willingly strip.

You will keep me safe on late
night walks from men.
I trust your seven-layer talisman
to make the past un-happen
or at least not happen again.

I have swaddled my groin,
my cup full of sorrow
is locked away.

I am wrapped up
like the Christ child himself:

just as sacred and perhaps
as doomed to suffer.

ORIGIN OF GIRL

**the wind howls over girl and her father:
holding them together, flying them apart**

The girl becomes the marble
inside an eye.

The girl sucks and sucks
in light: expanding

and contracting to every
time he flickers. Opening

or closing—light hacking
through blinds, cracks

in the closet, traffic, birds.
She loses her words.

**the sun shrieks through sky all long day:
cooking girl and her mother in a sweltering tangle**

The girl becomes the pit
of a peach, plum, apricot;

the juice bursting and the sweet,
bruised flesh, all in one

fell slap. The girl learns
to hold a hard knuckle

forever, hidden inside
every thing she will ever do.

TO HER LAST LOVERS, ALMOST EACH AND EVERY ONE

in the dream where
you shatter my pelvis
you stand forever above
an edifice gone shrug
a question mark
slowly filling
each of my open
eye sockets

A DAUGHTER IN PARTS II

I. Birth of the Eldest Daughter:

They wanted her to be beautiful and so dressed her in rose petals and glass underwear (they aspired for her privates to be enshrined for posterity). They wished her to be beautiful on the inside, too, and so gave her icicles and honeysuckle to eat. They hoped she would sparkle and gleam like a new road in a country club.

They needed their daughter to remain holy and so planted a church inside her skull, right after the baptism, with her lace dress plastered to her girl ribs. In the church bathroom she looked at her wet head in the mirror— but didn't see the beauty or the holy. She could, however, feel the planted church already growing in the bumps of bone under her hair, right at the nape, it grew in tiny, painful ways until anyone (who looked close enough) could see it.

They wanted her struggle to have meaning so they gave her a gold-paged King James Bible, pink leather, embossed with her name, “whenever Jesus speaks it's in red, see?”

For years and years she searched
for meaning in red words,
then just words, then just red.

They planned for God to like her and shine down, encircle her with the very best of lights, a spotlight really, so they sewed pointe shoes to her soles and took her to ballet class, singing lessons, taught her “His Eye is On the Sparrow” and sent her to one stage, then another, then another. The girl liked singing but not the eyes on her— the eyes, so many glinting like creatures in the night. Her mother had intricate portraits made: *Daughter Crossing Pond on White Bridge*, *Daughter Reading Bible in Taffeta Dress*, *Daughter in Fur Coat (Rabbit) that Matches Mommy's Fur Coat (Mink)* and her father said, “You've got to burn to shine.”

II. Daughter Washes up on the Shore of an Apartment Landing

—from all the hurt, the mean, the cruel, all that she did and did not do, even to herself, on herself, her very self: like she was the mountain and the capitalist, the miner, mine and coal all at once, only doing what was necessary, salvaging from the inside a dark necessity, the thing that must come with great cost:

What is the beauty hiding in her mouth? And must we keep plumbing it?

All the sharp, the claw, the pinprick, the gutting, the gaining, the gauging, the getting, all that she did or allowed or did not scream loud enough to stop, and then the years after the scream that never stopped anything (a tea kettle lived in her throat, wavering high pitch whistle all the time but when she opened her mouth, nothing but steam). All the times she bared her teeth, all the times she groveled, all that she rearranged and did again, same things in slanted light—

should you forgive her?

But yet, you must you must you must because you are not for the dust, not quite: that thin thread always in you, stitching *live, try, again*, moving inside you, precarious and painful in the cramped corners of your body that is (that has to be) some sort of home. The needle still guides, thread follows, turned iridescent through years of pulling, grown thinner than wire. The needle calls, thread obeys and you know you know you must.

THE MERMAID AWAKENS ON HER THIRD NIGHT ASHORE

I must swim
myself back
to the sea
at night, all night,
feel it eddy
around me,
tide me over,
wash the fish
back into me.

I wake writhing
tide pool of sweat:
the sheets on your
side still stiff and dry.

I stumble to your
water-closet to find
one scale
has grown back:
a petal of light,
a spot that shines
at the base of my spine,
a winking eye.

Will it taunt you?
Will you let it stay?

I pee naked, shiver
and stumble back
to bed. The sheets
are cold. The waters
in you are the only
warm I can see.

