

# **A Beautiful Haunting: *Poems Between Light & Dream***

Senior Paper

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## The Fall in Eden

I found Eden after treading water  
in the middle of a stream,  
alone, far from home.

I looked at the arching willows that frame the river, I almost  
swam to land, I almost  
didn't cross the rapids,  
massive rapids, yet they grooved in the tune of a lazy river.

Someone painted the water cerulean blue  
with white foam trapped in slow circles  
after that first fall, like soda fizz or mouthwash spit out &  
stranded in the washing machine.

After the rock drop,  
Eden awaits.  
She is a vast sea of still water.  
She absorbs people who rejoice in the blue,  
their arms dance, their laughter unheard over the fall.  
All eyes ascend towards the mystic goddess  
She towers us by hundreds of feet.  
With every inhale,  
Eden releases a new stream, births a unique life:  
baptismal fount from the mouth of the river.  
Its mist melts my skin as it touches my face,  
the secret bath washes away my thoughts.

I drink the blue and it is the first sip after a night of heavy drinking,  
after that moment when you spot the top of Sam's Knob after the climb,  
after a fast dance with a new stranger:  
communion.

If I could go back to this place,  
this wet, wondrous space,  
I would do anything just to die.

the chicken

hops on the other side of the barbed wire

clutches the girl's sad stare

the girl who is watched by her mother

dressed by her mother

taught what to say by her mother

who stands thirty yards behind, in the empty field of sand

drowns in a cherry-print dress, her black eyes scrunched like a squeeze-ball.

in the afternoon heat,

the kind of heat that makes each breath a marathon

the girl's fists remain clamping the fence

with all the strength hidden in her skeletal frame.

and she will wonder why

a feathered bird will travel farther than she.

barnyard montage

a possum is smoking a cigarette  
on top of a barn in the meadow.

inside the barn, a loaded sheepdog  
releases her gut--  
a batch of newborns creep out  
their eyes still caked shut--

as the possum finishes his last drag,  
i watch the trees in the yard stir,  
they rise up  
they walk away.

Enter the Apiary

I zip up the astronaut suit,  
& I drop a cubed veil on my head.  
I am the observer  
behind a television of nets.

My partner is a teapot who twists.  
My other partner is a pair of stained yellow gloves.

We enter the boxed colony and steam from my teapot  
wakes clusters of plump insects--  
they were aching  
to dance.

I rub the rough edge of honeycomb,  
I drain the visions of nectar.

When the day is over, I gather the jars,  
amber sucrose, the pee-color concoctions.  
In the kitchen, the timer aches  
to sing as the clouds from the pumpkin loaves  
sift through the room.

I hold my honey and I store my bread.

## In the Kitchen

We have conditioned our housewives for destruction.  
In the 50's it began,  
the years when we sucked them in aprons too-tight  
made them short of breath just to show  
the peach curves of their bodies,  
We only saw them as luscious fruit  
caked in the blackest lace.

Consider the vicious clawing  
to grate aged cheddar in thin slits,  
the gut grip around the edge of your fork  
when you stab straight into the sweet potato  
over & over again.  
the crazed knife dance right into  
the heart, the bulb of the onion,  
the juice, the blood from the raw venison  
splatters all over the kitchen floor.

They are an army in training.  
Listen as they sharpen their knives,  
the sound dark & sweet,  
like a violin gone mad,  
a chocolate bar with a hidden razorblade.

I can't help but wonder,  
Where are they going with this cutlery?

home

today i showered with a sister under the sun  
& we tiptoed to the lake,  
cool sand silked the soles of our feet.  
we wore the heat on our skin  
after months of piling on layers,  
icing ourselves like a cotton cake.

now a crowd of nude brothers & sisters  
tread banks of sand & fallen pollen.  
Pops comes around the bend with a green canoe,  
he takes us to the dock in the middle of the lake.  
Pops, with his sunburnt skin of muscles and tales  
names me goddess of the lake.

all of us hold a bit of the net  
to catch fish through the hole in the dock.  
we laugh because  
this is how we are meant to be,  
i find home in shared laughter with strangers,  
not in walls that keep us away.

