

Mallory Bass

### Internal Portrait, California

I've been waking to earthquakes and marking them  
down in the threshold of my dreams as real. Which is it—

I can feel the slight ones,  
or I'm living in a place riddled with earthquakes,  
and thinking up ones that don't exist?

I've created a personal fault line, near the core  
shaking against cranial ground, the tine of an off-tune fork.

the bow breaks // the boy breaks

In terms of seismicity, prediction is power  
and I always see the ends of things.

little ships go out to sea // I push my  
spoon away  
from me

There is a tree in your path, a tree in your oath.  
A tree grows in a road up a mountain.

let the cat die // the swing sigh slow

The wash of rain makes the ground so much colder,  
packed solid until it isn't.

I wear high heels like a butcher, to walk above the blood of dead beasts.

madness is gravity // you just need a little  
push

There is poetry, and there is pasta shaped like roses.  
If the heart is the tongue of the butter-thick chest,  
out of sorts,  
out of aorta,  
out of swords,  
this is it.

## Bra Review

### 1. Etoile. Keep.

I love the structure of the bra—the subtle movement from breast to ribs was engaging. It made my body more uniform. I felt classy and comfortable in the fit of the bodice. The lace made me feel pretty in the mirror. I went back in time to a speakeasy parlor in New York City. The bra peaked out of a black silk button-down, paired with pearls. It formed my waist well. I'm not always the girl who will wear this bra, but I know well enough that it accomplishes art.

### 2. Naked Glamour. Return.

This bra attempted to make me feel almost naked. However, the structure of its leap to sheer mesh is contrived to a point of error. The lines of the strap cut the path from my torso to my arm. The cups rested too low for my breasts to wade into and stay. The presence of the bra was a net set to an ocean's whole. My heartbeat reached up as fishes at day broken open.

### 3. Sleek and Lace. Keep.

Tulips, or pictures of tulips, look glassy. The flower would squeak at my touch. Tulips make us feel good about the way you feel when you see the sun pouring into a meadow, or breath fogging a window. The simple lines of this bra grow full at the cup, happy enough to wear the color pink. I feel good about walking through a life, a grocery store, a chain restaurant—pretty and uniquely sensual.

#### 4. Midnight Kiss. Return.

I didn't like the assumptions this bra made about my life.  
If a man's hand were to meet my breasts, the thin night  
of fabric from wire to wire would not allow a coy greet.  
The band was restrictive and wide, a balcony. I envisioned  
the store's employees in their Midnight Kiss bras,  
strutting an understanding for the body shape's  
demand on a woman's confidence—determined  
that a Midnight Kiss is the correct emblem  
for the beckoning edge of femininity.

#### 5. Nicole. Keep.

The band of this bra gave its lines to lace  
and formed to my skin without much of an impression.  
I could wear this under anything, every day. I forget  
ever worrying about how a bra looks under my clothes.  
I would leave that concern far behind with eyebrow liner  
and cuticles. The way a bra fits would only matter to those  
who only have that to worry about. I would enjoy Jane Austen.  
Her female leads always turn into movie characters  
with breasts heaving forth from their dresses. I would maybe  
express an interest in politics. I would have less of a relationship  
with the self that embodies my breasts. There would be no hope  
for change or improvement. I would have purchased the perfect scale  
or the unbiased mirror. How have we gone without realizing  
that the mirror has a perspective? It is what we think we see  
in the mirror, filtered through what we take  
from the purpose of a mirror at all.

## The Word West

He come from flat lands,  
highways with horses.  
He come from straws sucking up  
black blood. He cast a cloud shadow  
and he push ribeye  
sun down until the earth  
eats it with potatoes.

My friend got a tattoo of the word west.  
It told her where she was going.  
A post dated postcard.

He got a west Texas spine,  
flat and dry.  
A body built by brisket,  
a coyote absence.

## Cultured

A mollusk forms a pearl in any case—  
sand or parasite. Who crept past her grim shell  
to enter that dark velvet room?

Is there a man who walks the ocean bottom  
without oxygen?

We wear lesser pearls, hollowed from their purpose.  
From this depth I cannot tell  
if you are that man,  
and I don't know  
what weapons gleam  
inside me.

## Painted Desert, 2010

A day  
away

from dead end

escape

is a layered

existence

looming

light pathed

strata

bled

rock

tower.

The captured knowledge:

Yes,

your chest heft

is

dead

on.

You are alone

the stretch sun and canvas,

your shadow fixed,

long,

petrified.