

"*Rivers in Your Skin, Sirens in Your Hair* weaves magic into the human experience and brutality into fairy tales."

—Vanessa Jae, author and Poetry Editor at *Strange Horizons*

---

# rivers in your skin, sirens in your hair

---

*When I left home I took only what I could carry...*

What will you bring with you down the path, through the hills and into the woods? Fragments, stories, living things? Echoes of the past, promises for the future?

In fifty new and collected poems, Marisca Pichette celebrates myth, folklore, and memory. Her poems traverse landscapes both real and imagined, taking inherited tales and retelling them through a queer lens.

From dusk into the night and out again at dawn, her work offers you a magical journey in speculative verse.

Barcode - Do  
not remove

Marisca Pichette

*Rivers in Your Skin, Sirens in Your Hair*

Android Press

A surreal illustration for the book cover. At the top, a glowing golden fish is depicted with its body forming a woman's hair. The fish is surrounded by several dark, translucent butterflies with glowing patterns on their wings. Below the fish, a hand is shown holding a clear, cylindrical object that resembles a pen or a small bottle. The hand is adorned with delicate blue and white flowers and green leaves. The background is a dark, starry space. The text "rivers in your skin, sirens in your hair" is written in a white, serif font, with "rivers" and "sirens" on the top line, "in" in the middle, and "your skin," and "your hair" on the bottom line. Below this, the word "poems" is written in a smaller, white, sans-serif font, and the author's name "marisca pichette" is written in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font at the bottom.

rivers  
in  
your skin,  
sirens  
in  
your hair  
poems  
marisca pichette

PRAISE FOR RIVERS IN YOUR SKIN, SIRENS  
IN YOUR HAIR

The poems of *Rivers in Your Skin, Sirens in Your Hair* transport us from “dream to magic to grotesquerie” with exquisite attentiveness. Whether exploring the barnacled, psychological depths of “The Unlocking Room” or tracking the transformation of Rapunzel’s hair into light-seeking fungi, Pichette’s poems are steeped in the rich cross-pollination of the mythic and environmental. A luminous debut.

—Katherine Larson, award-winning author of *Radial Symmetry*.

Every one of Marisca’s poems is imbued with a wild fairytale magic: sometimes dark, others whimsical, but never once failing to grab you by the heartstrings. In this miraculous book of speculative poetry, moths dance with moss and memories, while sirens sing seaweed-tangled tales that will linger past the last poem.

—Avra Margariti, author of *The Saint of Witches*

Pichette's *River in Your Skin, Sirens in Your Hair* has the lyrical timelessness of whale songs; it is the effortless drift and gentle, yet striking, beauty of jellyfish; the heartrending notes of a ballad; the curtain-drop upon the conclusion of a tragedy, with the passionate applause still ringing in our ears and the sharp pain of our palms lingering, itching; and it is a walk down a desolate, dimly lit street, with a dying candle held between our hands."

—Ai Jiang, author of *Linghun*.

Simultaneously mythic and intimate, *Rivers in Your Skin, Sirens in Your Hair* initiates you into a world of mycelial princesses and glass slipper urns, as delicate as it is sinister, as grotesque as it is full of grace. The waters of Marisca Pichette's debut are pearl-encrusted, dark with seaweed, host to a whole ecosystem of mysterious denizens. The reward for plunging in is mouthwatering language, irresistible rhythm, and that deep full-bodied chill that all good poetry blooms in us.

—Sienna Tristen, author of *The Heretic's Guide to Homecoming* and *hortus animarum: a new herbal for the queer heart*

**RIVERS IN YOUR SKIN,  
SIRENS IN YOUR HAIR**



# RIVERS IN YOUR SKIN, SIRENS IN YOUR HAIR

*Poems*

MARISCA PICHETTE



Android Press

Copyright © 2023 by Marisca Pichette

Published by Android Press  
Eugene, Oregon

[www.android-press.com](http://www.android-press.com)

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission of Android Press, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

First Printing, 2023

Cover Art by Yuumei  
Author Photo by Hannah Mathews (2022)

ISBN 978-1-958121-14-6 (paperback)  
ISBN: 978-1-958121-15-3 (epub)

Please respect the rights of the author and the hard work they've put into writing and editing the stories in this book. Do not copy or distribute, and do not post or share online. If you like the book and want to share it with friends, please consider buying additional copies.

