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Perfect

Bailey Gunn

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Perfect

Poetry by Bailey Gunn

Illustrations by Emyliane Christodoulou



Acknowledgement

hen I open this book to write, the leaves
shake as if they recognize their brethren.

And the words look rather puny and fragile
like butterflies or
lives.

To harness the oncoming cloud's wrath
its purple stricken rage,
net it, and rub it between
thumb and forefinger is
paramount.

I promise this has no sub-cutaneous
membrane engorged and dripping
with meaning.

It's not a metaphor or a simile
or even a red herring.

This is me in perfect loneliness,
with a whole lifetime
to feel
down in the dumps,
depressed
and swallowed.

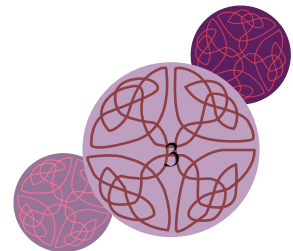
But it's times
like these that it is manifest
that I have taken too much for granted.

And I'll take in the
port wine leaves for once
and how the wind is unforgiving
but cannot penetrate my outer layers.

I take heart that I'm not
that black walnut tree
throwing insults the size of golf balls
for the squirrels to devour
and further augment the mess.
I haven't dropped all my leaves yet.
Maybe I'll gather those up and instead of
making paper,
I'll make gumption
enough
for me to look into my peers' eyes
and say "I know you, I acknowledge you."
Please tell me you'll do the same.

They say if you admit your shortcomings
your release will be forthcoming.
I think I'm immune
to epiphanies these days.

But not everything needs extrapolation,
a hypothesis,
or my two, three, or seventy-five cents.
Sometimes we need to
take it for what it is.

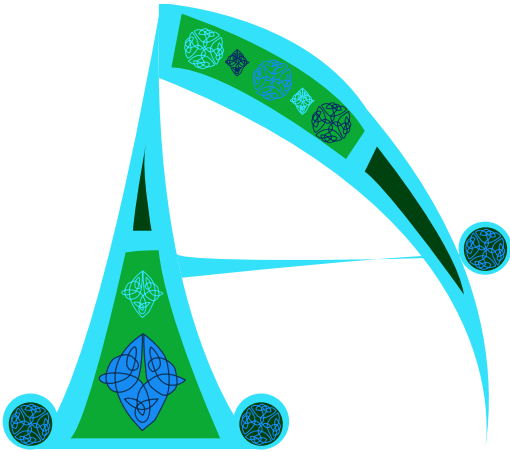




Perfect

think my arms are too fat.
I think I'll cut them off.
My thighs have too much flab,
I think I'll remove them, too.
Now
I'm just a head with a torso,
and I can't bring food to my mouth.
I wither away
to nothing.

There.
Perfect.



Four Seasons

summer wedding
swans on the lake; I was meant

to be your plus one.

Corpses of leaves, I
crunch, pull my coat closer,
you

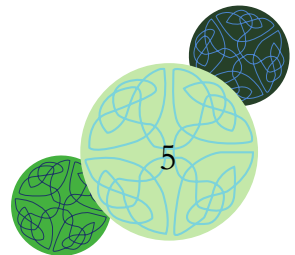
subtracted my love.

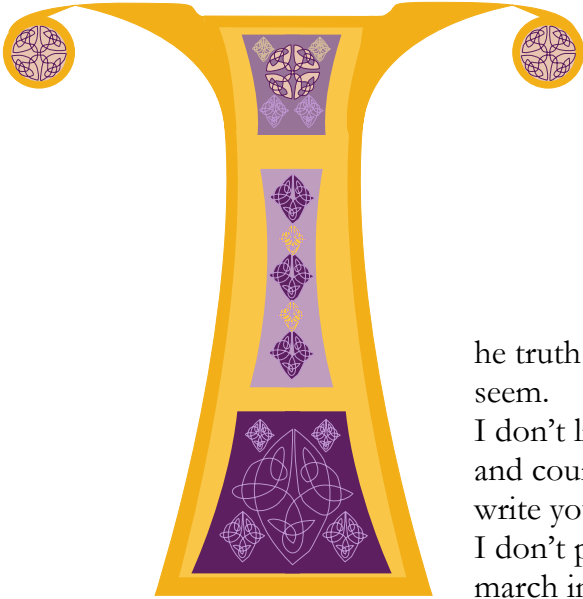
Winter winds outside
log multiples the flames and

my longing for you.

Spring in my step and
my heart: dividing it so
still

left me with half.





Maybe

he truth is I'm not as in love as I seem.

I don't lie awake at night
and count the strokes it takes to
write your name.

I don't practice the wedding
march in heels.

I don't have any cement to mix
for our future.

I don't know what you prefer,
soup or salad or neither.

And I hardly know your parents.

The truth is I don't lie
in raptures
I mostly lie in agony

or sometimes I just lie.

I don't know the exact color
of your eyes.

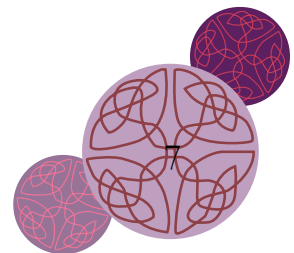
I can't name the octave your voice
is in,

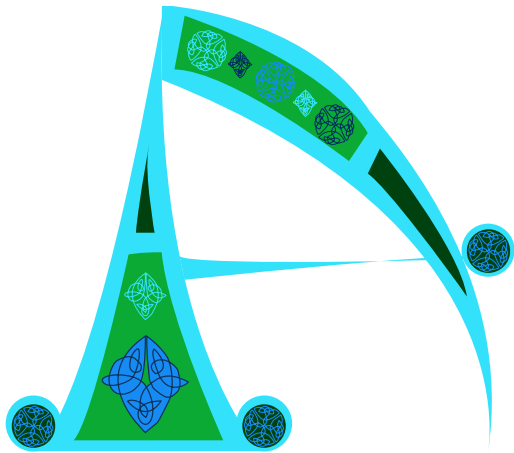
I don't know what you smell like
and I'm steeped in sorrow.

But then your knock comes
at the door
and here you are.

And I know it takes 12 and a half strokes to write your name.
And I don't need to practice the wedding march
because it's suddenly second nature
and I don't need cement for our future
because I want to know
if you need to go you can,
but you refuse it
all the same.
And your parents will accept me in time.

I don't know what the color of your eyes are,
because I can't articulate their beauty.
And I can't name the octave with which
you speak because it transcends music
and strikes otherworldly notes.
I can't say what you smell like
because who would believe
that you smell like rain
and solace
and wildflowers
and sweat?
I may not seem like I'm in love.
But I could be.





Treat Me Like A Child

child is not a slur.
It is not an insult, it is not a problem
to be dealt with,
swept under the Oriental rug, and tripped
over.

Treat me like a child,
for I am tired of my hand
swinging free, pointed down to the asphalt
that I am sure
to fall flat on when I fail.

And when I am told to get back up,
still no one reaches for that hand and I am
vulnerable.

Treat me like a child, and I will take that
hand,
and crescent moon nails will be eclipsed by
your warmth, and nail beds will grow rich in
calcium fortified castles.

Treat me like a child.

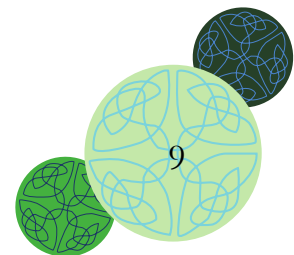
A child is not an argument.
There is no pro and con, there are only
swirls and ebbs, and deep breaths and great
sighs
of contentment.

Treat me like a child.

For on the vine, the older we get
we become prideful, and fragile
like grapes
that have hoped for grand arrangements
but are the subject of much more violent measures and
are left to be crushed and frozen in time
paralyzed potential.
Treat me like a child.

A child is not an answer.
It is always the question, and they are always open-
ended
and free.
Treat me like a child.
Let me ask
Why are caterpillars so hungry?
Why do bandages sealed with a kiss always heal me?
Why do I have a brother? Can't I have a sister?
Why does God bowl so loudly on rainy nights?
Why do I cry? Why do I rage?
Reply to me in more questions than responses, and I
will be sweetly satisfied.

Treat me like a child.
Talk to me in small words.
Teeny tiny
miniscule concepts that do not
shoot like stars across the universe, that blaze a trail
of non-conformity
and that whisper of years gone by
but rather, speak to me of what is buried in the Earth
and let it crawl slowly to the surface,
so that when I chew it
and I swallow it whole
I am full with only a mouthful
I do not want your IV drip stabbing my skin
nourishing my vessel solely, soul trailing.
Treat me like a child.