August 1992, Miami

Off the highway ramp to Miami,  
clusters of cars perched like baby robins in treetops  
some shimmied back and forth—ready to fly.  
Telephone poles and oak trees did the tango ‘til they dropped.  
Unwanted vomit, they spilled onto the grass and streets and  
the twin palm trees from Carol’s backyard fell in a stupor into the inground pool.  
Her favorite spot, her reading haven.  
The sun, the only light, radiated in waves,  
darkness to light to darkness.

Carol had phoned the bank earlier,  
her untouched safe deposit box the reason for her trip.  
She parks her Buick in the spot with the least ashes,  
begins towards the bank  
its scattered walls & teller’s desks now  
piles of cement.

She eyes the security guard who sits in a grey folding chair near the entrance.  
“How may I help you, ma’am?” the words exit his lips as if it’s another work day.  
She tells him her business, and starts towards the back, but triggers the guard...  
“Enter through the *front door*, ma’am!” Her feet guess at the old location,  
she gathers her savings, leaves out “the door” and  
a sharp smile crosses the guard’s face like a crescent moon.  
A crescent moon that will never wax or wane.



## signs

i read the sign on the wall,  
trace worn, beige corners  
of stained, manmade words,  
like braille, these six words  
with the paint-stained pads  
of my fingertips.

silent objects, cold copper posts  
on roadends, bite-sized amber lights  
shaped like a cigarette on an airplane,  
triplets of ovals that guide your foot on the pedal  
& yellow beckons you to make rash choices:  
cross me. smoke me.  
terrorize me.

who writes the monologues for walls?  
my walls of celery speak for themselves:  
*this house is powered by tacos.*

phantoms

that evening when I lay  
for a nap until midnight,  
I left the house lights blazing,  
all doors cracked open  
as my tabby-cat chews  
on the ends of my hair  
on my bed.

midnight comes & goes with ease,  
the cycle of my saliva waterfalls  
begins, watercolor  
on the pillowcase,  
my breath deepens with moonrise.

as the hour enters the darkest point of night  
the lights in the hall panic-- seizure:  
they dance on & off with indecision.  
there is no one else in my home  
yet someone is here.

her atoms tug my chest  
in-between dream & light,  
half-cracked eyes & a heart of speed,  
i levitate to meet the spirit  
face-to-face  
hers, the vintage frame of a Lichtenstein  
in shadows,  
a talking head  
i can't hear a word  
all i see is a mouth in motion.

*Can I borrow your mouth so I can kiss your cat like you do,  
make a ham sandwich and taste the veins,  
whisper melodies that share my miseries?*

Pt. II

i felt them again in the hummingbird room,  
above the feeders in the old mountain home,  
the room with its thick window that shows  
swaying shagbark branches winding up for a fight,  
and the high window that lets me stare  
at the waxing gibbous,  
when the clouds let us catch a glimpse of her.

spirits came in through computer screens  
in the invisible attic  
but the Lightweaver  
sent them away.

Pt. III

wafting smokering of white sage  
when i cleanse the room doorways in my home  
to let zam's phantoms dissipate  
into unseen pathways

is

reliving still moments--  
same smoke filled the same lungs  
in Allegheny woods in Pennsylvania,  
when Jesus grazed his wand of burning sage  
across my torso

down my thighs

to open myself to whispers of Love from human angels--  
or in bed with a past lover, our chests stirred upright  
from the old-lady ghost in her long prairie-dress  
that outlined her floating frame,  
she, the emitter of jostled confusion, of japan's *mah*

wafting is witchcraft,  
mesmerizing & waking  
still moments of memory through the mirror,  
it is knowing what the cat stares at  
when he sees something you can't.

spirits travel in those shadows  
i waft, since the smoke knows not to linger

## Concatenation on the Full Moon

in the blackhole parking lot (you will  
never find your car or your sanity)

the ketchup-stained pool table from  
the Cheers bar you practically live at

the despised dentist chair,  
with its navy cushions & recliner  
falsely beckoning for you to be poked by metal

the airplane that frequents underground tunnels

or the ocean with killer whales at the shoreline

you pick up the spike that sits in the lot at the gas station  
to save us from an imagined crash.

