

*MORTAL GHOSTS*

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FOR REVIEW ONLY

I.

## Gallowbird

Mid-fall. One year when I was young, I made a scythe  
from wood. Even then, I was convinced I could make my death,  
could shape matter into a form like gallows.

Late evening, I placed a pumpkin  
in wet grass. I was small & did not understand adults  
when they told me, *you're young & don't think about mortality.*

I thought about mortality daily. How love has a lifespan  
shorter than lovers. I saw a hummingbird  
slice into a wasp drinking nectar on our porch.  
The wasp, like rage, hung in air,  
as if caught by a rope  
between gravity and grief.

I swung the scythe, thought  
of the hummingbird hooking halfway  
into body. The scythe broke at its neck,  
pumpkin left, for nothing, in grass. A blanket  
of nightdew cleaved to wound-shaped memory.

\*

My mother, my father,  
they leave a door the way two people leave each other.

A house breathes  
an exhale, an inhale.  
Lungs stutter.  
This is a dying, not a death.

\*

It's raining when I find my father in the woods, rope on a tree.  
Later I tuck him into bed & sit butterfly style by his feet.

Living after someone leaves feels like winter air  
blowing through leafless branches. I think about the woods,  
about the way it must feel to drop sharply  
into darkness. What happens

to matter without form. The form of my father curled  
in bed. Or my mother sleeping upright in her car

after she had not heard *I love you* for three years.  
Or the form of my father's wedding ring cut  
through the middle, on my finger. It remembers  
the shape of the tree cut into a shudder  
the last time our door shut.

\*

In my room, I tell  
my partner I conceive of god  
as a mechanical hummingbird.

She replied with a need  
to destroy body, so spirit  
would live. My hummingbird,  
now a gallowbird, a wooden  
box filled with razors.

\*

How many birds land on branch  
before the tree dies? How many birds die?

Driving across Loch Raven Bridge,  
I cut eleven wings into my wrist.

A mentor tells me, *people who commit suicide  
should wander off in the woods, like an animal.*

\*

Dying is a suspension  
of life, like light suspended  
at the edge of a shadow.

I like trees best at night, when I know  
them with my hands. They are skin.  
Sometimes my hand will slide from one tree to another.  
The space between letters, between dying  
& the dead. The space between me & my parents.  
It feels like weight hanging from a tree.

\*

When I was young, I passed time shooting an arrow  
into sky, then sidestepping as it fell into ground.  
I did this to see the moment my arrow stopped falling up, hung



a second, by its head, flipped, then fell. The wind  
of its feathers near my face,  
a hummingbird flitting across flower petals.

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Leviticus 5:17

I broke three axes cutting felled trees  
by hand. No gloves. I was pathetic. Entirely  
convinced I could cut my way out  
of Hell. It is not that the force  
of my swinging was weak.  
It was the earnest quietness  
with which I believed I was damned  
for what those men  
did to me when I was a child.  
Again. And again.  
I remember the final swing; no, not  
the swing, the aftermath: the splintered  
haft made halfweight, its head buried  
in the trunk. I didn't hear the break.  
But—I felt. Sanguine-stained wood,  
sharp in contrast to grey rain.  
I stood still, wanting,  
like the fool I was, more of my body  
to repent.

In Response to Wittgenstein's Proposition Seven

I speak with the silences of place  
to understand my own pain—  
gone blank as the snowless shadow  
sheltered from a field of snow by willow.  
Silences are not graves of mind. Memories  
return between words I write  
on blank pages. The pressure, I  
can hardly bare it, hardly utter  
to myself the story I know.

Mere earth is more the tree than the tree.  
This is not about the fragility of language.

I have tried, and tried again.  
The blankness on the other side  
of the equation *past* = says  
my history has buried me.

*Snowcrie* is a word without body because  
the word's body cannot define it. A silence  
I can speak with.

\*

Snow. Partially frozen vapor  
falling from the sky. A choroid coat  
worn over familiar surfaces.  
Bedroom windows  
opening to wintered rooftop shingles  
scraped by small talons of songbirds  
where they hop around seeds  
I leave them.

The falling of my fingers  
to the snowscape of a page.

Mans' warmth on my face  
and in my mouth,  
small as it was. Tongue, a landscape  
terrified. Snow leaves nothing else  
visible or alive. Is the veil I cannot hold  
between the willow and myself.

Crie. To create. Tears, falling  
like snow onto skin.

