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dry rubbing against

we learn cursive and i love the sweeping tails of symbols, their tight loops.
from the start.

we all learn from the same long flat book with butcher paper paper and pale blue lines i often
confuse, and this—the middle line: broken.

i get chills the way my pencil either slides over a page or tears it up, bunches beneath graphite; i look
out of windows. you see palm fronds, a little sunlight and snatches of sky but no glimpse of life on the
ground.¹

some days the sky: white. hazy or smoggy or cloudy.

white grass and white builds, white shoes (my shoes white once). white hair won't curl or lie flat, wild
white. and white space and white flight. my white shirt ironed stiff, my white knee socks to cover the
burgeoning black hair on my legs. white ice cream studded with white raspberries and there—muddy
rivers of balsamic vinegar. and white cars travel in packs. towels white.

teeth white.²

white white sky white with memory, pray white beads to bloody and no longer white.

blue skies aren't meant for gazing from neat rows, from behind windows, but for hearing the palm fronds,
contemplating their scary, stabby bark. breezy and goose-bump arms. the squeak of pigeon wings as they
fly from one wire to another, congregating on rain gutters of the school building, their coos.

fragment: walking to a bus stop, a route which takes me beneath an interstate 10 freeway overpass.
many pigeons nest under. i fear being shit on (beware the pigeon butts).

cars and cars and cars so many of them, and a truck—striking a pigeon midair.

a burst of feathers; i watch its mate flutter about the bloody remains.

how do we hate what's capable of this kind of loss.³

¹ Education is the second phase of interpellation via desk rows, hand-raising to speak, public praise/humiliation and attempting to homogenize script (which is impossible, except fonts), as well as acclimating children to hours spent producing product. The first phase is being born.

² White is typically associated with cleanliness. Cleanliness is next to godliness.

³ Pigeons are reluctant to leave the nest, and do not depart unless forced out, typically during adolescence. People hate pigeons due to their ugly appearance and their feces everywhere.

i miss penmanship. now it's fonts(*please see footnote 1*). garamond uses less ink but keeps it classy i hear. i love times new roman but it seems decadent. if i use garamond i save the world (sad face).

i type with my middle fingers.⁴

maybe my thumbs too, if i'm feeling jazzy.

heat smothering oceanside when you aren't caring about anything but sea shells.

and moist movement underfoot erases time and space and distance called shore.⁵

and how after digging up too many sand crabs you look for your family and they're not where you left them.

it's not about anything. and i am pure in this place salty and covered in sand.

i shine like amber sea glass.

there is this story about how i get a baby blue skirt/sweater set for my birthday.

i wear it to school.

i wear it with white tights and black shoes i wear to church—all shiny.

black shoes with a strap and buckle.

at recess we play kickball and i'm up.

-bring it in!

classmates bring it in and i hate them.

the soccer ball rolls toward me and i kick with a whole soul, every muscle, a total focus, a big dumb heart.

i kick, and it goes and goes and i get to run somewhere.

but i slip.

but i fall.

tights filthy where unturned. shoes scuffed. skirt hiked above waist. i hear laughing and laughing, hard and aching as the asphalt i cry into.

pebbles embed themselves in skin around my elbow. scar.⁶

we copy and copy and still our letters look different from the booklet and from those of one another. like finger prints, like laughs. like the way i grip my pencil tight and engrave paper with letters, their ghosts haunt 4 pages underneath.

classmates write fat letters, curly letters, pointed letters, letters squished together, tiny letters, straight up-and-down letters.

all different.⁷

io, sitting in a hard chair in sister ____'s office.

-why is this writing so tiny.

⁴ This reflects a lack of hand/eye coordination, or confidence, and both.

⁵ Perhaps volume, though I couldn't explain why, and weight, and infinite directions and meaningless other measures as well.

⁶ It tells the story in braille. It tells the story of public humiliation. I have many scars. Each tell stories by braille. Each, a story of humiliation.

⁷ Tiny yet innate propensity for human rebellion.

i move beyond the large-learning-ruled paper and use college ruled grown-up paper and my capital letters do not reach anywhere near the top line. But the penmanship is neat.

-i don't know, sister ____.