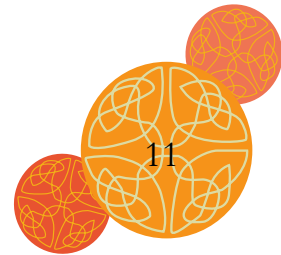
A child is not a belief.
Mostly made up of disbelief, they ask why
when there are dead ends, and dead goldfish.
Treat me like a child.
And when you give a response that is so aged,
winding and convoluted
do not ask me to see it your way.
For once that child walks down your perspective,
they do not have insight, but blisters on their feet
from walking too far without relief.
Take them into your arms.
Kiss them. Hug them.
Do not send them away
when you could have held them near.
The answer is always simpler, and within reach of
yourself
for that is what is closest to your heart.
Treat me like a child,
and I will not need to be seasoned by the seasons,
questioned by time.
For now, is enough.



Make Art or Make Babies?

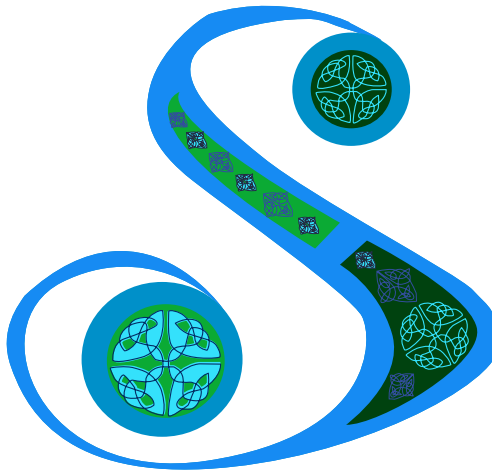
ake art or make babies?
It's never been put to me so
sharp and so blunt
at the same time. Now I know
my inspiration drips like
candle wax, slithering
emptying my tributaries
seeping down into one final puddle,
leaving me arid.
But I don't want to choose.
I want to believe that I have
enough stardust for both.

My children won't be tabula rasas.
Their faces will be rife with blue swirls
ranging and stretching
like tree rings.
Starry night is on the folds of their brains;
on their cat scans.
And Guernica helps them breathe at night
their lungs shallow enough to take in
the disjointed pieces as one.
Their pastel smiles



and oil eyes
their paint brush lashes
and watercolor hearts
make me sigh with the craft
of the fifties housewife.
My mother instinct croons in the moonlight
wailing that the world might
be excited to see them.
They are only white canvasses
on the inside
cut clay
leaning easels
and will be exactly who the universe wants
them to be.
Except for a few masterpieces I hope to
imbue
they have many gilded frames to hang.

I am only a conduit in
this world but if I get the
chance to create something
of my own instead of
letting the atmosphere wash and submerge
me
I will paint this town red,
and my children even redder.



Bloduedd's Flaw

he comes to you
like a breeze on a succulent morn,
made of sweet tea and verdant grasses.

She approaches like trailing ivy,
her gait as fluid as quicksilver,
as warm as a ray of sun.

Her name smacks of honey on your lips,
her limbs are slender, but not hollow.

To say she "walks"
is an insult.

To give her such a lowly human trait is
blasphemy.

She is ethereal and otherworldly...

and in that case,

it must have been a world
where fragrance condenses in clouds
and the skies are lethargic and pink
with happiness.

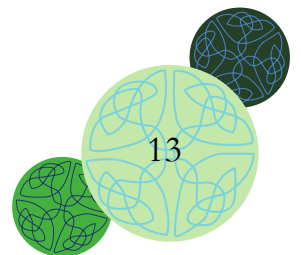
Her origin is mystery,
but her resplendence is renowned.

She never appears
she floats, she flows,
she glides
soundlessly.

Her perfume is of distilled rose hips,
her hips are waves
crests and troughs rolling
with measured effort.

Butterflies dine on her skin,
they flit at the chance of ingesting her
essence.

They are careful not to be crushed under her
rosy feet.

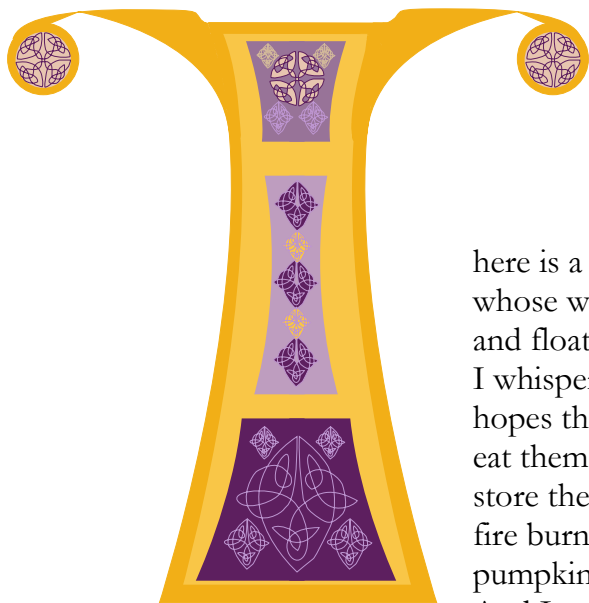


Her smile is wan,
and her impromptu audience sighs when she
wanes.

Like paraffin,
she drips with thick reverence,
muffling, and dense.
She blooms in all seasons,
because winter is too shy to kiss her,
and loves her too much to touch her,
she is green
but not with envy.
To call her beautiful
radiant
stunning
is to mar her.
She is as inexpressible as a sigh.

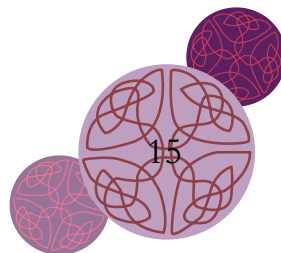
Man once thought himself
to be on par with kings,
and tried to net her,
capture her essence.
But she wilted in his presence.
And not even the hot,
velvet rain could revive her.
To smother her,
is to condemn the world to blindness
and to obscurity.
To uproot her, to deflower her,
is to murder freedom,
is to make her base,
is to reduce her to humanity.
A spirit cannot be caught
where the iron chafes,
where her tears must paradoxically
hydrate her.
Her petals must retain their minute veins
and sleek fragility.
Man let her go, intact.
And loved her from a far.
For she is a being seldom entertained.

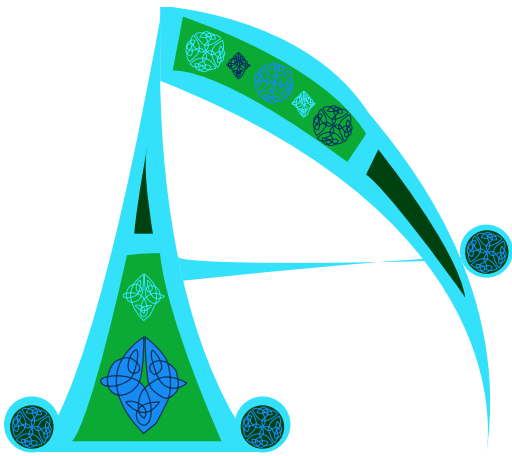
Capturing her is easy,
capturing her attention is futile.



The Ungrateful Dead

here is a firefly in the leaves
whose weathered and hearty,
and floats sweetly in September.
I whisper my prayers to him in the
hopes that he will
eat them,
store them safely in his life where a
fire burns that not even frost or
pumpkin vines can grasp.
And I can't touch them either,
though he is willing to land on my
finger,
and beat his wings
against the imposing night.
We both know he shakes in
anticipation to forsake the winter
stars,
cold and unyielding in their sight, as
he becomes the rising Polaris for all
to see clearly.
A petite, moving lighthouse
he is the beauty of you among the
rocks, fair Siren.
Please.
Won't you drown me?





Instant Gratification

girl with fire gold hair, tangled
and snarled so succinctly,
sat complacently
eyes intent on the stage.
I blushed as her underwear rose out
of her jeans like a blue moon.
I wished for her to turn around,
to see if the rarity of her hair
would match her face.
I willed feverishly to catch a glimpse,
to know her countenance like my
own.
When she rose once more,
quite erect,
our eyes met
hers utterly unflinching, open and
true
so blatant and candid
she stared with
complete abandon.

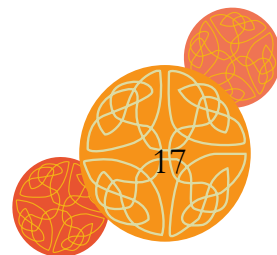
I was not disappointed.