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River  
*After Gustave Doré's Lucifer, Paradise Lost, (IX. 74, 75)*

I want to be made. Glass skin.  
The first death, a melting, a staining.  
Water breathed like air.

The feeling, like so many, I remember  
and fail to describe. Children fall from the body  
when they learn of death.

It felt good. Sunstrike refracting. Angles  
on the pool's surface—angels in cathedral glass,  
angels in stone, weathered and lichened.

Light shattered my eyes like bone.  
A year later, my body drowned. Pneumonia.  
Six, the last time I remember being a child.

\*

Body betrays  
what we want. The intangible  
sensation of mattering.

Look close. The veins in your wrist  
are obscurities, shades. Light—  
the difference between glass and skin.

\*

I watch the congregation enter  
like a river. I sink  
into the cold of god.

If he could read the color of words  
passing through skin, would he still tell  
the child in his hands he is wicked? Human.

Crown glass is made by pressing air into liquid quartz.  
Water bent by baptism.  
The priest gave me a disc of crown glass,

and, with it, all the world warped.  
Six years old, the last time  
I cupped my heart in my hands.

Lucifer

Eyes closed. Bone-china teacup in hand  
filled with coffee, black, sugarless. She flits  
fingers through steam  
drawn into air. Suspension, like a child  
falling from birch toward  
earth flaked by ice.

Without wings, coffee steam flies  
through her fingers. Without wings, she hates  
herself—as taught. Angels fly,  
even when falling out of stories. Warmth  
is unbearable when love is the place  
she can no longer begin.

She lifts cup to lips, slowly, like her eyelids open  
fearful the goodness she sees will burn.

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Transpositions in Black and White  
*After Francisco Goya's "What a Tailor Can Do!" Capricho 52, 1799*

*Kimbell Art Museum, January 4th, 2019*

You are draped in monkshood.  
Face wooden, as the child  
trembling before you reddens.

You claim priesthood  
poisons you, repressed wood  
splintered with green leaves.

You were a sapling once.  
Explain your violence.  
You are a tree wrapped in sheet  
like lips around  
a child leaving body.

You are wolf's  
bane dressed like *lupus Dei*.  
Sheep bleating prayers  
before the hanged prophet.  
Clasped hands forgetting  
what you did under sheet.

*Maryland, Fragmented Locations, 2000-2016*

I often ask if you see  
a child when you look at me,  
if you still see a child  
the next day, days, years.

I ask if you see the sweat  
that binds me when I wake.

Most nights I am alone.

What you see does not matter.  
If I look in a mirror, I still see a child.  
An aged, weary child. Afraid of doors  
I can't lock.

*Etchings, 2006*

The first image I burned into wood  
was an owl perched on a severed tree stump.

The burning began after laying a sheet of graphite  
over a wooden panel—edged

by bark—and etching the image onto its surface.  
The process of burning is mordant,

like acid burning into metal,  
like Goya dipping the metal

image of a monk into a pool of acid.

*Conversations, Virginia Beach, July 4th, 2018*

We speak early into dawn  
but your words fall through.

The intensity of waves  
on this beach distract me.

I do not hear the cold depths  
of your apologies.

*Kimbell Art Museum, January 4th, 2019*

In some versions of Goya's etching,  
a man on an owl is behind you,  
flying, naked and taloned.

You may be wood  
but I have seen owl claws  
bore into the bone  
of a severed stump.

I have remade that owl  
as seraphim  
soaring on serif-winged letters.

Those talons will not touch you.  
They are mine, an art made closure, like circle,  
like memory moving, skin to page.



Three Years After the Knives  
*After M.C. Escher's Lithograph: "Ascending and Descending"*

Grey, hooded ghosts, how are you different?  
Walking ahead & behind & past

other dolor-stained faces. In an image  
not yours. Moving across flatness

without taking a step. This is love.  
I still speak to her as one speaks to god.

Tongue distant & tired.  
Tongue stolen & still.

To find god I needed to die, she said.  
Grey ghosts, the white scars

on my arm. They are god. Walking up & down  
& nowhere. They are morning without speech.

They are days spent blind. Hands crying along surfaces.  
I imagine you were made unseeing

in a meadow of celandine. Yellow poison  
greyed into savior, for you, like her.

The absurdity, you ate the meadow.  
Normal, in the mouth of god. Every petal of celandine.

I stare & hope a ghost tips over edge.  
Into windowglass, forgiveness, self.