-you have low self-esteem.

i'd never thought of this.

now it's all i think about.⁸

i walk places. quickly without thinking except for how much longer.

one day, i grow up. everything thick and thicker with smoke. it's fire season.⁹

mother is over there at the sink, the dish water cold.

grandmother is in her room being sick.¹⁰

i press my forehead against the cool living room window, close my eyes, listen to the angels in my head.

they sing and talk amongst themselves.

my entire life: murmurs.

i strain to hear anything. a name. an answer. i don't ever.

it's not continuous or roaring (or maybe after a lifetime it's white noise) but fragments like feeling sorry for the kids renting roller skates because i have my own pair: a cherished gift at 7 years old.¹¹

or wishing the funeral was over because it's hot and we wear black clothes. grandmother has a breakdown i don't believe. she slides from her chair and presses her head to the casket.¹²

-no no no no!¹³

who am i to do that.¹⁴

when it's over i get situated on the scratchy plaid couch (brown/tan/gold/orange) next to my sisters who fidget and kick the couch with the heels of their mary janes and want to play outside.

so do i—kick the couch with the heels of my mary janes bought special.

⁸ When I am in fourth grade, I'm sent to Sister ____'s office because my penmanship, though neat, is considered illegible. She asks if I am feeling good about myself. My mother is in the office with us. I say I'm fine.

⁹ Fire is a season Southern California, and elsewhere with similar climate and drought. The Santa Ana's rub the valley raw to aching, then finally aflame. Fire is greedy and indiscriminate, a judgement.

¹⁰ A fiction.

¹¹ Black middle class: Father a deputy sheriff, mother a social worker. We children attend Catholic school. We attend mass every Sunday. Father sings in the choir. Mother bakes for the church's Christmas bizarre. We go to Christmas parties held at the homes of judges and lawyers. We wear good shoes and crisp plaid uniform skirts. We are clean and neat. We have manners, and father tells us at dinner to always speak properly, to always be clean and neat.

¹² I am a deist, but also sometimes atheist.

¹³ Before her illness, Grandmother made a chocolate cake from scratch but forgot the sugar. She made me eat two pieces.

¹⁴ No one special. Just an asshole, or an impressionable child, but what is the difference when you deeply consider it, for are we all not assholes, some more continuously than others. Moreover, I hate her—that is who I am.

every time the door opens i expect to see him.

it opens and opens and opens and opens and opens. he never shows.¹⁵
one day i grow up and cry in the dark—a thing i do the rest of my life.¹⁶

fragment: swimming lessons in the heavily chlorinated pool at the y, dairy queen after. fingers sticky from melting cones. chocolate dip cones: our favorite these summer days before smog alerts and their stages.

unable to play outside a travesty. for days on end (indescribable). tip-toeing because grandmother is in her room being sick, mother at the sink filled with cold water, and quiet, quiet, quiet.

an unnatural state of affairs: *whisper whisper*.

and quiet crushes (impending doom sounds heavier than it is).¹⁷

first i sweep the patio with the big brush broom.¹⁸

i'm afraid of it because it looks like a big mustache.¹⁹

next fill the bucket with soapy water, get down on my hands and knees, scrub it all with a wire scrub brush.²⁰

rinse with the water hose and push excess water and suds into grass with the scary broom. air dry. skate.

quiet is white too. like snow. like smoke.

mother can't play her lady sings the blues album. nor mariam makeba. nor barbara streisand. al green. fleetwood mac.²¹

aretha.

and no, i may not roller skate out on the back patio.

-we have to be quiet. grandmother isn't well today.

-but mama, i feel fine.

-i'm sorry but no.

-she's never doing well.

(sad face).

smog alert stage 3: we can't see the mountains surrounding us.

¹⁵ He is dead.

¹⁶ Memory is torture because of Love. Love is torture because of memory. Someone leaves and you cry over the memories entangled with that one. Moreover, memory wants to embellish, so the love is even more loving than it actually was, the loss greater.

¹⁷ Growing up in a home which imposes constant quietude on its inhabitants results in children growing into passive aggressive adults, or those who cannot speak up, or the opposite. Sometimes, upon exiting the quiet, a person may exhibit loud/impulsive;brash behavior. The reason for the quiet, despised.

¹⁸ When roller skating on surfaces other than the shining hardwood floors of roller rinks, you must be sure to clear the space of any debris.