Moonrise

s there any wonder in our eyes?
Do we strive to open them
in the morning as sunlight streams and motes
strike
in between transitions, through the curtains?
Does wakefulness become a fierce battle of
wills that have fought an archaic skirmish for
endless years?
With an urge as a tidal wave, and with as much
gravitational pull as the moon and the sea
you flip onto your side, rolling like
loose rocks in the current
as you dip
deeper onto the river bed and settle
permanently.

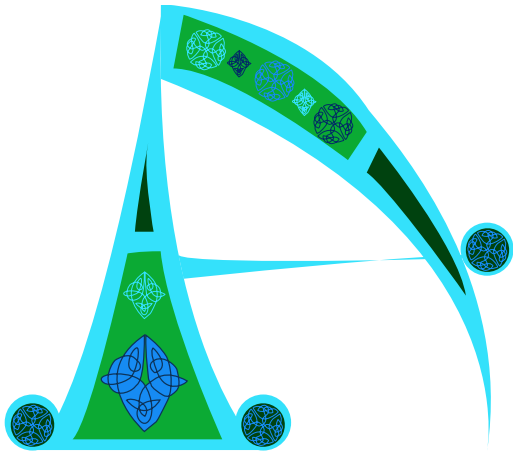
There, you had a nightmare against me.
Feeling, flexing, it was too far away from me
to grab you whole and take a hold
of what had already taken you.
Unseen wispy tendrils latched on
in the night.
Like coarse moonbeams
that surrounded the bed and allowed
it to drown in light and yet
there is still not the absence
of darkness in you. That would be
too much to
hope for.



As I speculate on its origins, I recall
what you said previously
that the moon moves over a foot away
every year and yet its gravity
its pull and sway on the
Earth's waters is unaffected.

It does not swell or drain
its strength remains.
At the moment's core,
I could not swallow your truths,
the seeds stuck in my throat and
I felt anger rise behind them.

But now I reach out in the dark,
try to send out my own dreamy feelers
to tell you
I understand, I acknowledge your admission
and that the moon may inch away
but it will still stay stretching the shore
and I absorb your nightmare through my flesh like
a carnivorous twin in the womb.



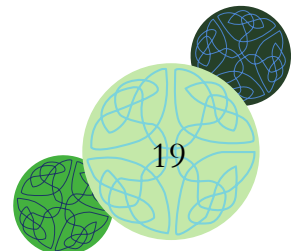
Streetlight

streetlight is never noticed
for its efforts until it has
gone out,
until it has been snuffed out.
People are the same.

The day you died was unremarkable.
You slipped away in the early hours
when the dogged middle class
may be just stretching in bed
their eyes fluttering from a primal dream
fighting the urge to wake
thrashing in their 1000 threat counts,
too tired to have even started to count sheep.
That is
until they sense the soft feather pillow
below them, and the fight goes out of them,
it is snuffed out.

The fight left you as well
but more on account
of the disease that ravaged
your internals and entrails,
made you so much less.
Like any hospital bed could have placated you
your indomitable spirit should be tapped like
sap from a tree, and poured
into the open mouths of the apathetic.

You spent your life in measured increments
that you could easily dole out with
a dose of laughter, whose nutritious value



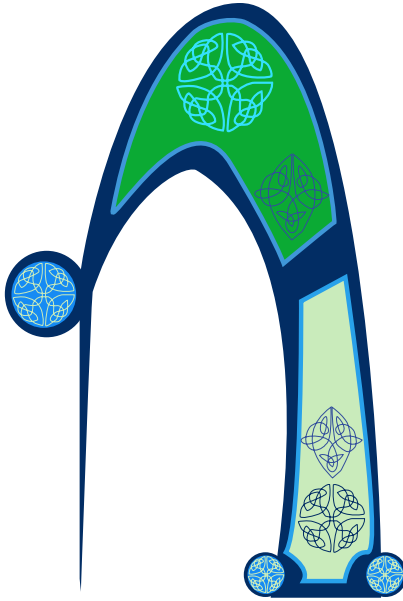
may have exceeded the daily caloric intake of
sweetness,
but smiling is fat free, after all.
And you were certainly far free.

But not in the way that a woman stands
in front of the mirror
and pinches
the inches
so deeply that she bruises her soul,
but rather you lived the good life
without the fat, the trimmings.
Simplicity was your bread and butter.

Reaching out to you is so much more than a
physical gesture now.
You became a streetlight.
Casting shadows from on high
on the living things
illuminating their existence,
never looking down on them, but
placing them on the top shelf, bathed in your
essence.

Just like a streetlight you were unable to see the
dawn of a new day
and certainly you were missed that night after you
went out,
were snuffed out.
But there is a confidence
when the stars emerge
and become present like when a woman
carefully applies her make-up,
and the moon man barely lights the way with his
plain countenance
because you flicker on and provide a security
blanket,
enveloping,
for those who have not come home, and still have
far to go.

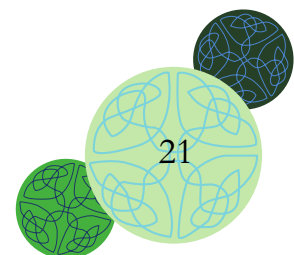
You dear friend
could not have shined
brighter.



Mosquito

o one can find the bright side
or the benefit of the mosquito.
They suck.
And certainly not in the alluring fashion
in which a vampire
has historically conducted himself.
All forbidden fruit, and seductive
danger,
a caress of the skin, and a shiver
that does not come from a draft
that is not caused by any open window
when her neck is cheesecloth that is
stretched loosely over the jar
with rubies that are captured only
breaths below.
Years go by, or so it feels
when he finally draws in closer,
and trots out his teeth
to tear and ravage
excuse me
ravish her.

But
a mosquito punctures any spot.
Praises any place
creates a wound, or breaks down walls.
Its needle sinks, and it slips down to the
depths
of your multi-layered existence,
touches your fluid soul, drinks from it
at times.
On a warm summer's evening, it revels
too far down like an upset buoy before
it regains its place on the
surface.



But maybe that's the courtesy of the mosquito.
They drive into your deepest folds,
scraping at your soul until they've hit flint and stone
shining a quick light on that that you've
buried in the dark.
All the amber that has frozen your memories
still intact
but you still see their contents, until the mosquito comes
up for air
and you smack it.

The damage is done, and while your skin
is rebelling
in a mountainous welt that will announce to the world
that you are drained and
you are still a candidate,
that you can give more.
Perhaps the liminality of the mosquito is simply the
boundaries of you,
meeting the boundaries of another.

Mingling
time and place
It taking part of you, unwillingly
and You,
taking a life that was not yours to take.
But you did it anyway.
And one of you at least
for a moment
is changed as a result of your interaction. And
the need you feel to scratch the mosquito's signature
as you claw, is only different
in the manifestation, and not in the urge.

That's love.



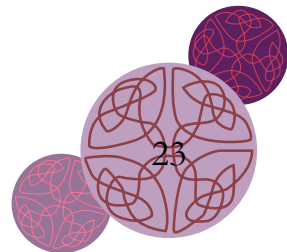
A Cold Shower

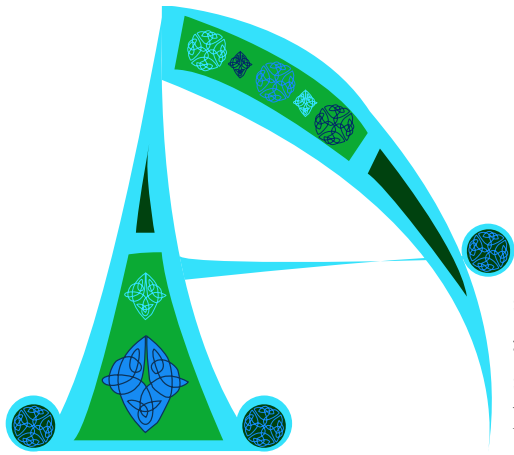
hen we first stood
under the buckling stream
pelting incessantly
on our bare pelts,
the water was too warm
and we too heated.
And yet we still stood closely
under the hard
calcified caked faucet
mouths wide open
and thirsty.

I wanted to throw you out
water, bathtub, baby,
and all
because you were dried and puny
and I was still drowning.

But now that the shower we shared
has run cold
and you were no longer pressed against
the clouded door
you still press against me,
seeking my warmth over that of the
water's catharsis.

Even now you do your best,
God knows it,
to wash me clean.