## PERMISSIONS

"These days were made for us" — original publication: *Mass Poetry* (2018)

"She gathered up the dust" — original publication: *Frozen Wavelets* (2023)

"Kitchen Garden" — original publication: *Savant-Garde* (2022)

"What roots she has her own" — original publication: *Kaleidotrope* (2022)

"I never learned the word" — original publication: *Blue Unicorn* (2022)

"In the Unlocking Room" — original publication: *Eye to the Telescope* (2022)

"Where We Felt With Moss" — original publication: *On Spec* (2022)

"Nobyl" — original publication: *Solarpunk Magazine* (2022)

"For a place in the family of things" — original publication: *Channel Magazine* (2020)

"charybdis" — original publication: *The Future Fire* (2022)

"What do you remember about the earth?" — original publication: *In this Together Exhibition* (2021)

"While Alice sleeps in Wonderland" — original publication:



## VIII - PERMISSIONS

*Apparition Lit* (2022)

“In the middle” — original publication: *Eye to the Telescope* (2022)

“At the Wedding of Death and Time” — original publication: *Enchanted Living* (2021)

“The Ossuary at Ocean’s End” — original publication: *Mermaids Monthly* (2021)

“Aequinoctium” — original publication: *Ghost Orchid Press* (2021)

“Killing whale” — original publication: *Ligeia Magazine* (2022)

“Victor II” — original publication: *Snow-Capped Press* (2021)

“Topsoil” — original publication: *Solarpunk Magazine* (2022)

“And it dries and dries” — original publication: *Haven Spec* (2022)

“Mary Celeste” — original publication: *Zeniada Magazine* (2018)

“Oddkin” — original publication: *Seaside Gothic* (2022)

“and” — original publication: *Black Cat Magazine* (2021)

“Heel to Toe” — original publication: *BSFS Honorable Mention* (2022)

“The Art of Betraying Others for Food” — original publication: *Coffin Bell* (2022)

“the glaciers made her deep” — original publication: *Gwyllion Magazine* (2021)

“Wait when ice forms over my fingertips” — original publication: *Of Horror and Hope* (2022)

“Syph” — original publication: *Star\*Line* (2022)

**PERMISSIONS - IX**

“Coronation” — original publication: *Star\*Line* (2022)

“Seeing-holes” — original publication: *Star\*Line* (2022)

*For those whom the stories never fit.*

# CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i>	xv
<b>PART ONE: RIVERS</b>	<b>1</b>
In parting	2
These days were made for us	4
the size of your fist	6
like breathing	9
Her ribs are apple wood	11
She gathered up the dust	13
Kitchen Garden	14
What roots she has her own	16
I never learned the word	18
In the Unlocking Room	19
They grow between foundation stones	22
conjuring mangroves	24

## **XII - CONTENTS**

Where We Felt With Moss	26
Nobyl	29
For a place in the family of things	31
charybdis	33
What do you remember about the earth?	35
Maid Stone	36
While Alice sleeps in Wonderland	38
In the middle	41
Paper boats	44
At the wedding of Death and Time	47
At the funeral of Thought and Action	49
At the birth of Song and Silence	51
And windows for regrets	53
<b>PART TWO: SIRENS</b>	<b>57</b>
The Ossuary at Ocean's End	58
Iron, Glass, Slipper	60
Aequinoctium	62
Killing whale	64
Victor II	66
death shadow	70
Take me as prescribed	72

Topsoil	74
And it dries and dries	76
Mothers become stepmothers in fairy tales	79
For this meal we thank her	82
correspondence	85
Mary Celeste	87
Oddkin	89
and	91
Huios: Phaeton's Flight	93
Heel to Toe	97
The Art of Betraying Others for Food	99
the glaciers made her deep	101
saving daylight	103
Wait when ice forms over my fingertips	105
Syph	107
Coronation	109
Seeing-holes	111
vigil	113
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	117
<i>About The Author</i>	119



## INTRODUCTION

In poetry, I never claimed to know what I was doing. I still struggle to call myself A Poet. As a prose writer, I didn't learn poetic forms or terms for rhythm and conceit. I apologize.

That said, these poems are born from the same place where all creative work grows. They come from a desire to tell a new story, or an old story in a new way. They embody a search for freedom from constraint, a space for authenticity.