¹⁹ I feared strange things, and still do, and I believe we all do: moths, falling backward, white boys in cargo shorts and a snap-back, middle-aged white women in visors, especially when travelling in packs, spiders, men in general, my own god damn self, etcetera.

²⁰ Dying when anyone enters the living room just cleaned, uses a toilet just scrubbed to gleam, and feel it in my stomach. I hold grudges.

²¹ Mother: her heart through the albums she played while scouring. Al Green was mother on an old desire. Fleetwood Mac, youth. Mariam Makeba, open. Lady Sings the Blues Soundtrack meant I would hug her a lot, she was sad, and I didn't want her to go.

before kindergarten i visit a doctor who asks me about colors.

-what color is the sky.

-brown.

-it's not brown, it's blue.

-but there's a smog alert.

and brown has its own kind of beauty but i don't know until soon, when surrounded by blue.

blue is painful because it's dense when it is sky.

fragment: i look at a painting in the l.a. county museum of art.

it is a diego rivera painting.

of calla lilies.

dusty yellows, billowing brown braids of a girl.

i watch her carry the long-stalked burdens of beauty, of her head tilted downward, of something near me but not quite—and her brown skin.

the sisters and i drink but not how you're thinking. we sit around and drink and laugh.

and loud as fuck.

and we drink away from one another, much quieter.

(it's better together).

we drink wine. we drink liquor. we drink beer.

some of us better than others.

we are craftsmen. we are a process of red deepening. we curl. we bend. we break.. we like it and so do you.²²

queer, but not how you think and exactly what you think.²³

when we drink it's art. the hand holding a cup holds a cigarette and our laughing holds smoke. our hearts hold roadmaps of missing men and women, fear of dire consequences. wash this fear with clear and amber liquids. sometimes, adorned with a pimento olive. other times a slice of lemon, a sprig of mint on my breath gin secrets, and unending.

-have you been drinking.²⁴

can i give my life to someone else—one who appreciates the many good things i find claustrophobic.

one day i grow up.

i make fun of a man once. his head hangs to the side. i drop my head.²⁵

²² Something about being broken or bent appears to be attractive to some others who look for nothing in particular in regard to intimacy, camaraderie—not love but maybe just fucking. Sometimes we want more, but never need. We laugh when men believe they've hurt us by not feeling in love. We love one another everlasting—better than god's.

²³ This is my moment.

²⁴ Why do people ask this?

²⁵ The condition is called Torticollis, or wry neck. It can be temporary, or fixed. It can be painful, or painful.

-mom.
-that's wrong.
-that's how he looks.²⁶
-you were born with your head just like that.

mother is over there at the kitchen sink and i am here with my head against a cool pane of glass: a window.
i'm listening to (angels).²⁷

they don't have wings but drift on air currents. they're fuzzy and teeny-teeny tiny, only seen when
they catch light. always whispering and infinite. mom knows about angels. and i learn about them in
school.²⁸

the school is private because it's catholic.

angels watch over. angels never sleep. big white angels with white wings and brass clothes and brass
sandals and brass shields and brass swords and ringlets for hair. halos and violent, but benevolently,
benevolently violent on our behalf.²⁹

6, i watch a group (of boys) pour salt on a slug and don't look away. neither do they. the angels do
not either—look away.³⁰

we all watch the frothing mess.

i know not to mention the angels ever. everyone says they're real but not the way i know.

you're not supposed to hear them.

anyone who told me about angels and how they protect people and fight for god and fight the devil
would tell me, no.

-those are not angels.³¹

why your/you're/(yore, and who the hell uses yore ever anymore).

we know exactly which with context but use anything at our disposal.³²

it's arbitrary but spider web too.

it can't help itsself.³³

the guilt of this instead of the breeze on my sweaty neck and how dry it's been because it's fire season creates
gritty film on the skin.

²⁶ Only my ears are so hot, jaw burning, the wind in my stomach.

²⁷ Present but not, hence the parenthetical erasure.

²⁸ Or dust motes.

²⁹ I often heard a thousand angels fit on the head of a pin. What can they do at that level of infinite smallness?