you handle the wolf spider of pure snow  
climbing your thigh.

you gaze wide-eyed as  
that dentist whips out his pliers:  
bi-annual torture that pays  
for all that touched your saliva:  
lovers, berries, wine, gluttony.

you stand by the shore as the bluewhale  
vacuums up your brother like a dust bunny.

you transform the plane into a dive bar,  
throw the airplane bottles of Skyy vodka  
to all the passengers so they don't  
notice when you go down.

you watch the first bite in the cherry tomato:  
the teeth settle into the plump yellow flesh  
fangs puncture the skin & seeds turn to fleas--  
you watch it again & again, in slow motion, on repeat.

you walk down the aisles in the grocery store  
under florescent ceilings, canned goods explode  
as you pass, a blackbean rain.  
but the ladies in line for blackberry pie  
squeal when you forget to take a number.

share the closed-eye visions,  
these untold stories are  
cobwebs of our collective mind.

## Stink Eye

I am sentenced to stay here  
in the pockets of your face.  
I know you don't consider me much,  
as if I'm not working away  
flipping reality into headstands,  
painting the images that swim  
through the streams of your memory.

You have taken me to  
dark places: apartments with thick, thick smoke  
that stains your sweater for days  
when you sleep in the guest bedroom  
with tonight's stranger from the bar,  
the underground bar with toilets  
caked with scum, or  
those bedrooms with too many  
moving, naked parts that rub &  
hand over drunken disease.

I will sit and be sour  
in my God-given pocket.  
You will stroke that raw pork  
in your freezer, then stroke me.  
You will be sorry.

nightmare

in evening suburbia,  
a piss-stained moon huddles overhead  
to brood over rows & rows of carbon copy homes.  
the moon's glare stains the sky,  
the air is a blanket of bristles.

i am on the street, calloused soles  
brush chrome cement.

as i pass an empty lot, animated  
with a rainbow of ripe fruits  
on Saturday's market, now grey and aching.  
i hear a soft mumur,  
see Ania's forested Suburu swarm in to scoop me,  
her window lowers and i see her eyes,  
held wide with fear settled in the irises, as if piranhas are secretly  
gnawing her legs there,  
its not funny.  
come quick, she squeals at me as I jump inside  
onto milky mildew seats, she  
never stops driving,

on the street, a man expands into  
a monstrous pterodactyl like an Anamorphs novel  
he chases us, i feel his pull from behind,  
inside dark matter,  
as he rides atop a pickup truck  
i am latched to the back of the Suburu, surrendering.  
the beast sprays a mist, a potion that  
makes me feel like melting, like a hit of a heavy opiate,  
the dark, ethereal pull, a lovestruck teen on an apathy ride,  
i become a useless solider,  
ania is left alone to fight the man.  
where are we?

in the kitchen of an uninfected family,  
their pink lips warn us of grandmothers that wander into homes  
with five-dollar bills, they ask you to take them to the theater--  
but if you barely trace the bill,  
their white hair will dissipate into scaly skin, the demonic eyes  
won't leave your memory.

tennessee summer

at the pigeon river in tennessee,  
we pass the days wading in blowup tubes  
we are snakes who creep in kayaks of foreigners  
who paddle backwards, they are already wobbling, just  
asking to be pushed.

in the night our bodies turn, our minds turn into the realm  
of distant narratives  
in our small wooden rooms  
with creaky doors, with walls of purple paint,  
with putrid air of a dead rodent, really  
a bag of rotten potatoes that summoned the love interest, aroused  
pools of fast squealing maggots-- such  
a delicious cleanup.



## The American Dream

If

you climb the tower of the fun-house  
house-party, the tilted stairways  
with rooms full of mirrors & faces of Marilyn,  
with rooms full of mattresses.