I know what some of us are thinking. Isn't speculative poetry *inauthentic*? It tells a story outside of reality, after all.

Ah. But that makes it all the more authentic. By leaving reality behind, we access the rawest truths about ourselves.

From dream to magic to grotesquerie, I offer these poems to you. I hope you see in them a glimmer of memory, an echo of home.





# Part One: rivers

# In parting

When I left home I took only what I could carry:

seaglass, postcards, embroidery  
thread woven between my fingers  
circling my wrists.

I braided my hair with eggshells  
& apple seeds, trussed together  
under a paisley pashmina.

I wove pockets I'd accumulated:  
stitches over my shoulders,  
knees to accommodate Polaroids,  
owl pellets, wax seals & vintage  
stamps;

pillowcases bulging with stuffed  
animals & clementines for later,  
headphones for the bus, extra  
USB cables wrapped around  
My mother's perfume.

A doll, felted from my first cat's  
fur. The jawbone of an English sheep.

With the Larousse, my pockets filled.  
I turned to my collarbones, wedging  
Playdough, fish food, pine needles  
& glass beads into leftover spaces.

When I could carry no more—  
my throat lined with academic papers  
& diary entries rolled up in  
rubber bands  
—I stepped towards the door.

I forgot nothing as I left.

My last act: unscrewed bookshelves,  
carefully folded  
into the creases  
of my skin.

# These days were made for us

so tell me that rain  
wasn't made for me

tell me that there's a difference  
between diamonds and teardrops;

so tell me that seagulls  
fear the ocean

tell them that water  
isn't touchable, not really

—we all shrink away from things  
that are bigger than us—

so tell the field that mud  
is just shy soil

and that a hole is a memory  
of bravery,

exploration and dirty shoes  
that don't quite know the way.

so tell me that mud wasn't made  
to remember where I go

and tell me that you fear the ocean  
just like an eye fears a tear

and the clouds  
fear the rain.

# the size of your fist

I tried molding my heart—  
carving it of golem clay  
& incising my wish on its malleable skin:  
*love me back.*

I fired it too long  
& brittle, it broke  
the day my ribs collapsed.

I decided metal was stronger  
& forged my heart again  
in the same mold.

Iron was too heavy  
steel too cold  
copper too weak  
& green too soon.

Aluminum bent out of shape  
just with words.  
Metal, I realized,  
is weakest of all.

I blew my heart of glass  
decorated with chips  
from all it was  
before.

But I couldn't feel through my gloves  
& I dropped that heart  
before it ever had a chance  
to beat.

Between the shards I saw  
what had lain  
underneath it  
all this time.

I walked outside & found  
an oak tree  
broken by the storm.

From her fallenness I carved  
heartwood dense  
dark  
sap dripping blood life  
on my feet.



8 - MARISCA PICHETTE

It took me three weeks  
to whittle my heart.

Light, tough  
smoother than glass  
& warmer  
than steel.

I placed my oaken heart  
between bruised ribs  
& folded closed my skin,  
muscle knitting like bark.

On the first day  
of the fourth week  
my heart beat at last  
its first pulse.

# like breathing

a kind stranger once said  
“rain is in the air.”  
water pools in my lungs,  
lightning restarting my pulse,  
thunder rumbling where my gut  
should be.

I asked them under storm clouds  
“will we drown?”  
rain falls  
wipes washes wrings my wrinkles  
away.

all the years I worked for,  
experience wearily won  
absorbed by grass already dead  
& the black holes of gutters.

they said between flashes  
“we drink the years  
like fine wine.”  
& in the arms of a jagged bolt  
I lost them.

I swim home  
paddling past strangers  
kind & unkind  
stranger & strange  
swallowing thunder I wonder

about the kindness of strangers—  
the strangeness of kindness—  
the kind of strange  
only stranger than kind.

my home is washed clean  
by the storm.  
I backstroke up the steps  
& find myself in a living room  
of fish.

drifting in their midst I ask them  
if they have finally drunk  
enough.

# Her ribs are apple wood

Her fingers long ago lost  
their feeling.

Nails browning, abscising in  
a breath lost

between her toes,  
She colds & colds the winter

slumbering nailless, hairless,  
skin chapped peeling into strips.

Where her children planted  
grapevines wrap clothes to out

their colding. She colds  
still in spring, her skin senescing

12 - MARISCA PICHETTE

Flesh bared to the bees,  
colorless arms too thin too dead

too little for homes to make.  
A hole in her heart

invites them in, & colding  
empty, filling motion she flies

& breathes  
& buzzes

with them.