³⁰ I am not supposed to mention boys, next men, then men and boys, will be the most hurtful things to happen. I loathe them and
love them fiercely. I consume them by the bagful, even though they are high in cholesterol, and slug is a symbol.

³¹ Then what are they?

³² I/you/we have been conditioned to judge character and credibility based on spelling among other things like grades, skin color,
condition of shoes, teeth, fingernails, region, accent, car driven, colors worn, weight, scent, shape, handshake, set of eyes, etcetera,
etcetera.

³³ Purposeful misspelling of "itself", but you read the word as "itself" still.

september and october after dry august they come: the santa ana winds.
the sainted gusts sift us.

there is a culture of fire, a smog culture and that of cleansing winds in southern california. a judgement on hilltop/hillside living.

californians: watch shit burn on the news. they donate blankets and clothes and lament the loss of other people's photos.³⁴

californians: levels of pyromania ranging from devastation porn to finding dry places to set ablaze. fires start from some asshole's cigarette butt tossed from a car window sometimes. and the mountains burn, sky raining ash. for days. schools close and force us indoors.³⁵

mostly it's dry things rubbing against themselves and one another.

it begins with gusting warm air, the santa ana winds. and you smell every blade of grass, all the tree limbs, leaves, leaves, asphalt, and it's beautiful hot. the sky white.

chimera.

eyes go wild and violent and we want to barbecue and drink beers and argue and fight. big rigs turn on their sides in the cajon pass. we want to fuck in air-conditioned bedrooms.

impending doom sounds heavier than it is, and is instead warmth upon the face, salty skin, enigmatic attractions, and we drive wild.³⁶

then mid-morning/early afternoon a tower of smoke billows gray/black in the distance. or white if the trees are damp or fresh but this is rare.

wind picks up.

a roaring fire.

it's never simple.³⁷

i watch fire spill down a mountainside like liquid more hypnotic than the sound of ocean waves or angel-song or gin. i watch for hours with this desire to discern its properties, describe its color to myself, yet cannot.

(maybe you can help me. what is the color of fire.)

but you feel it all in your chest.³⁸

soon the sky is dark with the ghosts of trees and deer and stupid birds, running bears who (sadly) do not run faster than fire runs, and you're outside smoking a cigarette under the porch awning watching the ash of trees and deer and stupid birds, running bears who sadly do not outrun the fire, coat the windshield of your car.

the conversations had, the live reports, firestorm (insert year here): it comes for all, whether 60 miles east or 7 miles north or you're hosing down your house while the rest gather together treasures like social security cards and favorite toys.³⁹

³⁴ Swooooooop.

³⁵ Watch others lose everything and, as a result. Fill with a self-congratulatory tinged relief (as if character saved you), or false gratitude, for all that you still possess. Or perhaps the gratitude is genuine, but who can know for sure?

³⁶ I once let a pizza delivery guy finger-bang me in the back seat of his tricked-out red Mazda. He had gold fronts. I didn't know his name. He kissed me so hard my teeth sliced my lips. *Deep*. I was sixteen and sweating and coming while the San Bernardino Mountains burned.

³⁷ Moist, Moist: stigmatized and loathed for its feminization. Such a round, Pussy-word.

³⁸ Riverside County maintains a high infant mortality rate due to air pollution. Smoke/smog/all debris collects itself there. An external oppression creates a worldview.

it feels like we're all in it together but are not.
it feels like it though.
it feels like it.
feels like it though don't you think.

so where are the angels.
just here in my head.

one day i grow up and know how quiet works.

the strangest quiet is when the sky is empty of planes, when it's so hot outside, when the world sleeps and the crickets with their songs of aggression/their songs of loneliness and inexplicable need for action (because do they feel lonesome or just switched on to procreate when the sun sits a certain place in the sky), when you smell coffee in the 2 am air.⁴⁰

in the shower fat and tender, a fat and tender stalk of something, of asparagus, of a tulip, or fat and tender as a pollen-laden leg of a bee, a pretty-ish girl once with watery hair and brown eyes.⁴¹
(i listen to blur).

i love a lot of people, and love is a devouring.

i can pour myself into anything just enough.⁴²
some get gin. others, a smoky tongue. also anything blue. maybe high.
but i am a sun.
the sun devours.
we need it to live but it eats us back.
and we live as long as the sun(*please see footnote 42*).

in the kitchen: apples, oranges, tortilla chips, coffee.

alfredo sauce.
when a jar is empty, i wash it.