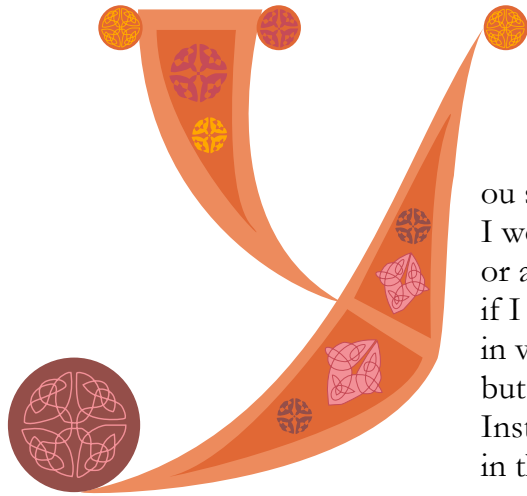




January
23rd,
2011

s I stand,
and the axis turns unwillingly under my
sole
I spin out of control, but I look
to the west and see
one pointed outlier of
hope.
In the peaks and valleys of life,
there seems to always be,
one outlier that
does not compute, and does not
conform and is
no help
when one is tracking their growth.

You were always my outlier,
the only one who ever believed.

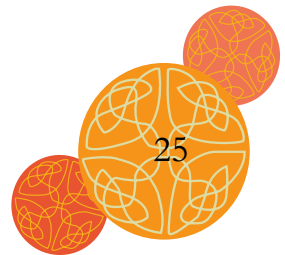


ou screeched.
I would have joined you
or at least answered you
if I was not searching for sleep
in vain
but still searching.
Instead I wrapped myself more tightly
in the blankets,
a soft armored shell against your
penetrating call.

Wise

I grab at sleep's silvered outline and tug
the rope
that dangles down into the pit
that gives way
as I float gently below.

The last of your kind
around these parts
I wonder what you cry out for.
It was an ugly sound
did that match your intent?
Or was it an orgasm
of life, out of the finer things?
Nowhere near a lullaby
I had to croon myself back into a calm,



back into the cradle
for your presence was unexpected, a distraction,
like a bruise whose origins are unknown
but whose center is purpled.

I rolled on my side
cupping my chin
to ponder your song.
As I reached for my lover
to nestle my hand upon his curves
a foreign act for me, you
screamed again.
Startled, I jumped,
you cooed a final warning
and I understood.

I retract
I squeeze
I release
I sigh.

And lift from the downy pillow.
As you settle into your downy nest.
Relaxed, you make one more cautious turn of
your exorcist neck
to ensure your circumspection. Armed to the teeth.
You are ready. But asleep.
Straining, I am awake.
My own body protests, and throbs with its own
rigidity.

I should know love and its pattern
like your tired snoring, and the tide of your
breath.
Instead, I do not reach for you at night when
terrors are near.
Instead, I do not reach for you in the day when
owls are asleep.

I am not wise.

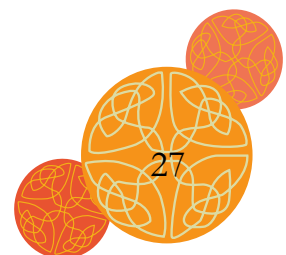


Get Out of Here

couldn't wait to get out of this town"
my mother said
in the town she was born in
next to the mother
she grew up next to
and the daughter
who grew inside her,
memories speeding past
behind her eyes like
mile markers.

But in two generations
no dust clouded
the trunk of their vehicles.
No boxes were packed
my mother and her mother
stayed put.

Now
when I hold paper bills in my hand
they seem as thin as butterfly wings
and more apt to fly away
with every crumpled moment
I invest here.
My body knows my plan
as if a constellation's path
has been etched
into my skin but the more
I sip the water
brimming over with fluoride
the more I wash down my troubles
with kool-aid

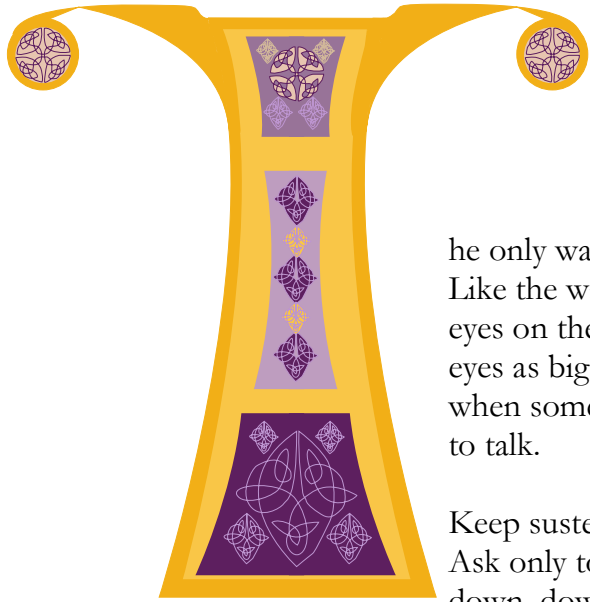


the more I begin to douse unsavory
dinner conversations
and sweep dirty laundry
under the proverbial Persian rug.
I can feel my panoramic vision
reduced to my peripherals.

And just like that rug,
it fits the area that my life
covers.
It's compact and limited.

In this town, the sky makes me feel
claustrophobic as it only
inhales day and exhales night.
Even my vision is circumscribed
through lenses with rims that like
a carriage horse, I am not spooked
by the progress that races by me.
This town is too small, for mosquitoes
happily breed in tears, and vines creep out to
hold me close.

I need to sharpen
believe in something
get out of here.
And straighten out my
mother and her mother left in my hair
and hope I don't disappoint
myself in the wrong direction.

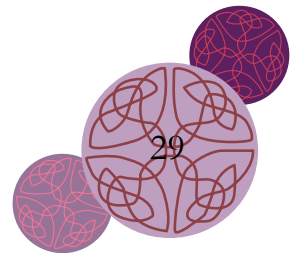


At Arm's Length

he only way to live is to live at arm's length.
Like the way people sit at the dinner table
eyes on their plates
eyes as big as dinner plates
when someone actually starts
to talk.

Keep sustenance at arm's length.
Ask only to pass it from leagues away
down, down
just in case too much passes the lips when it is
right in front of you. So much you pass on it.
Keep it at arm's length because you are safe
when there's distance in between,
and there's a hollow sound that echoes from
you.

Keep indulgence at arm's length.
Use your staying power to keep yourself
in check and stay away from anything
that may submerge you
in bliss
the way that a young child submerges
themselves in the pool at their community
club.



Underwater reveals a myriad of perspectives
that are simply revealed by the fractures of light
that so delicately slice through their vision.

And most importantly, hold your lover at arm's
length if you don't want
the walls
you've so precariously built to keep the
morning glory from growing and seething
around your heart,
to crumble and wither
then
by all means
and by any means necessary
use
ropes and metal handcuffs and bungee cords and
hand guns and fire
and even rage, jealousy, guilt
darkly shining
diamond edges of a sword dunked in embers
by all means keep your lover at arm's length.

But know
with a certainty of the creation of the wind's power
of the tree's whisper
of a rock's immobilization
that when death strikes,
it strikes hard and true, and if by the smallest chance
that he licks you
slices but does not plunge,
he will follow you until he
can bleed you.

Even
at arm's length.



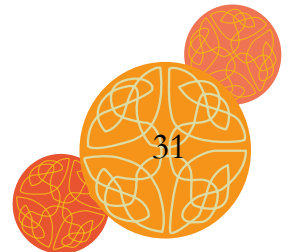
Sisters

t's a rare occurrence,
That you take my hand firmly in yours.
Usually it's open-faced
when you try to slap me away from
reaching into your
boiling pot
of backyard soup
or when I sneak into your closet
for my latest trend.

It's a rare occurrence
that you reach out and grab my hand
first.

The last time was when we were
crossing the street, and more on
big sister instinct
than some sense of safety,
you grasped me and lead me
along as only a big sister
can do.

And before that
you lead me into the sea
as the rip current dragged on my legs
and I still followed
your dark hair and your light jumps
as you hopped over the rolling crests

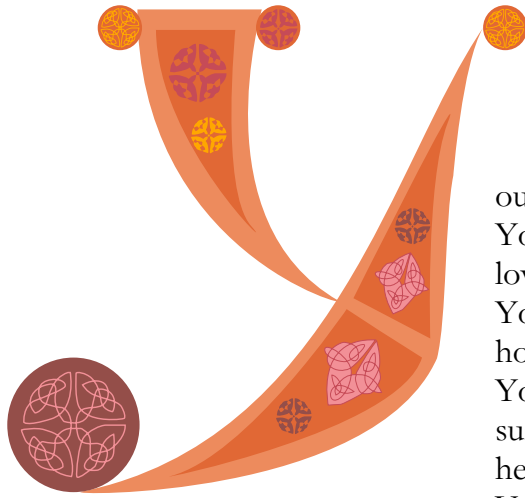


of the waves
as I tried so very hard
not to drown.