*Then*

you can hide behind the thick stage curtain  
in the attic with your Patrick &  
suck thick white bumps &  
forget about missing your shift today  
sleeping 'til ten in the eve.

If

you walk to the Russian bakery  
down rickety stone streets, or  
take a flying car in your drunken state,  
grab the 35 cent puff pastries  
of cream, yoghurt & mint  
from under the glass ceiling.

*Then*

you succeed,  
drowning in body pleasure.  
You have earned your residency.

*Apocalypse Dreams*

Pt. I

a hand full of familiar strangers--mixed  
with recent guests of my flat  
(like the faerie friend with the voice of a man,  
the proud & queer Ms. Bobo-Dancy herself,  
who taught me how to glitter everyone  
in the dance hall)  
we come together to swim.

we tread water in canals, naked  
along the European street,  
framed by pastel towers,  
easter-egg homes.  
*untouched elation* sits in our chests,  
a rare & extraordinary organ.

our legs tango in cyclic waves,  
we do the dead fish  
float in the rising water.  
our bodies are carried  
right to a high school gymnasium.

the dance takes our legs  
down the stairs, down  
descending ceilings, to the blue mats in the basement  
where we pull our limbs out &  
the blonde lady in front guides the flow--  
then  
Sirens shriek in routine breaths, they are  
the alarm we prepared to disregard in school drills

dirt smoke rushes down the stairs to play tag,  
my eyes dash, no doors,  
all the fibers in my thighs work together to perform the sprint,  
across the tiled floor, up the crowded stairs

flames rule the spiral staircase  
i suck in air as i rush against the cloud of grey, the block.  
fellow stretchers surround me, i reach the door in time but

i look back. i am lot's wife.  
i look back.  
i watch the orange killer strike--

in one motion, he absorbs the school  
the girls behind me on the stairs  
become walking bodies of fire.

Pt. 2

Tonight we are at the ocean,  
the boy from Budapest, my father, & I.

We stand on the shore  
as waves gently turn with the aid of the Moon.

It is winter, yet the ocean is bathwater  
under Midnight's sky, under the rickety boardwalk,  
We push off into deep water.

The boy points at the scarlet seahorse latched on my arm like a tattoo,  
Through clear water, I watch a stingray swarm &  
chase me back to the sand,  
my heartbeat faster than my ankles.

The sand starts to growl,  
the Earth hiccups,  
sonic thunder,  
it vomits seawater,  
only over the ocean,  
I am untouched.

But the boardwalk,  
it acts like a sewer  
The water rushes through its pipes &  
I see one man on the walk,  
a tall, dark-haired stranger with a top hat, suitcase & a story  
The water sweeps him up  
and he drops straight down,  
his bottom plops onto the shore  
and his arms fall right off like a plastic doll with removable parts.

A smile strikes his face,  
The satisfaction of a future in disability funds?

His suitcase is out of sight, and  
I'm sitting in a kitchen with purple walls and a shag green carpet,  
yawning at the apocalypse.

## Wednesday Eyes

The chrome half-moons  
under your eyes grew darker  
that morning,  
layered,  
like moon's cycle at nightfall.  
The wrinkles on your  
forehead were defined then  
from the unwelcome light  
that enters through  
these basement windows.

You stumbled to your countertop,  
where I watched your face do the snakeroll  
with snorts,  
your heavy eyes closed shut  
your body gave its last shrug.

I carried the old man to his bed,  
placed cold water on the envelope of his lips  
and lay with him,  
pretending to sleep as  
his bones rested on my soft skin,  
his beer breath snores  
were like smoke on my face.