³⁹ I love watching high speed chases on the news with the surprise endings.

⁴⁰ Stop disparaging the run-on.

⁴¹ A fat adolescence never departs from me. When I weigh 120 pounds for a period, I am fat. When I weigh 160 pounds, I am fat. I am fat while sleeping, especially fat when dressing each morning. Fat is inescapable. Fattest when I eat, regardless. Always regardless.

⁴² Lovers romanticized. Not mine but everyone's idea of *Lover*. (A Type of Person): die young or live old and vibrant called a zest for life. But the disciplined love of Another Type of Person, who loves selectively but wholly, in *those moments*, with *those people*, live longer. Lovers good. /Haters Bad/. So much time wasted defending beliefs and life and we all go to dirt. Some of us greedy though, consuming always. We're all Lovers—lovers of booze and porn and nature and shopping and feet and each other or one another and skiing and the slick cool of slipping fingers into bags of raw rice or beans in the bulk bins at health food stores when I'm five and that is in 1977. At the time, overalls were all the rage and denim overalls over clingy polyester shirts was not conducive living in burning Southern California and everyone and everything was always shiny. Foreheads and upper lips, chimera on sidewalks, off mailboxes and cars, and still everybody out in a version of this pairing in 90°+ heat, long lines at gas stations, running into Crown's with a note. The store: cool and weird feeling, coming out with cigarettes for Dad and a Nehi grape soda warming in your salt-grimed hands.

I once stole a pack of Fruit Stripes from this store.

i store the jars in a cupboard for jars. it is not made for jars but becomes so thoughtlessly. i simply place jar after jar in this cupboard.⁴³

i listen to madvillain because i'm angry about nothing in particular.

i look at the jars in the cupboard. tightly packed glass paraphernalia which over time, form tiny cracks at their lips and their dust, their pretty little star dust, glitters on the shelves.

nothing i want is in the refrigerator.

i don't eat because i don't feel like washing dishes after.

(i listen to georgia anne muldrow).

(i listen to the refrigerator).

i listen to the heartbeat in my ears and have nightmares. walls are everywhere and i face them with my eyes closed.

my heartbeat in my ears, and angels—aloof and continuous.⁴⁴

a nightmare, its something else-ness or its pituitary gland or the chemicals and codes, strings of dna, shining red and blue and green with it, and the ability to create hurt manifests a mosquito bite.

a nightmare i sleep clean through.⁴⁵

i haven't many mosquito bites year after year. maybe one on my foot. maybe two. each summer all these summers.⁴⁶

the unbearable itch. terrible and everlasting until it heals or a new one swells.

just enough.⁴⁷

one day i grow up merciless in regard to lost objects of mine (and others).

i can't help you except the last place i see it may be on top of the microwave or sitting in the dishwasher or hanging there or there, or folded in sweet/yellowed linen, placed in a small cardboard box, tucked in the corner of a closet either here or upstairs or left behind in a place we live years ago.

i still love you.⁴⁸

i'm no use after that.⁴⁹

⁴³ I've collected TV Guides and Elle magazines, white lighters and white men, cards for occasions like bat-mitzvahs or Wednesdays, eyes of the moribund and Virgen De Guadalupe candles I never burn but regard with the expectation of magic, books and different types of tea (loose leaf and bagged).

⁴⁴ Precursor to nightmares of being lost, chased. Lately, it's corridors. Previously it was just a bad feeling of grinding my teeth and waking with bleeding gums.

⁴⁵ I make these small paragraphs. And these paragraphs make me small. And small paragraphs are frightening, with how small I am, making them.

⁴⁶ Like California quakes. (See footnote 45)

⁴⁷ A pretty evening rain after warm weather, and we like the smell because it smells and tastes and feels like cool pennies that smell like copper that smells like blood.

⁴⁸ Tightly packed adverbs and their tarnished reputations.