And now,
I am behind you in the crowd
pressed bodies like leaves
pressed in a book, on wax paper
that try to peel away from the bar,
from each other
as we squeeze and jostle our way through.
At one point,
I feel myself
slipping away
from you.

Like some many years ago,
crossing the asphalt
washed by the ocean
I am reminded that you
can still leave me behind.

But then
you reach behind yourself
for a moment
receding into the past you've
already conquered and grabbed
my hand as your sweatshirt
slipped too long
over your knuckles
and you propel me forward.
In that bar,
I was a lost wanderer
eyes wide as the trees branched out before me
but our family tree was stronger
as you pulled me safe
across the road, across the sea
across the bar, across the universe.
And really,
it doesn't matter where you are
because I would follow you
anywhere.

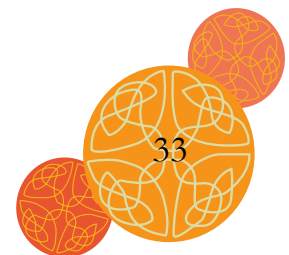


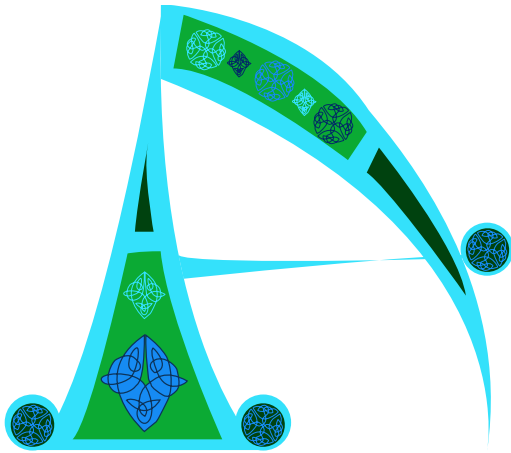
Self Fulfilling Prophecy

ou talk of storms in reverent golden tones.
You talk of the moon wresting the sea, from its
lover, the shore.
You talk of lions, with bated breath and
honeyed eyes.
You talk of iron men, shining under the bronze
sun, hollowed out for courage, for they lack
heart.
You talk of the restraint that criminals exercise
in public, stirring a frothy elixir that bubbles
beneath the cuticle.
You talk of the cancer that infects us all, and
those who are brawny enough to combat it.
You talk of the whole universe in gravitational
equilibrium, and its awesome perfection.
You talk of strength, you rationalize.
Yet, I have not heard you speak of a mother's
vitality.

Soon the heat of infection will settle over my
body and snag itself on my vagus nerve, and
the child will be externally expunged and
inquisitive.
Until then, the tainted beating of my own heart
will deliver sullied blood to my extremities.
Suddenly
(you take my foul hand in yours)
it's all there: the schematics to regrowth, a vast
emotional regeneration.
Yes, I found reconstruction in your fulgent
gaze
despite the shadows on your face.
I am enamored with the baptismal properties
of your green eyes,
and a stillness reigns.

I am immaculate, again.





Bloduedd Revisited

All people seek not ice
or heat but warmth,
a delicate glow
a bloom of blush.
But she is searing between two extremes
and she is burning and freezing over
like an ice cap on a hot
dying planet.

She's not delicate or immaculate
a flower is not her essence.
Rather her dress is made of muscle
and sinew
and even though her arrow
does not fly true, it flies
as the crow does
with a wingspan
that can scratch the sky,
and shadow the Earth,
with a force not to be matched
unparalleled
parallel but vertical are the lovers
she's sipped from until they've gone down
with drink.
Because as women
we are supposed to hold our liquor
and hold our husband's hand at the altar
and hold our spines just so
as to be cracked in the clean, fresh morning
sun.

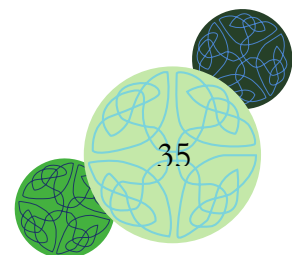
As women we are meant to be all soft curves ahead.
Dabbed dew, and moisturized golden glows
pulsating, prim and trimmed, we are meant to dazzle
in demure subtleties.
As conquerable and alluring as a mermaid, devoid of
the dark intentions of her cousin, the Siren,
displayed on the beach for your taste, she has
nowhere to go
but down.

Yet, sweetly contradictory she is
unlike her race she is
punching and glaring
wolfish, her blood runs red and hot
unlike her hood
and her hair is tied up instead of loose,
spitting in the face of insanity.

Unable to touch her,
but acknowledging her existence,
the desire and fire
knows not what will become of her
because if she
yields yields yields
ice will break and
there will be
all smiles because
warmth is back.

The town hates her. She's seen them
cursing her red lips, pursed, with their own
men drooling from their porches
watching dirt swirl behind her travels
hoping she would only look back,
and let them put their hands on the small of
her back
to guide her.

She will undoubtedly die alone,
cold and waning from a disease transferred
from someone else's broken heart
but when a woman is scorned,
she is born.





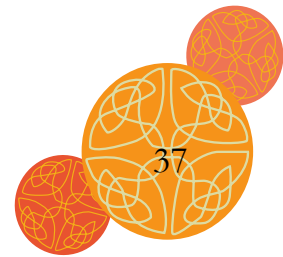
X Y
Zygote

n the womb
I knew Y and I knew X for a time,
for they struggled over my fate.
But I see now that I was the variable
that you just didn't account for.

When my heartbeat was slow
and the nurse held that shiny, cold circumference to your
stomach, Mom
and its radius shot out into the dark
and sought the beat I now walk and talk to. She smiled
her teeth to face ratio
extremely disproportional
and announced,
"a slow heartbeat means a boy."

Yet, I came out
differently
as the X gene fought its way to the world
and I grinned at you with my gums
and my pie eyes
you were so shocked
that you forgot all about your boy names
or even that you would name me Theresa, after your
mother, Dad
and instead you called me Bailey, which exists
somewhere close to purity on the acid/base scale
and exactly in the middle of the gender neutral
measurement
but where am I
on your number line?
A month past 32 years old, and half past 3 o'clock
here I cry and toddle and exist
as a girl.
Nothing this perfect in its golden ratio dimensions
could be wrong, you think to yourselves
as you coddle, but do not disdain me.

In your heart,
X now marks the spot,
and you've stopped
asking Y.





orld Traveler,
weary, wanton lines
cross your face,
like the paths you've set
and the journeys you've made.

But you have grown tired
without someone to uncrease them
fold them back along the same folds
hold your hand, allow you to cry.

World Traveler

For you hold out your hand, and out spills
the golden sands of a thousand beaches
I've never been to.
Their waters are so lucid, you explain, that your tears
appear murky and spoiled when compared to the soft
curl of a wave.

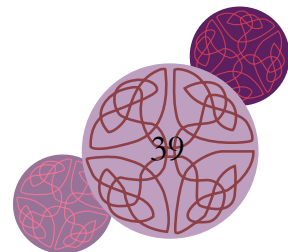
You open your fist and out pours
a breeze so heavenly, and rich
the sunshine is still baked within it
and I have surely never basked in such a
wind, you point out
even though we both know,
I have seen enough change.

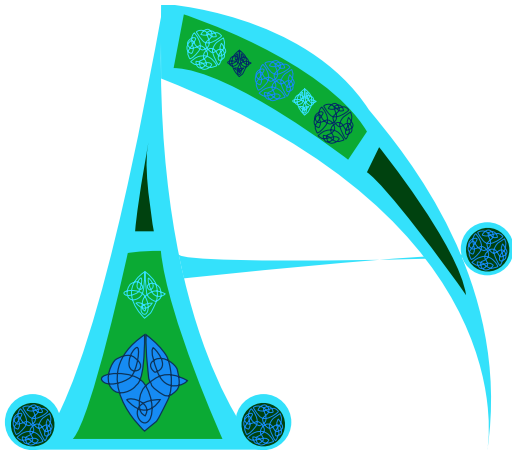
But you forget that I have eyes, too
with which to see your failing face
and I have seen great sights
though they may have not been the adoring sunsets in
the tropics

I have known warmth from hearts and hearths,
and while I may never trample the tundra of a
thousand snowscapes
I have known the chill of the first morning light in
winter,
and have never refused hibernation when it was
needed
as you do.