THE MERMAID LEARNS LAND RITUALS FROM MOLLUSKS AND
MANICURISTS

I scrub scales
off my backside.
They fall into a golden
dowry of leaves
on white porcelain
floor. It leaves a scent
less than pleasant. Now
all must be cleaned
again, the tub, the skin

(all the surfaces his
surfaces might touch).

Double-dutch
with scrubbers,
flimsy fins
in hand. Hum
and hum
the tune aloud:

Yes, this all
can stay, I
can stay
on ground.

THE MERMAID EATS TUNA STRAIGHT FROM THE CAN

She stares flat ahead
at bottles and bottles
of water, an aisle of water
each one held tight
and for a price.

She turns on faucets
in his house, the gas-
station, and grocery
store to feel
home tunneling
back to her.

Land walking, land
living is too much
for the formerly finned.
She misses scales
over too soft skin.

She decides to escape, lose
his longing if she must.

Maybe this time
she will try
a different dance:
wet her pants,
go see the sea,
and this time turn
full manatee.

SHEELA NA GIG

I.

He retreats within. The best you will get till he decides to come out is a nod or a *no*. Lock. He could give a fuck about you. Look, you can riot right outside, iris to iris, and not a murmur, a gesture will forth-come. Done. Take care of yourself. Stop needing so much. Learn to live in the wake of space: the marble absence he wants you to eat with and sleep beside, bump dreams against, two buoys in the night. Is this a punishment for something you did but didn't realize? Some button you pressed in the back of his brain, at the hinge of his skull, all petals and leaves. Is there a lesson here from God? *From the universe just for you?* Something you are supposed to learn? *Draw a circle around yourself right now and that's where the universe wants you to be.* Some shit like that. Why did you ever say those goddamn magic words, the *I-love-you-I-love-you-I-love-you* spell which if chanted, incanted, long enough means: you have to stay.

II.

Proffer *I love you*. Proffer a kiss. Proffer a hand to flaccid penis. Proffer your mouth, your jokes, your empathic listening skills. Proffer your heart, each chamber and beat. Proffer your bare, pink cervix. Proffer to keep the peace. And after offering all this, after doves, incense, frankincense and myrrh, after cleavage and questions and stroking his hair— when he wants to *not talk*, calmly ask him to leave the room so that you can get off. Answer: *I'm going to watch porn* to the question in his eyes. Close the door. Don't think about how you will watch people fuck on a screen while the person you would very much like to fuck sits in the other room. Click. Can wanting make you insane? Tip you over the line into outer space, spooling piano wire, spilled out jack-in-the-box, iridescent fish scales, sheening and sharp, roomful of yellow balloons, air that keeps ticking? Does wanting keep us alive? Is this the alive you wanted to be? Couldn't you have chosen better? Click on this video. Click that one. Click another. Try to find something. Not too dirty. Not too insane. Not now. Find something with some kind of there there. One where the people look familiar, with bodies unscarred by surgeons, un-waxed, undone, like the bodies of real people, like your body, like his body breathing in the next room.

VANNA WHITE SPELLS IT OUT

I've turned a cube
a time or two.
I've turned all heads
like a curlicue.
She's turned a few tricks.
Well, haven't you too?

I've seen jaws drop
and lion mouth gape;
the loapish shoulders
huddled, quite sedate.
I'm fashioned to please
and boy can I do it.

I've ridden kings and fondled grapes,
bend your knees and I'll prove it.
Beauty queen wave
and mouth dentist white,
I've turned dinging cubes
every goddamn night.

I walk on heels to ample applause,
collarbones lighting your
living room as a career.
I "ooh" and I "ahh" because
I'm paid to be here.

If you laugh at my purpose
or you doubt my life's path,
I have two letters left
so you do the math.

WHEREIN I BECOME THE GODDESS OF BOTH FERTILITY AND THE HUNT

Nursing babies and ripping meat
from the bone are not so different, really.
Both requiring a fearlessness to the fingers.

Every night, infants and toddlers
nurse at each nipple and men
as well, tongues out for the offering.