# She gathered up the dust

of herself  
and could not find the glue.

So, despairing of a place  
she took a breath, and blew—

The pieces fluttered from her hands  
and sparkled, as they flew

to land at last  
upon her past;

A house she never knew.

# Kitchen Garden

in chalk you drew a line  
between the Wilderness  
and our childhood  
spent in gardens we thought  
were wild, walls we imagined  
endured for centuries  
and food we saw  
in miracles.

your chalk was pink and orange  
and sunset, summer days  
washed back by spring  
snow melt in your eyes when you said  
you were leaving, when you said  
so was i.

ivy and weeds force their way between my toes  
occupy the palm you used to hold  
as we went running through labyrinths  
we pretended not to see in progress,  
shears nipped out of memories

like tags removed from clothes.

you always swore we'd come back;  
you always said you can't go back  
can't replace the Wilderness spreading over the hills  
into the vast horizon dripping in stories  
with a plain old kitchen garden  
as practical as our futures.

i'm sorry to say i didn't listen—not then  
and not now as i leave the car running  
door ajar, coat half-buttoned  
shuffling through the broken gate  
between ruined beds and gravel spread  
like fish scales on the grass.

it really is a kitchen garden, neat (or was)  
with onions, parsnips, chives and herbs  
that flutter faint on the breeze.  
half dry, half dead, half naturalized  
wandering out into  
a different kind of wilderness.

without you here, i fall into a squat  
squint my eyes  
clench my fists  
and through blurred vision,  
remember how our horizon  
never ran out of sun.



# What roots she has her own

In the forgotten tower  
she reads a library

forgotten worlds in  
forgotten pages like and

nothing like her own.  
Her forgotten room is small,

lined with shelves she reads  
twelve hundred worlds together

holding her place with endless  
strands of wheat-gold hair.

Sitting in her web of forgetting  
she tugs, ties, binds

her forgotten present  
to a thousand futures

unbraiding.

# I never learned the word

for drowned.

Watching ice crack  
and crumble,  
watching is not  
a choice.

My thoughts

graze

*Ursus major* meandering over  
a waning sky, chased  
season after season

by the notion  
of watching.

# In the Unlocking Room

the doors are all round. Arches spread themselves  
in marble and birch bark, caressing doors set deep  
under their keystones.

Some keystones are marked. (I have marked them.)  
A rotary dial in chalk over the door that leads  
to my childhood; two crystal ornaments  
flashing rainbows onto the door to summer;  
a smear of dirt against the birch bark keystone  
which holds the Beginning.

In the Unlocking Room I count my steps,  
pacing its edges—really, there are no edges,  
just the doors and their eventual openings—  
round and round I go, slowing when I hear  
Voices.

I talk frequently in the Unlocking Room. To myself  
and to the doors, their keystones, the ceiling  
(which is not a ceiling, but an observatory),  
and to those who come to visit when doors  
Let them in.

There is a table where I take my lunch:  
cucumber sandwiches with cranberries and  
a thermos of loose-leaf tea. I sit  
watching the doors I can see, listening  
to those I cannot.

Eventually, one opens. My first grade teacher  
walks across the pine and brick floor  
to take the stool opposite me. She whispers  
her first name.

Doors open. Keystones shift deeper into their seats.

In the Unlocking Room my mother holds a quay.  
Algae and barnacles drip between her fingers,  
their watery strength collapsing under the weight of air.  
Boats hang from her hair like marionettes;  
she shakes her head and they swim past her face,  
sails concealing her lips.

The Unlocking Room shrinks when I stay too long,  
expands when I decide to leave, gathering the remnants  
of my visit close.

I sweep the table clean  
with the heel of my hand.

Unsure where to put the crumbs, I drop them  
in my pockets.

When I go, I forget where they came from.

The Unlocking Room accordions closed,  
so thin it can only be seen from one side,  
one eye squinted, tongue pinched  
between your teeth.

# They grow between foundation stones

Rapunzel's hair was hyphae;  
she lay down in moss & topsoil,  
garter snakes circling her lips  
tasting futures on the air.

Her hair grew & grew  
meeting sycamore roots & birch  
tracing footprints of ages  
& fossils forgotten.