Black-Capped Chickadees in Autumn

The sky is blue. Something I know  
but do not see. Black-capped  
Chickadees brush wing

to branch. Passerine, bobbing  
between perches, safety. Like them,  
I discern and am disappointed.

My love for you, haunted  
by hands not yours. I want to tell you  
I have lost the present. My heart,

a pomegranate with rotted seeds.  
I am nowhere near you, though I am  
closer to you than me. Chickadees

chirp their way to meaning  
in a pattern of four notes. I kiss  
your cheek, chirr, rest

my head on your shoulder. Ideas  
no longer help. The cruel trick  
of numbers is a blank face

photographed. I cannot seem  
to prove the sky  
is blue. A feeling wells color,

then overcast, a chickadee falling  
into birdsong and bramble. It will not live.  
I don't know how to tell you. I am the bird.

On Birds & Bodies & Cages

Part of the cage is wind.  
Part of the cage is unseen.

The body you see  
is not mine &  
it is flying through  
itself.

Emptiness, in a cage  
birds fly through.

They must,  
knowing no stillness.

Silence, then what.  
One voice speaks me, & not

the voice of vision.  
I am lost

to a looking glass  
that doesn't reflect

the sea within  
the lake.

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## Ponds

I hold my hand over a pond,  
until its silhouette drowns.

Pupils, too, are ponds. An empty greatcoat  
hangs from a tree and asks to be more.

Wind blowing through cloth,  
a librarian archiving ghosts.

What can I say  
to give them breath?

My vision fails. Trying towards joy  
begins as a swimming. Out of seeing,

an awareness of water's resistance.  
I speak to water

with more gentleness than I can myself.  
Revision is heartless love.

We do not love the emptiness  
of the coat, we love the idea of its fullness.

Bones rise to the surface. So many. I do not know me.  
I know I am afraid. I know the details

of my palm, the cast of my silhouette.  
Exhaustion is a pond.

## Where I See You

1.

I am soulish scattergram of self in horizon.  
You cannot understand  
my sad way  
of talking to all that is whole until  
you have let yourself slip

out of the will to choose like a broken stallion.  
Horizon is body. Burned into redblack,  
over ocean. At dawn.

I see and am not. O, horizon, how  
are you there, palpable, almost in  
my eyes, the mere illusion of a limit?

2.

Call me by the name of my eyes. Horizon  
curved like fear. Stillness

bent into words. I see abuse follow  
miragelike, atmospheric. I want

to refract, relive  
elsewhere. An edge approached.

3.

Horizon, I am as afraid  
of reaching myself  
as you.

Night, a dark disc of onyx on eyes.  
Lines end. You roll away.

Gallowbird II

Like a sedge wren wrought wrenles—  
becoming meadow—I nest childhood.  
Wings in the wind.

I erased hands, the unwilling body,  
erased the ribcage  
needled by a knife, erased dead friends, split  
rings, suicides and mockingbirds, erased

erased erased—until nothing  
but a library for a heart.

Every voice a meadow. I don't want to say  
I never learned  
childness. I never did. Among meadows,  
no longer safe, sedge wrens migrate

year to year, like ink.  
I don't want to say  
I read as a way of dying.

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Caldera

*After J. M. W. Turner's "Vesuvius in Eruption."*

I'm by the fireplace, burning tree limbs I cut:  
a cast of bodies, like shed snakeskin, crackling.  
I am violet flame, and want no ruins. Wood to ash.  
Wood to ash. Ash to. I cup specks of self  
in hand. Blow them to wind like spores  
I don't want to seed. Isn't this what you wanted  
when you took me away from my body?  
Pompei skin. Violet flame refusing the weight  
of ruins. A body of words, igneous dust  
brushed against brute canvas.

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ii.



When I see them, and I will,  
in snowdrifts, ghosts,  
denizens of dust,  
I become frightened  
to move.  
Burning a body  
is how a soul  
becomes smoke.  
The wind forgets  
everything.  
We try.  
At times, I know the air  
has more  
than those who breathe.

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Even in Darkness

*For Inoshin, a locomotive engineer who was taken to the Soviet labor camps.*

In a few words, the jurists said more than the crows  
above your child's body. The hush  
of your future's future. Simple gesture  
of rifle stock. Small coffin shatter.  
Handcuffs round the quiet of a rageless city.

Decades later, names slip  
across the thin body-count bar—  
barely news anymore. I drink coffee,  
read Arendt, watch tent caterpillars  
weave invasion into homeland.