So, when I take you in my arms,
and you align yourself longitudinally
with my own body
in charted waters,
we are both in awe of such creature comforts
and you've forgotten why you've left before to see
the world's wonders.

And so have I.





Dog is God Spelled Backwards

t the back of my head,
I feel unknown scabs. And I'm not certain of their
origin.

When I search them
they bleed.

I think that perhaps Athena may spring from the holes,
weaving at night,
or maybe small spiders are nesting in my brain to make
a home of my ideas and
insecurities.

Or they are planting them there.

It might be
that it is both of these options, their battling spools of
thread rattling in my head.

"It's your hairbrush," someone in the ether shoots.

"I..." Shrug. If that's the conclusion you must come to
it is a valid one.

Reaching into the abyss
there is a great warmth
and I turn to see the oncoming headlights.

I am as a doe,
my children just under my spilled milk underbelly.

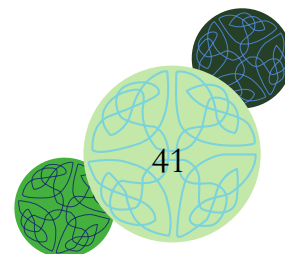
I imagine my life as a rush of wind down the
highway, then the car

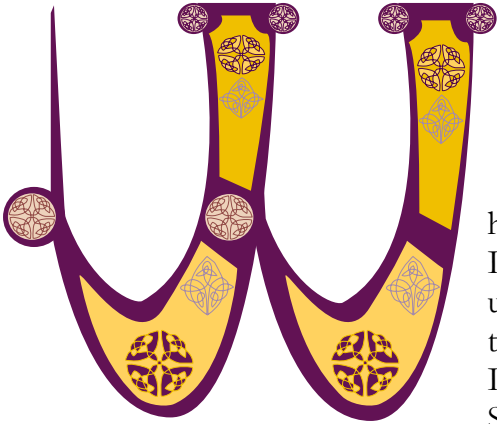
racing the scenery as it passes. Then I am the blood
swept from the glass by the wipers.

To breathe, to ache
to ask for sleep, but to not receive.
To die, unwillingly
to lie, without warning.
It is so active. It is a choice.
To spend the energy is to invest, is to believe is
to be
exhausted.
And to deserve rest is to welcome the end, and in
that there is no decision.
The glass is most certainly empty, and we invoke
its second filling,
yet, it does not, will not, cannot come.
The road may look inviting, bisected as it is,
cloven as a deer hoof, yet it is cloying as a web.

Tell me. What is real? What is dead?
“The brush and the hair. That is all,” my mind
answers.

But all I can think is,
“No, you are.”





The Operation

When I had my operation
I was convinced
utterly persuaded
that this was the last time
I would sleep as deeply.
Slashes in my stomach
are my only reminder
of what I was almost apart of
the only remembrance that I almost
rejoined the ground simply
because of what I had done on top
of the Earth.

You smiled down,
your eyes made of porcelain,
and just as glassy as you told me over and over
as you sipped from water to replenish yourself
that I would be fine
though my mouth had gone dry
with the end.

Far before that they had strapped me down with no
explanation for their deft movements
and certainly with no indication
that I would
fight back.

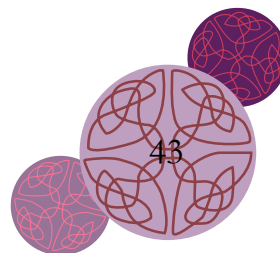
They unplugged the metal from my nose and ears,
and even from my eyes.
The iron directly behind my forehead, too
entwined so delicately with my confidence,
was decimated
my iron will.

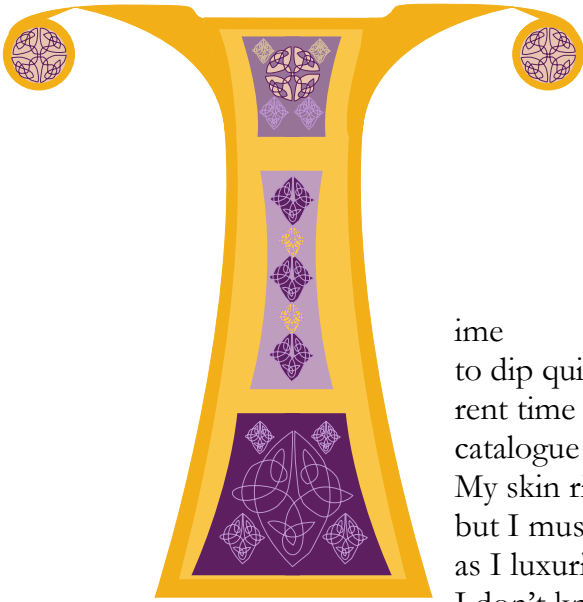
I spilled my own tears
fearing so greatly my last moments
that I had seen so many times
on television and reenactments.

And in reality,
it had to come out
because despite my belly-aching,
my belly ached with a burden
I could not see.

They took it from me,
an inflamed, stopped up organ
I did not know the function of
or why it was ill
in the first place,
only that it threatened to ruin me
only that it refused to exist inside of me
a sweet rebellion made of bile
and dark humors
that long ago influenced my personality
explained my volatile nature
explained why I desired to place the
sharpest edge
against my skin
and explains why the doctor now
wants to point the scalpel and press down
on me, too.

And after all these months
of recovery,
I still
fear
that I may lose you from my life,
in quite the same
violent
experienced
manner.





Season Cocktail

ime
to dip quill into ink
rent time to think
catalogue this all away.
My skin ripples and itches
but I must be satisfied
as I luxuriate in a life unlived.
I don't know what to name this.

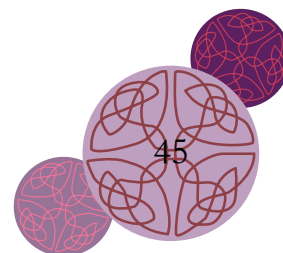
Most call it summer
but I don't put much stock in
majority thoughts
and who's to say one word
can encompass all that this is?
It is drab, it repeats a letter
and it does not emulate
the corrupt deal
the disillusionment that
hangs like a gauze curtain
and that squishes and stains
like ripe blueberries
under foot.
What made you believe that just
because the sun was out there
wasn't going to be rain?
Troubles don't leave.

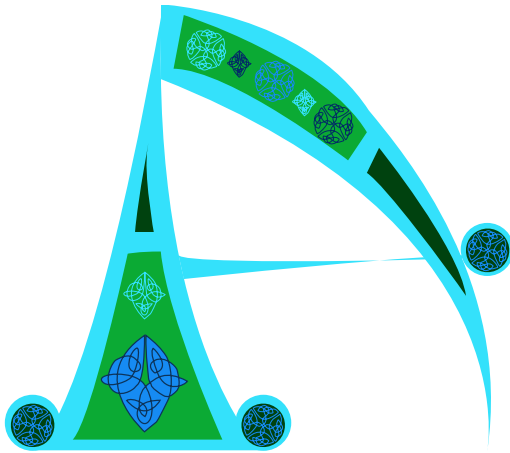
They hide behind clouds and remain looming
with a
needle and teeth
in dark corners and shadows
the likeness of which has never been
documented
in polaroids, in peripherals
they drape
and suffocate all the dreams
leaving just nightmares underneath
a crown of thorns nestled atop a pillow
and I've never been this lethargic.
Water dripped in thin skins
ready to burst and also break
near humid sun showers
dining with no restrictions and sweetened
recklessness with a dollop of attitude.
But don't forget the cerulean sky,
the cocktail of a season
so heady it cannot be tethered under one
name.

It's time to bring this out in the open
instead of corked inside like a sloshing sea
swells and eddies giving me motion sickness
when I close my eyes.

This isn't just one feeling believe me.
Elixirs like this need a plethora of ingredients
and hundreds of willful mixers.
Mortar and pestle
will break my thin epidermis
and let forth the sweetest of aromas.

Disguised as a weed,
I am now finally utilized.
In its foggy folds, I'll discover
what "summer"
wants to be
this year.





Dread

foreign car that is all too familiar
in your lover's driveway.
Bats in the belfry, swooping
in and out of sight.
A gasp that empties lungs and forgets
to fill them again.

It is a feeling I've never invited,
but I have felt all the same,
paralyzing my limbs.
I take instead glacial steps without
progress,
as it replaces my existence with a long
shadow
that extends past
high noon.



