

**The Warmth of Many Ovens
: A Collection of Free Form Poetry**

Senior Creative Writing Project

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For a Degree Bachelor of Arts with
A Major in Creative Writing at
The University of North Carolina at Asheville
Fall 2009

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Adultery

Like your hands on my hips, her lips
leave an impression larger than they should
as my cat howls and your light bulb flickers
needing to be changed.

Grappling she's inside me
above me around me, now a part of the story
that started before she's and he's
and fists and fucks when
my eyes saw but I was not yet
a character. On our couch I grasp her thighs
and sides and throat the way I can never reach yours
and in this rarity I am quiet.

Strike

The purple juices dripping
suggest flesh
instead of plum pulp.
The hide around the wound
is jagged, torn quickly.
All skin is wet
from entrails and your lips.
The meat of it captures
the sun from the fruit's season,
expels flavor onto the pillaging tongue.

Coffee Break

The warmth of it soothes where the ice has carved into my fingers.
The harsh winter falters in the presence of this mug,
receiving the kettle's boiled blood.

More than one sense takes in the life of this drink,
billowing up and beyond the brim.

Inspiration

Beaks dart at my scalp
Sharp enough to dig
Past grammatical concern
And predefined structure

I cannot receive all
Of the glittering wings
Attacking around me

Vying for attention
They fight
Tearing what connection
They have to each other
And myself

I catch what I can
A net of broken parts
And used elders

The cruel and beautiful
Soar out of range

The Anger In

your eyes in that moment
Shook me to a statue
The green turned
From spring to poison
In an instant
Surrounded by the flame of your hair

First Month

The breath of my child wakes me
Calls for instinct
Her curling fingers pull my hair
Her presence alters my position
My definition
I lack patience
Her skin does not attract my hands
Her eyes do not draw me

I watch her
Awaiting some spark

My Daughter's Response

her claws dig scalp

rigid like the rest

before the hitting begins
cuts from nails, bruises from fists
that I will deal with later

the trigger
spilled bowl of cherries
in the floor before her knees

I right it and embrace with words
the girl I know better than to touch

strength doubles in fear
hers is overwhelming

words take hold slowly
eyes meet mine
and the claws
becomes fingers again

Beds

It has been years
Since your arms woke us
Flailing in post-dream terror
The tears on your pillow always convinced us
To let you sleep in the middle

You have outgrown my comfort
All I know of you are muffled sobs
As I sit remembering the bodies
Of the height markers
Notched in your doorframe

Phantom Musician

She'll only sleep in the stomach of a baby grand
after crawling carefully over the keys,
allowing two notes to pierce
the silence of her parents' museum home.

The piano forgives the intrusion,
and the brocade comforter from her toddler bed
keeps the strings from biting her flesh
without deleting their comforting pressure,
the ropes of a hammock.

The warmth from the vent below collects here,
gathering beads of sweat between her skin
and the thickness of blanket and nightgown.
The lid above her reflects the old world:
a white fireplace, decorative pillows.

Oils line the window
but do not erase the heavy cleaners'
harsh scent, lingering like the first notes
of a good perfume. The vent's whisper stops,
making way for the cricket's chorus,
the sacrifice of an immaculate garden.

In the morning the Spanish maid
whose name remains unimportant
will whisper her awake
and walk her up the stairs
a few hours before her mother asks
how the piano can be out of tune again
when no one ever uses it.

Reading

your socks smooth over the seat lid
as you sit on the back of the toilet
a habit I think you picked up hiding
from teachers and your sisters
who tried to make you their doll

Goodnight Kiss

Your lips warm
and dry could use
a coat of chap stick.
Maybe they will pick it up
from mine as they smack
my moistness, almost still.

The dinner was fine,
and the conversation,
which dipped beyond
casualties and compliments,
interested me,

but my heart did not leap
when you smiled,
and my body did not hold in breath
when you leaned towards me
in the front seat of your parked car.

I remember the tune
I harmonized to
as the buttons unhooked
and you slid across my skin.
I will sing it in the shower when you've gone.