Above, a sparrow struggles against wind.  
This movement away  
is a part of me. I refuse the name  
*human* as if a sparrow  
moving nowhere. Lately, my art feels helpless.

Letters, dandelion spores  
drifting over scorched grassland.  
How many times can I speak  
to the idea of death? A blindfold  
around the missing angel body

belonging to Kiefer's *Book with Wings*.  
In my refusal, the refusal  
of responsibility. I cannot fly.  
Spores sink into blades burned black.  
I am human. I do not know how to forgive

what others, what I, have done.  
Tell me, Inoshin, somewhere in the gulag,  
you found beauty in a fading leaf  
parachuting into winter. Tell me.

Triptych  
*After Otto Dix's "The War"*

None of this stopped the wildflowers.  
The words, the paint. Movement changed.  
We were no longer willing to be caught  
in dining room mirrors. Skeletons over skin.  
The dead touched us in each hand we held.

\*

Unable to judge name from meaning,  
we called ourselves alive.  
Moved our bodies into paintbrushes—  
stained canvas with shapes against ourselves.  
We stopped by wildflowers. Wept, faces placid.

\*

Museums seemed a good place  
to collect our fear—what we looked like  
when fragments failed. Each of us,  
viscera. We lay among wildflowers. Felt meaningless.

## Redress

If this field of red osier  
mirrors the dead,  
do not flicker.

We group the dead  
into their word, their grave,  
their name. Easy

when tongues are not  
alive enough to speak themselves apart.  
The word *mirror* so like *murmur*.

The quietude  
is tension. Plant it. A funeral  
in your longing to see  
some life, some struggle.

Time has no sound.  
You make one for it,  
incapable as you are  
of speaking its pain,  
your pain. Vestiges,  
a violence history inflicts.

The unmarked  
graves growing here  
were cut by living hands.

Magenta  
*After the Battle of Magenta, Italy 1859*

1.

Some names begin in the veins of the dead.  
Under boots of modest war gods  
& rifling voices  
& unheard waves of corvid wings.  
Dye makers stood at the periphery of death  
and said, *here is the work of our lives.*  
They discovered a dye  
the color of ichor and earth on a battlefield,  
and named it magenta.

Dredged earth, like dredged soul—  
scar on scar. The whine of a guillotine blade  
falls through language. Fabric  
stamped by soil and gore  
is not itself—  
it is a painting of a valorous horse  
on a pile of bodies, sunshine  
bursting behind its figure.

2.

Winters come as springs. An elegy.  
I am a body of snow.

Fields are quiet  
when they speak of renaming.

What is lost? Winter tries to write  
itself out of winter, & evergreens grow  
needled fingers.

3.

From field, grass, or snow  
from sky, light bodies of light,  
from chrysalis, butterfly  
or nothing, from memory, memory,  
from moments of death, beauty  
and the doubt of beauty;  
from magenta blindfolds, words,

eyes, vision, the need for awe as autumn falls through symbol.

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III.

### Gallowbird III

A final bird before I turn from flight,  
from brokenness, the harsh comfort of self  
undone.

Staccato notes, a patter. Wings  
detached, but not. I watch the same image  
over a cup of coffee on my roof—  
somewhere, through steam, a mockingbird opens  
its wings and flits across the yard to me.  
These are the gentle visions.

Stigmata  
have been my need since childhood—signs that god  
is close to me. At eight, I tried to pierce  
my palms with garden stakes, with god and love.

Dear mockingbird, stop collecting psalms  
and voices. Effigies cannot be you.  
Who, under white-wing-flash, will be left?  
A shadow? Silence? No. A fledgling, bright,  
solus, and weak.

The bird leaves, and I am  
left again to become enough to hear  
myself in quiet notes among the clear,  
the ready, words and worlds inside of me  
that shape the breath that mists this morning air.



Notes Towards a Theory of Names

Halation. A supernova  
in camera aperture, name  
overwriting you and me.

The photo, a calligram  
of stick-figure lovers and streetlamps.  
They called us *gay demons*. We laughed.

Our photo is in my window,  
facing out. Streetlamps behind us cleave halos  
to our bodies, through our bodies.

Crystalized water on your eyelashes,  
a kiss in winter. We laughed,  
but those names did something to us.

You tattooed Raphael on your forearm,  
over scars. Became angelic. Left.  
I watched your funeral from the church's parking lot.

Then drove home, holding your name  
like a lodestone. Sinking.