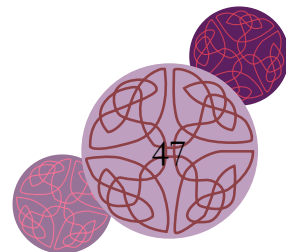
Slaked

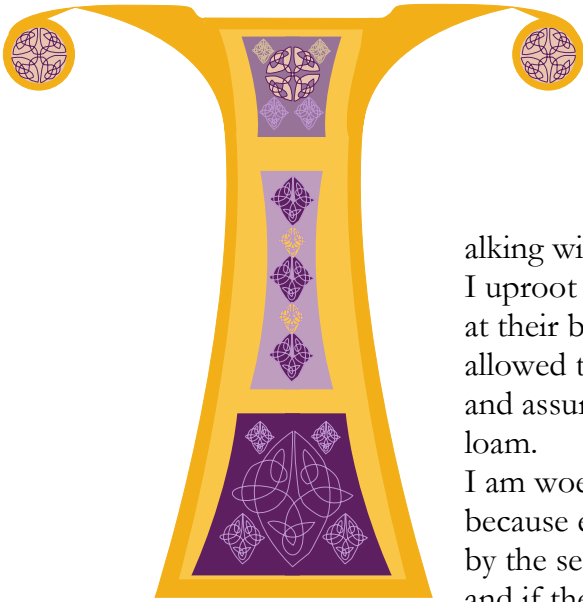
etness and dew on my clean, white
bones.

My rib cage erupts in Spring.
Ivy that tended my heart, now
bisects it,
and wildflowers bloom close to home.

Like a desert after a long rain
I am grateful for the moisture
but I find little use for it.

I have evolved.





Tree Talk

alking with trees
I uproot ideologies, standing
at their base I am only
allowed to see the canopies
and assuredly the leaf litter and
loam.

I am woefully marked as an enemy
because even if I creak onto my tippy toes, I am dwarfed
by the sequoia giants,
and if the wind blows,
I can hear their
condescending chuckling.

If I tried to climb them
I'd be enclosed in amber
and if I whisper in dulcet tones
to match their purpose
I'd have to watch it shatter
and I'd shudder
fearing their crumpling
like their offspring
that are doubled
and tripled
and packaged
and sent
jumping through hoops of age
like their offering to the Earth.

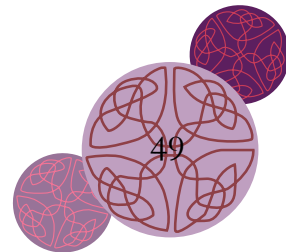
I feel them timber.

It is enough to make me run for cover
when they begin to sway
but something makes me stay.
My urge is never satisfied talking to trees
although I am
by and large cast out of their world
like a net far ashore.

I try telling them of our world
and our gross misunderstandings of nature
to win their favor, and to release the dark
tar that grows exponentially in my chest
at the sights that industry must offer.

I often end up apologizing for hours.

But when they do forgive me
allow me leniency
for man's fallacies
and they let me scale their great heights
I am ironically
floored.





Divorce

must cast the shell, I molt
and itch my wings against the rough bark
of my past.

Little scrapes appear
in starkest red on the remaining skin
and relief is not forthcoming.

I rub, and still I fidget
to rip off the last remains.

My self and my body can no longer reconcile
their differences

and I'm onto much bigger and better things
without such a fleshy anchor

to weigh me down to the bottom,
settling me

obediently
in the sea.

Instead

I am leaving my mark,
smearing blood on the concrete.

The littlest bits that swirl on the wind
like human ash.

I've known loss, but

not in the way you're hoping

I have. This parting makes me shed my silt,
and divorce my casing.

I must become lighter than this

for the sake of humility

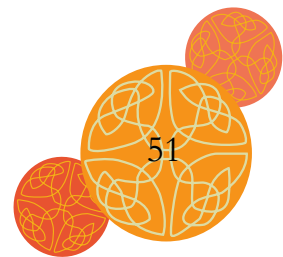
because any one who ever was good enough
floats

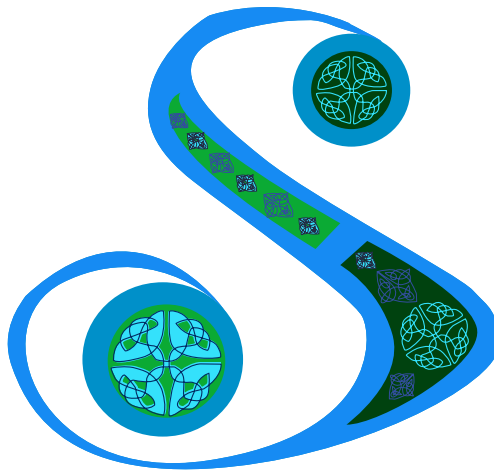
and never needed the wind to guide them,

never was so indecisive

as this.

I suppose I can't
really afford the divorce
though I'll be paying alimony to my
grave
to keep this body in good stock
of stardust.





o lonely
in a chapel of your longing
I fear I am kneeling.
I think my seams are failing and I thought that I'd
sewn them tight enough
against event the full moon,
and especially
willow roots that would slide into
my gutter, and overtake
the drainage, overtake the abscess.

Instead I am bowed, doubled over
and I am unable to progress
and it is obvious to all how
I've got myself
so folded and choked.

Willowed

In search of water, I have found myself in danger,
hoping only for sustenance
snaking along foreign lines
for the best drink and the optimal hydrated state that
has left me drunk
and giggling
until I take note of the cuts along my veins
and the spillage of my sap in pursuit of simple
pleasures.
When I was found, the crook and thief,
I was uprooted in response.

My tendrils and my aura
now sweep the ground in painful stabs
of embarrassment
and when I feel the lift of the wind
that cackles at me and my trusting ways
I feel that I have been willowed
cowed in my existence,
and derided for my unquenchable thirst,
a trait I can't help, or even cut down
when I finally tried
to help myself.



The Maiden Lasting

stare out through the glass,
at a white landscape
blanketed with security
saturated with purity
an endless virginity
marred only by the ram-rod trees
and the deer's tread over the frozen
ground.

A vastness incomparable...

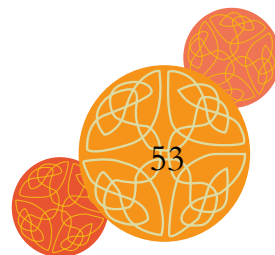
I think

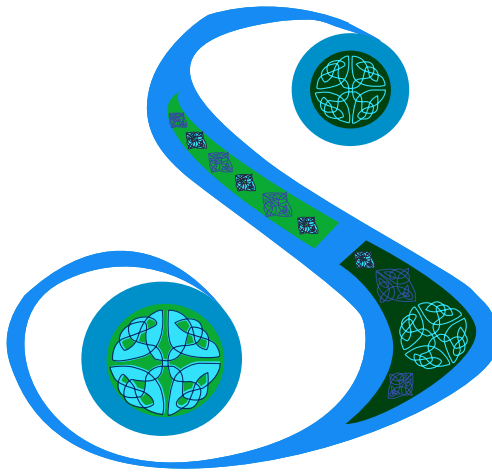
when my eyes alight upon a single tree
who, although the solstice has passed,
retains her leaves
though they are decrepit and lifeless.

I wonder if she has cursed her decision
renounced it until it reverberated to her
swollen limbs.

Pregnant with so much failure
it seems her time has waned.

Now the snow is melting...
but what has she learned?





idewalk in the city
under the gaze of neon,
transfixed by beckoning
menus in a different language,
breath coming in puffs of impatience,
in boots that click and fade against the
night.

Free Again

My eyes are as big as saucers,
rimmed by fallen mascara
with a mind too busy for dreams.

I feel that I have reached an impasse.

I know that this should inspire me...
I should have something to say...

But I am suffocated by disillusionments
my thoughts are frightened
to leave my body
at the sight of the symbol of man's greed,
iron clad and looming.

As I continue to walk, however
I pass a building
and hear a window shatter.

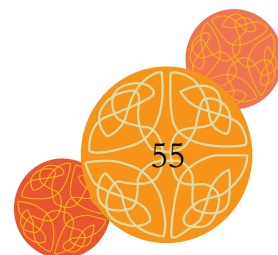
I smile.
I am happy to be free, again.



Who Burns

know we'd all die in the ovens, now.
All my friends, family, and lovers.
The handicapped,
the elderly,
the invalids,
the gays,
the deviants,
the individuals;
how singed they'd all be.
And I, the gypsy,
with my be-coined skirt,
and my filthy, tattered feet
dancing
gyrating
swirling with the ashes
of my ancestors.