The Eye

a thought escapes my lips
as my flesh bumps in response to yours
“my grandmother called it chicken skin”
lust should not relate to poultry

but my skin is chicken
afraid of yours, of pleasure
that I am not supposed to know

movements fumble
breath quickens
I wait for your exit
but your arms continue

there is no rebellion in my lips
or salvation in your hands

First Marriage

It was finding a way to live
two lives with one car
in a sidewalkless town

Christmas pictures for families
parties for friends
and porn for us

my red dress
never leaving the hanger
above my useless heels

compromised meals
your entrée my dessert
our wine

your poker nights
midnight delays
and morning flowers

mugs of coffee and milk
sometimes spiked
for movie night

silent fights
useless talk
mute winter walks

It was you and me.
It was fun
and it hurt.

An Evening in Bed

The soft of your stomach rises
as you breathe, tilting the balance of
my traveling hands. Students studying abroad,
they part to experience
the simultaneous phenomenon
of your face and chest. The hair,
which trails when wet, is brush,
leading to the hill of your shoulder.

Slow to climb, my fingers relish
every step, marveling
at the definition of this solid landscape,
exploring the ridge of your bicep. As you rotate,
I, not being attached to your axis, travel
round to the plains of your shoulders, full of freckles
all seeking my immediate attention. They receive
it in no particular order as I scurry
over the muscle field to reach soft skin once more.

The small of your back arrests my southern trek
and contented weariness asks my twin travelers
to fall to the space of our mattress,
where they can gaze on your full beauty.

Solace

my hands must practice the act of prayer
fingers remember the rosary's continuity
knees should know the floor
beside my bed only for communication
only with god
I am told my soul hangs in wait
of my recitation of holy words
I practice their intricacies
but cannot forget your supple hands
and my lips stumble at the thought of that one wild lock of hair
curling above the bud of your cheek, lifted in a smile

the Sister catches my eye
I wring the rosary
and pray

Polite Conversation

Were I to whisper
the 'secret' words
no one wants to hear,
everyone would fall silent to listen.

We feed on this
in the shadows of dinner parties
and the shade of luncheons, gathered
around the town church
where good women serve up
fresh biscuits
with a side of small talk.

First-serving discussions
are for family and illness,
weather and religion,
but desserts are rich with layered chatter.

Infidelities and debt serve
as both spiritual warnings
and local entertainment.

There is no privacy
among casseroles and salad
or the thick accents
of hospitable southern women.

Like Your Scent

Inkstained fingers

On my throat leave smudges

That I know I will have trouble washing off

Lights

Swirl in my mind like the wine in my ears
and the music in my stomach, my stomach
waiting to be filled with payment
for company, to swell slightly before asking
the knife to remove another mistake. Eyeless, hairless,
motherless; these things complicate my day
and my heart. Deformed, I think my heart must be
in my stomach, and the doctor is seeing how much
he can take away with each visit.

Persistent Illusion *

There is no way to fall from earth's sphere.
Say then that I have been abandoned,
in the air above my daughter's trampoline,
to the burnt rusts of the autumn sky
where my red hair isn't outlandish
and I forget I'm wearing a uniform.

I could pull myself back
as if a track led from the sky to the ground
to my kitchen, but I don't,
and when my daughter comes home,
I file her schedules with mine
and pull her out.

The part of her that is adult wins,
and the mother, alone, imagines.

*The title is based on a quote from Albert Einstein: "Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one."

Camouflage

when the nightmares come
I dig into your chest
so deeply
that your psyche becomes mine
and the fears of my youth
cannot reach me

Broke

I didn't know we were poor
As a kid when the power cut off for a few days
And we got to have dinner by candle light
When my cousins and I shared clothes
Exchanging things every two weeks or so
I didn't know we were running low
When mom gave up the car
And school lunches became free
Now I hope my daughter sees
An Eco-friendly, string-pulling,
Candle-loving me

Kitchen Heat

The lover of me bakes bread,
needs the warmth of many ovens,
of many tongues praise.
My hands knead and churn and burn
inches from the fire that completes my masterpiece.
I drizzle the glaze and send the pleading morsels
to the furnace of your lips
which leaks conditional rewards
for my sweets and labor.

