

Cate McLaughlin

An Apologist's Guide to Field Dressing

I would like to give you something, the caul my grandmother was born in, the *Irish Times* the doctor swaddled her with, some measure of proof in the blood, some philosophical distance. I would like to tell you that I fed you all the wrong apologies, that a choice between side effect and symptom is not a choice. That I, too, wish fairness entered into it. If the truest thing I can say to you is that only when I have ceased to speak in superlatives is it safe to believe me—then is it safe? If I say I'm sorry, can we really be sure I'm not just whistling past the graveyard of my own deliverance? Meaning is too clever to be ensnared by speech, and the words make clumsy arrows, no matter how sharp the archer, how willing the prey. Nothing I can catch could compare to the magnitude of my hunger. My regrets, they are the softest rabbits caught in six bear traps, they are a row of strung-up quail, bright as bunting on the Fourth of July. There's no turning back now, there is always blood on the hands of sustenance. Come here: I would like to give you something. First, we'll close our eyes. Then you'll open your mouth.

The Revenants

The ghost of my father
who isn't dead yet
and asks me to uncap
the aspirin. First light ghost,
who spills cold light on cold sheets,
while the ghost of a chewed cigar
reeks from the mantelpiece--
and sober ghost, who's forever standing
in front of an open refrigerator door.

Ghosts with cracked elbows
or trench coats. Turpentine's
ghost, paddle ghost, a shadow's
ghost. The ghost of her brother
still wearing the bandage.

A burlap sack trembling
with ghosts and slumped
in the corner. Russia's ghost.
Ghost of a woman who still
takes baths, wax ghost,
and the ghosts of other women.

Highway ghost; ghost of mercury.
The ghost I remember as a child.
Now ghost, the ghost you left me.

Plan View

an aerial view of death
must be like watching
the outer boroughs of a city
succumb to darkness, one by one,
the light snatched from them,
as in a fist. Sockets popping,
the boroughs shut down in a sudden
and random spiral toward where you are
standing on the top floor of the tallest building
at the center of the city, and you are surrounded
by windows. A telephone rings
and the voice on the other line is you,
saying, *You aren't supposed to know how to do this*,
which is a kind of apology,
but you realize you can no longer see
the Citgo sign across the street—
Don't hang up, you want to say,
but the light bulbs begin to hum,
and you're afraid, so you close your eyes,
and it smells like birthday candles
blown out.

Your Daily Forecast

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Dilemmas arise from the emphasis on your 7th House of Partnerships and Public Life. Loved ones demand more attention than you feel able to give, the recycling piles up by the back door-- and your mother called again last night, Virgo.

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Anything is possible today, dear Virgo. Your best reproductive years are behind you; why not take up a new hobby and get those creative juices flowing!

*

Mercury stumbles into Aries in your 9th House of Higher Truth, so the sun will be in your eyes no matter which direction you drive today. Someone in your life is not what they appear.

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The transit of Pluto in Capricorn tempts you to stick a fork in the toaster and accelerate at stop lights. A trip to the doctor could confirm your body's ability to breed quiet malignancies. Today you will succeed in all your financial endeavors!

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With speedy Aries in your fifth house, surprises abound. In the mail, you could receive a check for five dollars from your grandmother who is only two days dead. The card in her handwriting might read, *Are you getting enough sleep?* Avoid escalators, refined sugar, and redheads.

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The Sun quincunx Saturn advises going back
to square one when it comes to Friday's "new start."
It's worth a shot, Virgo. The planets portend
colds eggs or a kink in the brake line.

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Expect the unexpected today!
A full moon in your sign guarantees surprises;
a lukewarm friendship heats up, perhaps,
or an ex sends a bill for her cold half
of the Tempur-Pedic mattress.

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The afternoon Scorpio Moon triggers
a sudden case of the dry heaves, forcing you
to pull over to the shoulder of the road
and concentrate on the sound of traffic.
Try taking deep breaths, Virgo.
It won't be long now.

Aftergreen

A woman in a green dress reaching back
to the clasp on a set of pearls,
chin up-tipped, elbows like wings unpinned,
a flash of under-bicep skin like brushed
cream—sustenance for the starved
part of me who thinks that green
is the tint of beginning, green the grace notes
in a mouthful of mud, green a fist
pulling out of the punch, green the road
from here to my good intentions--
green yes, even this, the way light snags
on blonde filaments at the nape of her neck
as she turns from me, green and sad and electric.