Where are we under the words.  
*We were lovers*. We were  
one clear image in a kaleidoscope.

I am reaching my fingers  
towards a name I cannot touch.

A Skeleton Flower in the Rain  
*After Raffaella Monti's Marble Statues*

1.

Skeleton flowers in the garden cup raindrops  
in their pellucid palms. I held  
opacity, once, like a curse  
called skin & body. Until the rain.  
Its little fists,  
men's fists,  
cities of words, fists inherited  
in the spindrift  
from waves of culture breaking  
on dying voices, struck my skin.  
I collapsed into rain  
& little oceans pooling  
on pavement. Men here do not cry.  
Do not know a body  
from a sieve for complexity.  
Skeleton flowers,  
transparent, elude simple eyes  
in a way I cannot. If they had bones,  
would those bones bend  
at the wrist? Would the rest of the body  
crumple after? Struckthrough  
like an unwanted word,  
like a reminder of the linearity  
of names, the linearity of bodies.

2.

Years later  
& unafraid, I press  
my finger to the dent  
in my jaw, the dent in culture.  
At the museum, I trace abstractions  
in the behavior of brushes  
and scalpels. Sculptures  
of societies, and spaces  
between exhibits for the transparent,  
the silent, the dead bodies  
that did not live in the anatomy of bias  
veining through the acceptable. A game  
of language—each daylily  
is the idea of a daylily,

is ideal dayliliness. Until the name fails  
the body that bears it. When I see them,  
I call them men, but they look like a story  
with skin. I do not know  
how Raffaele Monti did it: transformed  
marble into veil, made vision  
carve a new trick—  
*tenderness* falling from the eyes of men.  
As they walk from the exhibit, something leaves  
silently enough it seems like shame,  
a shuffle of feet murmuring  
towards the nudes. Later, at the bar  
they push each other  
into alcohol & women,  
and crush their own softness into small, stolen spaces.

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If Tongues Unfurled Slowly Enough to Think

1.

would you call yourself  
would you call me,

a time-lapse photo  
of pages falling  
through themselves, or

a phenotype fractal  
cycling through codes:  
girl, boy, child; the language never fails

to shape fog on a window  
into its place—pareidolia,

then it cannot be unseen; or,  
touch me, the locus of me,  
in the folds

of changing cells, of eroding riverbeds  
of ideas; or don't, & speak simple bends  
& flicks of collocations  
your tongue knows

for the body & for being &  
for *the way life is, has always been;*

or,

would you let go of name,  
press your ear to earth, and listen to the roots of aspens  
click electric speech,

then rethink how life is, has been—unheard?

2.

what would I call you  
what would I call me?

Webs without spiders.  
Some threaded with

more weaves  
& eccentricities,  
less stability.  
Some kite into sky  
on electric current sparking  
between leaf  
and atmosphere. Some  
coily amble  
around the concept of a center, laughing  
the laugh of silenced silk.  
Some disavow opacity,  
until dew, mist, a breath of evaporating tears  
paint their bodies  
against the need for transparency; and why  
do I reframe, and reframe always,  
as another form of body? Why,

when I know not to, do I call you by the name of a shape,  
by the phonemes cast as interpreters  
in an unseen theater  
of categories? *Commedia Dell'Arte* of dictionaries.  
The mask of man, of clown,  
of woman,  
of harlequin, of hunger for  
identity. And when the mask is less opaque,  
what to say? How do the veins of a heart  
become lines on hands?

## Helices

### *Mullion*

What can we say of windows?  
A glass vase on a glass table, filled  
by glass flowers. Phthalo blue  
dust in water. Can you stand in fall  
with glass leaves reflecting  
you in segments? Where are you  
in a field so easily fractured?  
Heart, a mullion. Soul, transom.  
Every column, a collapse.  
Watching sunset, you grip lines  
across a window you cannot see through,  
rest your forehead to a pane.

The sunset is easier when you slip through fire.  
Every fire but the blue in your eyes.

### *Phlox*

Every fire but the blue in your eyes  
burns through peat and glass  
and your palm-shaped print on a windowpane.  
I died when I saw myself. *Phlox*  
like Latin naming unknowns. You  
are a thread, a phantom in a dress.  
Unknown flame-colored flower, give me  
your soul and walk into a room of windows.  
We will never leave. Your body  
a body someone will name.  
Mirrors for eyes, petals like iris.  
If its glass were water, you would want  
  
it to reflect a depth clearer than skin.  
Body burns like phthalo blue in water.