The SS will grab my wrists
with their clean fingernails.
I hope my tears burn their
skin with the acidity of my
sullied soul.
Rip my clothes.
Tear out my hair.
I couldn't care
less
if I tried.
You won't get my spirit.
You won't take my soul.



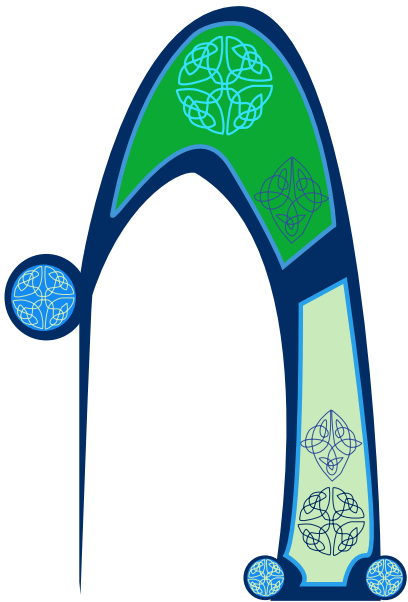
And as they throw me in the kiln
within only a few degrees of
hell itself
my hair will reek
and my skin will bubble
and the yeast in me will rise with the resistance.
I am no martyr
I'll scream with the power of a thousand octaves.
I'll shatter eardrums in stained glass windows in
the church of
my
God
not yours.

My eyes will glaze over like earthenware, fired.
All because of those brown eyes
that black hair.

The Imperfect
by only degrees of hell.

But how is it
in the darkness
I shine brighter?

How is it
that you don't burn like I do?

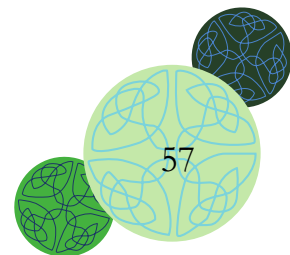


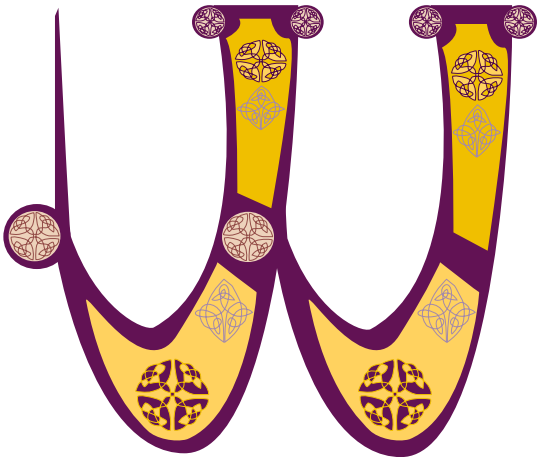
Lovers in Pompeii

estled in each other's arms for eternity;
captured in our history by outsiders
you were safe there.
Whether it was a moment's passion,
or a whole night's endeavor,
it is of no pertinence, it was permanent.
When hot fire slithered down the
mountainside
engulfing you both in flames
devouring your flesh
sipping on your blood
you held steadfastly to each other,
and made a silent vow
while the world burned
that death may take you
but the lava could never quench the
embers of your twin, beating hearts.

There you stayed
intertwined for all of time...

The clocks thrown forward now
hundreds of years
and we lie in a matching embrace
paying unknown homage to our ancestors
of love
waiting, silently,
for the end of the world.





The Big Dipper and The Big Division

e were almost one last night.
You didn't even mind
that I dragged you out into the middle of a field under the
inky nothing
and we lay our bodies down, crinkled and sun-kissed on a
crumpled quilt,
and stared up at the patchwork of the stars.
"They really are millions of miles away."
You broke the silence between us like an old fractured hip
unceremoniously, but cleanly.
And when I turned my own hip to meet yours
my lips to align like the constellations above
you blinked like Venus
and whispered, "I'm saving myself for marriage. I can save
you, too."
From then on, the distance formula
could not have calculated the breadth between us.
We were on two distant planets.
But I thought our love would bring
us into each other's orbit.
That gravity would make the apple fall,
and that I could fall into your sin.

But that wasn't case
and I found that night
that we are asymptotes.



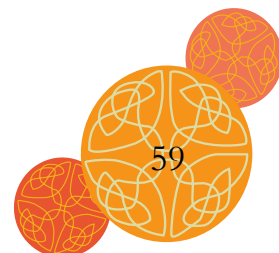
Fairy Tale

My father tells me to be careful.
And really, he is right.
In a world of rapists,
cloaked as learned men
stealing kisses by force,
and wolves that do more damage
than blowing your house down
but rather rip and ravage
your reputation.

It is no wonder that we take
pity on the wolf.

For surely these canines are the victims, though
they flash their canines, of their own anguish,
of their own urges.
Should we murder the wolf
for its adherence to natural instincts?

Do we want the red blood of an optimistic future
on our
capable hands?
Do we bleat too hard our displeasure?
Do we protest too much?

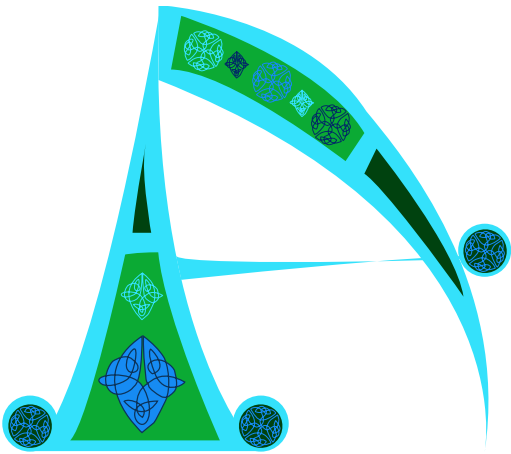


I've heard her say no in so many different
ways that I surely could not have imagined
the yes that she had tucked away in her smile,
that simply must have been whispered since
the radio was much too high
that night
and so was she.

We can't kill the wolf, his teeth glittering with
unfortunate circumstances with
apologies
dripping not saliva but
"I am sorry" for what I did
when society was not watching,
for what I did when I was watched by
the silent bystanders who I knew
were not as brave as the lion,
but were more like lambs
and would say nothing.
I slaughtered them, too.

But still despite his woolly garb
we take pity on the wolf?
Now that is a fairy tale,
perfect and convenient.

But in this age,
daddy, you are the one who isn't safe.
Princesses will fight back.

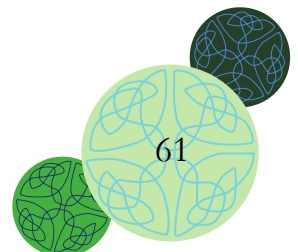


n implication of beauty
is at core an acknowledgement of ownership.
To live a beautiful life is to suggest that you are
capable of owning such a wild thing,
that bucks itself in your grasp
as it flips over your head into the crystal water.

“Rage On, Whirl On”

And to suggest that you already live
a beautiful life
that does not elude
your grasp at the moment, if happiness
does not swish its vibrant tail away from
your clutch
know that it soon will
and lying bereft, you will know winter
the stark trees, the chill of bones
with no leaves or fat to feed them.

Then you will know my sorrow,
and you will also know my life through this
lucid lens.
But rage on, whirl on
even in the face of your despair
even in the face of the face in the mirror,
with frowns and remnants of disappointment.



Rage on, whirl on.
For I do not wish for you
the warmest sheets, not the fullest belly
nor the least resistant path to tread,
neither the beautiful life that you have sought for yourself
in the eleventh hour, in the hardest shifts, in the most
brilliant sunsets.

Rather, I hope that you rage on, whirl on
and instead of destruction being left in your wake,
I hope that you wake each day with purpose and passion,
enough to last the dregs down,
enough to fill the cups of your enemies
see red, smell blood,
blackout, let it be.
Rage on, whirl on.

I pray to your God that you
only set sails that have no wind in them. I wish
on a thousand birthday candles that you forget to plan
just once in your life, and your only stipulation, your only
deal breaker for yourself and your life is that you must keep
on breathing.
That you must keep chasing the horizon,
you must keep wandering with the river,
you must keep time with the wind,
and you must keep company with the trees.
Rage on

whirl on.



Emyliane Christodoulou is a young and dedicated artist, studying at Arcadia University near Philadelphia. She spends much of her time working on projects to help those around her in the community. Well travelled, she has spent a lot of time fostering friendships with people all over the world.



Bailey Gunn has been writing since she could pick up a pen, and not drool on the paper. This is her debut work, and she hopes to continue to publish her poems. She cannot thank her family, friends, and boyfriend enough for their unyielding support and love.