Removing the Wedding Dress

Ready to please, I let him watch.
The layers of slip and tulle and skirt
are foreplay, the shoes first base.
Removing them, my toes breath,
and my heels moan.

I slide my fingers under the garter belt,
feeling the indentions left by their weight,
and my skin tingles as each strap is unhooked.
My hands, soft from weeks of lotion,
preparing for ring pictures,
run down the waxed smooth of each leg,
and when the nylon is thrown aside,
my feet grind into the carpet.

The lacing of my corset is detailed.
I must be attentive.
Each pull brings release closer,
and when my ribs are unbound,
I gasp to fully fill my lungs.

Dry Daughter

I pass the flowers on tombstones
of mothers and lovers and children
flores por los muertos
but not for you

I pour gin over your grave
with a moderation you never grasped,
an offering like your tears at my wedding
or your steady hand at Mom's funeral
before liquor induced insults

my mourning for you has been silent
I replace my tears with this bottle
The only thing I know you'll want

Conviction of the Dead

Dance as I danced and learn of me
For the hands at my hem
And the lips on my skin
Speak my legacy as much
As the child of my womb

I inhaled dance halls
Where the scent of sweat managed
To overpower booze and perfume
I burnished skin to a rose glaze
While the mattress took a breath
Under the arch of my back

Tongues were for motion
And the rub of calloused fingers
Courted pleasure exhausted breathing
While uninhibited vocal appreciation
Served as lullaby

Flesh was fire which fed
My taste for liquid salt

Transition

I automatically loved the living room's bay window,
the kitchen's shelved pantry, the evening light
on the front steps, and the working fireplace.
Other things took time.

I learned to brush my teeth while waiting
for the shower water to warm and to keep
the door open while the dryer spewed
hot air. The living room fan worked,
but the high setting created a Strobe,
and the kitchen windows' cross breeze pulled
any hint of smoke directly towards the detector.

The slight step from the hallway to the bedroom
while visible, never failed to catch the toe
of the untrained visitor. Heavy frames called
for the accent of smaller décor. No stud
was perfectly even in the wall.

Photos made it look like home,
but squeaky closet doors made it familiar,
and paint-locked windows became comfort.
I walk out with the last box,
preparing to learn again.

Infatuation

I knew
whenever I was close to her
that if I ripped it out
I would have her charm

I wanted to capture
the flick of her cigarette
the purple of her punk cut hair
the smirk

the ring in her lip
held every detail
I wanted to know it
to hold it
to take it
into every niche of myself

I imagine the chipped
black of her nails
remember the paint stained scarf

my own piercing
mirrors location
emulates style
fails to achieve allure

Color Memory

History lies in the paint on your jeans
Under my fingers the stain remembers
Painting our home in summer
Replacing doors and shutters
To close up our liminal space

We painted beyond fixtures
And walls to each other

You started it
A red line soaking my t-shirt and skin
Your jeans took the bulk of my aim
As we splattered
Between kisses and attacks
Leaving a trail to the bedroom

A Beauty Study

the memory of you is pressed
between my book's chapters
the pretty details of our petals lie flat
there is no part of the leaf that we do not know
looking back

most of the beauty is content
in its newly fixed form
but anytime they are given the least bit of room
the ovaries try to regain their original shape
placing themselves in the present

tweezers move the flower
to show a new angle
I must be careful not to lose too much

My Lens Points to You

you carried your father's camera
firmly attached appendage
until night, I slipped the strap
from your shoulders
placed it near your head

it was always in tow by breakfast

the first few weeks you held it backwards
lens at your eyes
before the man on television

you watched him holding his camera
looked at your own, your hands
and changed

your obsession started mine
I never got a picture of your backwards photography
and you never did it again