Meeting the squalling, wet tongue,
careful of the loose jointed neck, the soft
spot skull—I feed the children first,

then, only after, I rain for the mouths
of men, hand out rations of meat. I kill
with bow and arrow sharpened with waiting,

skilled by hours of practice aiming
at ripe figs. Now expert at parting
skin, dodging viscera, fat, muscle

to find the vital artery, the inside river.
I stroll with humming step to each trembling,
felled body, fur growing damp with red,

look in the eyes and offer a kindness: quick slit
of throat and the shudders slow to stop,
leaving only a knowing, an erasure

of all else except body and body.
Until I am not Dianna anymore, not
any one thing of the world but all the suckling
lips of time, all the sticking tendons

of space, the heat and hunger of every bodily
thing. Can't you see I am not me here?
I am blood and stone. I am spasm and sputter.

I am pouring forth and catching
it with my own two hands.
Leave me at peace with my hive

full of children, the fountain
of each breast, the cleaned bones
of animals at my feet.

LA ESPERA

I walked the streets of Madrid,
Toledo, Andalucia, Sevilla, worried
that the waiting and the weight
of it (an overripe fruit, sweetness left
too long) was ready to split and soon shrivel.

I slept in a single bed (rosary laced
through my headboard, crucifix
on the wall beside me, painting of sad-eyed
Jesus greeting me like a lover each morning)

and waited (in barren and bubbling
cafes, dank metro rides, crowded
bar bathrooms, empty cathedrals.
winding streets, desert air) to see
if, after exiled by that doctor's
skillful hands, cancer
had crawled back.

The air was thick with new
sounds, vowels and lifts, opera
and hula-hoops in my ears. Devilishly
fast and me walking mute among it,
or my fumbling tongue flicking
the air in stutter stops.

Oh thief that lives in my heart,
you have filched long enough.

Al ladrón se le olvidó llavarse la alegría—

There is more goodness than I can hold
in these two hands: it waits
in my left wrist, a fever blushing
my skin. It is there in my limping

step, in the fields of sunflowers,
en *los escaparates de pastelería*,
in the fountain round the corner,
and in this—in my somehow
still fertile center, in the places
I won't let you enter.

HOW IN THE WORLD DID I STUMBLE INTO EDEN?

Did I conjure him with my making
and constant remaking of the not-
too-soiled-after-all bed sheets?

Did I drag him from the ether with how
much I scrubbed, how, God, I wrenched?
The hope, inherent, in a California
king-sized bed?

Did I assemble him: tall tree trunk and head
alive with hairs. We are always under water.
I am always watching him move. He messes
with my barometric pressure is what I am
saying, see?

Did I form his hands to fit me, exact
to measure? His loins to keep
my backside *everwarm*? Did I tie
him, tether him to me to keep
me here, on this ground? Have I
borrowed his sense of gravity?

How do I know already (like glancing
the large flashes of flicking
koi—their bodies below the surface
of the water) and feel like I've seen
his types of pain before: the yellows
and orange alarms of it, the splashes
of red, his branches and species
of hurt and bone, still moving, still
underwater darting.

I can see them swim in his iris right now,
hope the movements will match my own.

The wish to drink from him snags
my days, the drive to wrap him
in me: be forever a body
touching his body, forever
this pear on the tree, this prayer
and sweaty necessity, forever
dew and breath and hairs sprung
up at the back of my neck
and too much laughter
and so much
shaking. I am racked
by him, with him, on
him, through him,
 unbridled, I ride,
 am ridden, wave
 of horses, pony
 pummeled, love-
 drunk, nothing
 left but a blathering
 tongue.

LOVING A MAN AND HIS KIDS AND HIS HOUSE

The parade-roller-coaster-
hijinks-filled-slapstick-show
of kids: your kids, becoming
something like mine, as well?

How close should I hold
them? What will stay? What
will be taken away? The kids
are never still, neither am I,

neither are we. Snare drum
of dryer and tickle of zipper
going round. I sit seeing
if I can become all house, can

reach peace with the plumbing,
vents, and lofty operations
of this whole rigmarole.
I am becoming woman

of the dishrag, the counter-top,
the shower. I am wife-ing the damn
house; tending to her, administering

each careful ministrations. We will
keep each other safe and clean, keep
ordered functioning, keep all precious
things precious. If this were a cave,

I would festoon it with honeysuckle,
thick garlands of magnolia blossoms
circling the rounding where ground slopes
high to wall. If this were the belly

of a whale, I would light candles and read
the shadows. If this were a cockpit,
I'd learn fast how to fly.
This is a house, I am a girlwoman

grown harder through toil
and dedication. Must remember:

Do not confuse Eden
with a really nice rest stop off I-40
(though both might beckon and beseech you
by how green the grass glows).