I can see now  
why he stirred me away.  
My young eyes  
earned their glasses that day.

rendering of love on a tuesday:

reaching in to seize my heart from my chest  
& handing it over to my daughter, sophia  
cupped through soft, gentle palms  
'til her womb plays the role of a maker  
& molds a new heart, births a new creature.

the picture of tangled, honeyed thighs,  
skin crinkled and peppered with spots made of stories  
soft cackles singing in an otherwise quiet room  
they will never grow mold.

dogwood mail

driving south to see  
trees in bloom  
after a night of sleeping in the snow  
& letting the hail beat my face,  
is like seeing color for the first time.

i am the wick of a candle--  
ignited by vernal sun,  
the light shows the beauty in strangers  
like red-haired, shirtless Steven  
whose eyes blazed  
the picture of an olive on fire,  
gold & green twists in circles  
in his irises, like magic

no wonder the warm blood of new loves is harvested in this season.

at blood rock on the parkway,  
i spy front seat fever  
in the car next to mine,  
i watch heads disappear  
into the laps of their lovers,  
a wave of pollination:  
the lovers mimic the sassafras,  
romanced by spicebush swallowtail,  
winged creatures kiss buds,  
birth sherbet.

in these woods,  
the wind of untouched silence  
numbs my fingertips with a warmth  
in a way a person never could.  
i am not alone, sitting  
by the glasshouse over the lake.

the bloom of new cycles  
in the ancient--  
what was always there,  
like lovers that are always within,  
reflections of who you want to be each moment.

dogwoods crack open  
they carry us to the forest where all trails lead to  
treehouses,  
they wait for us.

## Cave Games

When we sit at the long picnic tables,  
twenty of us with our big toes in the ocean,  
at the shore by the cave, we get  
rowdy with our drinking, fling cups in the air  
in rotation, thrown high and low and  
our shit beer dirties the water and Clay  
beside me wears his heavy winter coat and he  
helps me tie my hiking boots, bunny ears  
style, and awkward incest thoughts run through our heads  
and we touch thighs and we lose balance, lose the game  
and tumble off the bench into the shallow water  
beside that cave where Cyclops  
sits and chuckles at our folly.

*messages from the mountain sanctuary*

rows & rows of rooms without windows.

scariest thought:

the business of carrying your mind into the future.

when you can't

see the dancing loblollies right in front of your face,

taste the skin of your newest lover,

smell the burning cedar

in the ancient potbelly stove

that heats every room of the wood cabin.

let go of everything:

shape your body into an empty mug,

pour into yourself

the coffee of this moment:

it is always brewing.



## View from the Streetcar

I remember looking through the window,  
into a forest where bright colored hammocks  
hung in trees in abundance--  
ripe fruit in a fresh street market,  
they are canopies full of hard covered books.

I saw only hammocks in this forest,  
hammocks holding books that must be tired from not being read,  
from watching people in their homes, on their screens,  
with fingers that no longer fondle the soft corners of worn pages with patience,  
noses that no longer take in the sweet cologne of an aged tale  
that has traveled over many seas, held by many shades of hands,  
of ancestors who scribbled first reactions  
in the margins, in smeared lead.

These hard covers have traveled the full cycle, back to their mother trees.

I remember seeing the books, thinking  
that was enough to bring flavor back to my throat.

seductive decay

i dream of the river,  
of appalachian townies wandering in wet grass on the banks.  
they circle the folding-tables with masks on display  
to purchase like a van gogh piece.  
a mask of an old person's face,  
cartoon-like, goofy,  
like comic characters in the funny pages.  
masks of rubbered wrinkles with bulging eyes  
whiskered ears that never stop growing,  
attached by a thin strip of elastic.

old age attracts the masses of river folk,  
for it's hard to fake being wise  
when you're forced to think for years.

a mid-spring winter

there is a battle in the sky--  
hemispheres in armor  
split by a jagged line:

the smoke of a storm marches on the left field  
hard whistles slide through the maze of bamboo stalks,  
stalks forced to samba back & forth.  
unseen soliders batter the many windchimes of the home  
tambourines being torn apart.  
roars grow from the chicken coop,  
the music of the moment  
an unrehearsed orchestra on speed.  
the doors on the porch swing wildly,  
wrestled by the armies of ghosts,  
each creak in the bamboo treehut is a war horn,.  
the place aches in  
new kinds of movement,  
like a new actor just fighting to be heard.

the other half of sky is peaceful, silent  
the remaining glow peaks through turquoise sheets,  
until it is torn out of bed.

such a beautiful haunting to the sanctuary.