### *Undress*

Body burns into water but does not enter.  
Can you see yourself as two-tone dahlia in fall?  
Nakedness has nothing to do with body.  
When I see myself, I want to see through  
the stem, the vein, the vase. The heart's

blue does not exist but in eyes. Try to stand  
in the color of sky. Can the body  
be a translucent dress? You misread me.  
This is loneliness.  
I am inside what I say.  
Fingers, as petals, touch  
a reflection in water—

ripples blur body into other shapes.  
Crows sing when I leave my door.

### *Sinfonia*

Crows sing. I leave to the scream  
of my screen door opening, closing.  
Cayotes need to eat. I should not have left  
before dawn. There are sounds  
you will not name, I tell myself. How words  
become sight and sight, words, is how I become  
transparent, small. Between the window  
and the world, distance. I am afraid  
I cannot see into me. Like teeth, letters  
hunger for what has nothing  
to do with skin, for what is nameless,  
what is lost between my breaths.

Between sign and sign  
there is a quiet voice I do not hear.

### *Whisper*

A quiet voice I do not hear: snow  
falling onto glass. Lace  
over a soul, phthalo blue submerged  
into symbol, symbol into winter.  
If I talked to you as quietly as I talk  
to me, would I see you less? I do.  
Quiet, the decision I make  
in a mirror. If I held myself  
before the glass, before you,  
without body,  
would the mirror empty?  
Would the distance fade?

The sunset is easier when I leave  
the flame of my eyes. I cannot leave.

## A Small Glossary of Myself

- Names: No, eyes are not open  
windows; eyes are mirrors, wanting.
- Why should I see myself in calyces, in petals?  
I am not as gentle  
    though, I want to press my body into wind  
    to press my body into a sound, a form  
    of blossoms closing, opening.
- I am thinking of the pulse  
of plants. Orchids. Oleander.
- Charcoal dust I have spun  
off my tongue.
- Nothing* is so much to ask for, to live  
uncontained, unlearned, unknown.
- I want no name.  
Only a sound like a limpid utterance,  
    like a tremolo hum, wavering  
    through greenhouse glass,  
    like nothing I know how to say,  
    something I know everything  
    of.
- Perception: A botanist irons blooms to pages.  
Writes names in Latin and English. Understands  
none of this is different
- from the insistence a man  
    needs to live as a man.
- Orchis.*
- He traces the word, the flowerhead,  
    looks at his naked body in a mirror, sees  
    no resemblance, despite the name. *Orchis.*  
    The glass whispers, until he crosses  
    a line through the word.
- Memory: The red dye of *Nerium oleander* stains  
a lace dress, a trace of streamside  
petals. Men say, *poison is so sensual*, before pressing



more blossoms, more bodies,  
under mortars, pestles. A young boy

paints his nails, hides his hands,  
studies flowers in gardens, slips  
into a dress.

Expectation: Men enter. I lower my voice an octave.

Body: They feel they know  
enough to say: *No, no.*  
*You are confused.* In time, it feels true—  
as true as a genome: oleander, orchid, skin—

I understand their need  
to tie ideas into gossamer, dewed,  
stable, safe. Their worlds are dying  
with dissent, the bodies  
of legacies, atrophied. Chalk dust  
on sidewalks.

Rain passes through. Me,  
I am home in the crossfade  
of body into body, fingertip  
into bloom, dye  
into stain and restrain.  
The press of heartbeat to paper.

Prediction: It was a ghost orchid before  
it was an inkblot  
before  
it was a paper psychologist  
before  
it was a masquerade  
voice  
before  
it was a lace dress  
before  
it was a wilted petal on my lips  
before  
it was a bridge no one crosses  
although each thought  
they did  
before  
it was a hush  
an inkblot

a flake of oleander  
before  
a ghost orchid  
kissing a ghost.

Attention: I watch raindrops  
split  
against umbrellas.  
I feel  
like a man. If I focus.

Umbrellas,  
always red  
and bundled like a phalanx—  
red to signal danger  
to slice through the grey of space  
to tincture the rain as it falls

like petals of oleander.  
I remember holding as a child.

Disunity: Wind in a box,  
you know why I cannot be named.

Draw the shape of thought.  
You know why I cannot.

Tell me everything you are—  
every idea you know and don't,  
every fear you have of being misunderstood,  
every shade of chalk you dusted  
on your skin as a child to look like a butterfly;  
what is it like to kiss a flower—  
with a glance of your eyes.