SAYING YES

I love you with terror
and wonder, Vegas lights
struck and impending
doom, cymbals sounded
too soon. I love you
with icy fingers, dizzying
dips between each rib.
I love you like gutting
a fish. I love you with great
jaws of need, stony eyes
of regret, the whole long
moan of it.

UPON MEETING MY PARTNER'S CHILDREN FOR THE FIRST TIME

Your children spring up like vines
in my view, fantastically healthy,
dense as a jungle where the plants grow
big, tall and close together.

They are bright poppies
burning against a blue, sun-
drenched sky.

They are gorgeous:
agile mountain lions, a school of fish (synchronized
chaos) a swarm of bees, mighty in their sweet
and stinging power, their threatened air space.

They are good
ears of corn grown in another woman's
soil, endless, abundant, bright yellow hair. They run
like horses, pack of wolves inside each
chest, wild things.

They clamor new music in my ears, fill
my vision to the brim, toss and turn in my sleep, already, too soon?
Two small teacups bright and porcelain, polished and chipping—

Are they too much in my hands, as light as they are?
Your children brought wildflowers to meet me at my door.
Your children are wildflowers, bright against dusty floor.

How big the love that made them?
How big the love that brought them monkeying
up to my landing?

How big they are and real:
solid white boats, made for truest purpose.

The possibilities of each;
in the girl

fast sails and open sea
and the boy,

shatter me
up and shore me back in.

MAN OF MAPS

brings fortune
to my feet:
shorelines, tide-pool, bridge
edged with green, fresh
meat and flowers.

takes me up
the mountain, pulls
me down to ground, to blue
and black winged butterflies
frothing the air dizzy.

moves me to sea
and see the sky,
interstate lines, cities
clotting ever onward.

We feast
on hot hours
and air crowded
with the wings of bees.

He kneads me back
to a kind of beginning,
land of my birth: Bluefield,
the place where I came
drumming forth.

He gives me sun
shining through lake
slime: buoys me,
calls forth goose
flesh in my skin
and riverbeds, takes us
to the highest place
he can or lowest or most
dense and hard to hatch.
He must always search for
some volcano's edge.

He wants to see
me cracked
by pleasure
and risen,
at last, from all ash.

ELEGY FOR MY GRANDMOTHER, VIRGINIA LITTLE SMITH

After serving as the Southern
Baptist preacher's wife for half
a century: the helpmate, soother,
mender, the garden always
growing under her delicate,
patient hands,

after two children leapt from her
and into life,
 (after her own mother
 swallowed the barrel
 and pulled the trigger)

she kept on smiling, kept on
bake sales, hospital visits, getting
pretty each and every Sunday
morning, Sunday night and Wednesday
night service, kept on watching
all the people watch my grandfather,
kept on shifting her weight and praying.

You see she was buffeted about
by her drunk dad, her mother ticking
to die, then later, this handsome one
called husband, minister, preacher-man.

Sometimes she was at sea
and sometimes dashed against
the rocks. Life spun her, splinters
of beauty, aching wonder
at her young children, pride
filling like a hot air balloon
at the sight of them.

She stayed the safest lap and softest
skin, even when I was a child and played
with her charm bracelet every Sunday
morning, Sunday evening, and Wednesday
night— even as we both were buffeted
about, when her son, my father, grew up
to be like his father, in all that majesty and fury.

She stayed a lily, an offering
for the light of every afternoon,
until the many small strokes
jumbled the wires in her head,
turned the suffering of seventy years
into a fast, urgent fire, made her
honest and angry and ready to go.

She looked at my grandfather, the Right
Honorable Reverend and said:

“I’m going to divorce you and marry a black man because *they*
have always been nice to me”

because although he loved her
he was not always nice
and at long last she was going
to say what she damned-well-pleased.

I STILL (COME SUNDAYS) THINK ABOUT

the many ways she wept and how a light
kept on with shining, flickered bright, inside
the face worn against the edge of nice:
stay small, sit down, keep up, hush now. The glide

of pearls against her neck are all I can
still summon—smooth, white, chilled—of something real
(still here) from those long hours in church. I ran
away and kept the only thing worth it to steal.

I have the tools, the jewels grandma wore.
She, the obedient preacher's wife, her small hands
always folded (perfect) but grew flowers and tore
every rose from its thorns and now she commands—

she shears out the pain, all thorns must go, God-bless,
because sometimes to garden we all must transgress.