⁴⁹ Maybe this is forward, my scars, my ugly feet, my scars deepening, darkening in different, connoted, spaces. My ugly feet.

i walk great lengths and feel it roiling in hip joints. stiff platelets collect themselves in the shallows of this haunted sacrum—softened after years of wear and tear(s).

i drink coffee across from a man with his latte, his beard, some dot of foam quivering on his bottom lip.⁵⁰

fragment: a wafer placed on my tongue because it is time. other girls in white dresses and veils, white tights or little white anklets with little white lace, their white shoes patent leather with little heels. i press the wafer to the roof of my mouth.⁵¹

i press the wafer to the roof of my mouth and stinging wine doesn't wash it away.

i press the wafer to the roof of my mouth, where it remains.

we go to breakfast at denny's, me all ugly famished even after the body and blood of christ.
the symbology lost on me.⁵²

i clean the char of yesterday's soul from the rim of the bowl.

i remember burnt things, smell traces of you on my fingertips after. pack it fresh. burn it again.⁵³

i don't remember 5 minutes ago. maybe yesterday never happens. or this. or touching wet hair—my teeth grit.

one day i grow up and more is accumulated.

more to remember and/or forget.

i do.

faithfully.

now, walking in a different place. i walk in an abundance of trees: confiers, cottonwood, japanese maple, cherry trees, silver birch with their fixed gaze, but the pear trees are fenced and inaccessible, and here are orchards left to die.⁵⁴

i walk in abundance around me but no industry unrelated to retirees or cannabis or catering to those above the boulevard.⁵⁵

fire is not here(*please see footnote 9*).

what is here is smoke from happy camp. dead skied summers every other summer.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ While not hotly debated, rarely pointed out due to the collective idea that these are interchangeable, nauseous and nauseated each work here, but it is a fluke of the experience.

⁵¹ But no, my face bare and open to the priest. I do not wear white but a dress pleated and peachy colors, my shoes brown. I call them boy-shoes. It looks like I don't love Jesus at all.

⁵² Eat me to marrow-suck five minutes after the apocalypse begins.

⁵³ Ricki Lee Fowler awaits the death penalty for starting The Old Fire in San Bernardino in 2003, as well as five counts of murder—all heart attacks induced by the physical and emotional doom of the blaze, all men. Jeremiah Hope went off-roading with some buddies and his vehicle started The Playground Fire, which merged with The Old Fire. Estimated total of acres burned: 91,281.

⁵⁴ *Pyrus communis*, or pear, is the state fruit of Oregon. Pear production in the state's Rogue River Valley has been greatly reduced, with current acreage roughly half of what it was during its prime. The Great Spring Frost of 2010 had a huge impact on growers and now orchards unkempt, damaged, dying, or dead, abound.

⁵⁵ A saying meaning *I am rich, but don't want to be rude, yet need you to know*. Please note: below the boulevard requires wealth but exists at a lower elevation creating a level view, as opposed to “above”—where one has a view of those below.

what is here is rain.

rain.

rain.

r

a

i

n often enough and i contemplate slicing my arms at the elbow after two days
and weeks and gray wet nothing sopping.

i sleep instead.⁵⁷

i stand at the sink. the children do not make it.

i am alone with the jars.

fragment: i walk the side of a tall and natural structure.

i sweat sweet smells profusely—a dead saint.

sunlight exceptionally direct and heavy on my person, on the twist of a green snake.

i am scream.⁵⁸

i scream and am screaming and no one stops or no one looks.

i am here at the kitchen sink looking out the window.

cool water runs over my wrists. the sky out there is white.

out there without depth: white.

the white is flat and keeping heat.

(i listen to nothing).

(i listen to the gentle roar of angels in my head).

hear the cool water hiss over my skin.

when i am pretty i am high.

or you are.

hooded eyes and ease of forgetting deepen a plum of my lip, pupils of the eyes stuck in my head.

so deep you could rummage there.⁵⁹

i am laughing.

⁵⁶ Unlike Southern California's fires, this is not considered judgement. This is something from "over there", not ours, a prevalent attitude held by Oregon residents.

⁵⁷ Rain pelts windows, its beat without rhythm but constant, reminding me of something within myself which comforts or protects. What is it, I search.

⁵⁸ I have forgotten quiet.

⁵⁹ You could find any type of treasure here: smiles, desire, candids of butterflies and worms, rainbows, and all manner of food considered bad for you, words and words, words, words, an infinity of words. Also looks of suspicion and surprise. Calla lilies.