GRANNY PREACHES HER FIRST AND FINAL SERMON, DURHAM COUNTY
JAIL

My darlings, my dears, my devil's eggs:
there are many here among you who
have been lost, been tasted, tested,
tasered and teased. I sneeze
a blessing on you all. I dust
over all sins growing lavender with time,
dusking softer, ebbing out. And for those new
sins out there in the air among us;
those hot red threads, those hues
among you in the pews—

hear me now and hear me well:

*Listen to the call of sin
but remember
your way back again.*

*Therein lies the clue or key
and depending on your pedigree
filth and flowers may spill
ever from your grave.*

A DAUGHTER IN PARTS III

Daughter as pill-popper, as piss-ant, as jaw-dropper.

Daughter eating curds and whey all day everyday. Daughter as brown spot on the inside of the arm, as brown bag, as old hag.

Daughter as joke, as gag, as punching bag.

Daughter as snail without shell, as beached whale.

Daughter as little miss Muffet complete with her tuffet.

Daughter as failed test and must remediate, as jail-bate, as fish-bait, worm wriggling on the line.

Daughter as paddy-cake, as baker, as bank-roll, as dough, as doe in the forest struck through with a bow.

(Beaus upon beaus with chapeaux drew her flame, boys and their actions she would later rename).

Daughter as cocktail waitress, as dime-store poor, as disco ball loud and non-stop spinning, as over-stuffed ashtray.

Daughter stays okay, stays okay, stays okay, keeps outrunning her shoes, shaking off old selves, split shells, snaking out of shedding skin, daughter as rail thin.

Daughter writhing, tossing, turning, Daughter struggling.

Daughter as sweet, sickening fruit gone too long, as sickening.

Daughter so sick it must be a reckoning.

Daughter must bring a reckoning.

She must bring a right to things.

HOW TO HEAL

1. Discard the possibility that you might not:
 peek it out of your head
 scatter the remains from your car window
2. Try:
 with the furrowed brow like learning how to read
 squinting to make the squiggles make sense.
 Sound it out. Start again. Arrive at the word: *windchime*.
 Repeat, string it together with the previous pearls
3. Don't try too hard:
 Remember grade school the sweaty palms, your pencil
 breaking, paper ripping under hard erasing
4. Inspect the wound:
 Do not eye it with panic and clamor.
 Let your eyes fall gentle
 on all the places you are broken.
 Let your eyes fall soft and close to incisions while
 remembering the round, round world around you.
 Do not pick it apart hunting for more meaning.
 Do not unthread the stitches with wonder.
5. Put your faith in pills:
 Doubting will not help so swallow as much hope as you can
 stomach: yellow oval in palm, three blue Easter eggs in a basket.
 Believe this sacrament will absolve you.
 Believe I will be saved, made new
 made back to my old self:
 where I didn't know all the ways
 I could go wrong, the springs inside
 and how they rust, that what once
 was steady can go unstuck.
6. Use gloves:
 use sleep use supplements use tea use time use shamans use
 dreams use doctors use sunlight use ice cream use music use
 poems use doves

7. Be around plants and babies:
like Marcello told you in the mountains of Italy, the light filtering
down through his laughter and gray hair
bug a tree, it will give you life, cara signora
and you smiled and clung
to a thin sapling
breathing in bark
wanting to believe
all the while seeing the eggplant marking blooming
from his lip, thinking: *caro signore, no tree can cure you of cancer.*

8. Pretend you are better:
right now, already, the book says *ask believe receive* and *manifest*
radiant health. Believe you are shedding sickness
like a tree its leaves. Believe your bare bones
will be beautiful.

9. Accept that you are not better yet:
Hear the pain alarm drumming your spine. Feel that ache and pull.
Breathe and say:
I will feel you and still move.
I will walk right through you.
And you will be the pebble in my shoe.
From you I will learn what each step costs.
From you I will learn how to pray with my feet.

10. Accept the all and everything:
the allotment of pain, the I can manage no more, the constant vigil,
its call to prayer:
its apple seeds in winter, its gold in a bowl, its fish belly up,
its narrowing of choice, its interlocking cloth, its unruly logic.

Accept kind words, a shawl, a flock of birds landing,
a feather in your hair, a box full of laughter, a brilliant
marble, velvet against skin, accept pleasure given.

The world offering up to your eyes
Eden upon Eden, opening
your palm, pointing to a hack-
marked life line

Saying, still now:
Drink of me
and call me good