In the shade of a medieval folly  
Rapunzel decided to wait  
no more.

She buried herself in leaf litter  
& wove her face a fungal  
sleeping mask.

Ages after, princes came looking  
for the maiden Gothel forgot.  
But where a tower once stood  
they found a faerie ring.

Pale mushrooms rising  
kissing light instead of lips  
sending their spores at last  
to the ends of the world

carried on the boots  
of oblivious knights.



## conjuring mangroves

Everyone knows the witches  
who grow by ages  
in granite blocks exposed  
to rough New England winters  
still draped in thick  
colonial smoke.

All have felt the embers  
melting candy houses into  
crystalline mass graves  
watched over by listing  
dispassionate historical markers.

Tell me: is your broomstick  
really a palm frond?  
Is your familiar  
iguana-shaped?

Your All Hallow's Eve is  
sticky with humidity,  
frogs chirping under  
a full moon.

Our graves hold bones,  
yours: Spanish moss  
trussed together  
with tropical webs.

Your witches wear gauze  
and sunscreen  
while they fly over  
haunted everglades.

From Connecticut to Key West  
we send binding spells,  
quarterly newsletters  
remembering our sisters

whose graves have yet  
to be marked.

# Where We Felt With Moss

At the table in the willow grove  
all our feet are bare and damp.

A string connects our cuticles.  
With each shared stroke, it hums

the music we share with the bees,  
while mice shake chajchas

made from ladybug shells.  
Our hands reach from one end

of the table—past milkweed seeds  
and pewter beads the mourning doves

brought as gifts—to the other, where  
we knit cocoons for wooly bears

and webs for lace weavers.

Where our fingers touch, needles grow.

We share them, left and right,  
each project growing in the spaces

where our bodies make shade.  
Clockwise we crochet jay nests,

sculpt exoskeletons and eggshells,  
incise bark with memories.

Counterclockwise we felt coats  
for butterflies and moths, tugging

tufts of moss from the ground  
with our toes.

Everything dries in the dapples  
between our crafts, tested for strength

by water striders. Under the light  
of dusk we knot our strings together,

gnash our needles while  
deer mice retreat.

**28 - MARISCA PICHETTE**

As the moon rises our futures hatch  
from teapots, clay halves rolling wet

into our laps.

# Nobyl

Denali herds wild grass. She wraps strands around her wrists up to her elbows and walks from the edge of the sunrise to the rim of the sunset, dragging the day and the plains behind her.

Fairhair breaks roads. His antlers crack pavement into pebbles, disrupts gravel and rolls it into earth. He walks over lands that used to be called streets, ensuring the people have gone.

Basil paints with vines. His scurrying dislodges paper scraps like dying leaves as he climbs each crumbling building and paints a landscape of the past, the future. His murals color high-rises into hills.

Jamila spreads seeds like radiation,  
millions of bombs dropped over roofs,  
roads, memories. She beats her wings and  
flaps  
a breeze spun from her effort  
to repopulate  
Nobyl.

Santi carries the forest into the city.  
His fur is dusted with pollen, his nose  
driving sprouts through cracks. He follows the paths  
drawn by all the Nobyl inhabitants, all the children  
of disaster.

Qi guards the boundary.  
Their roots hold the line, their branches  
pull poison from the clouds.  
They grow to cover the skeletons  
that fumble and fall with the ages. They know  
that Nobyl is the frontier, the first forest  
to grow  
from a city.

# For a place in the family of things

i.

A dynasty divided by years of waves,  
storms thundering, dragging,  
cracking these shells away from  
outside of myself. I was born  
in seaweed, slick, wet, adrift.  
I was born looking to anchor myself  
in time, swirling  
with the tide, riding out the storms  
the winds tossed my way.

We are born waiting for the shore.

ii.

The place where family surges  
and breaks and mends itself,  
drawing the pieces together  
like shadows coalescing before sunlight;  
that is the place where the drifting stops.



Born seaweed, we seek this place and  
we know it is a cove. In rockpools  
and silhouettes of broken shells  
with glacial memories I plant my life  
in the crook of the past, extending a tendon  
feeling into the world.

Primeval slime turns to blood and bile  
and all the things decision is made of.

iii.

I reach this tidal rest  
and among the bones of my mothers  
I taste the salt of growing.

On the coast, all bets are collected. All lives cast free.

# charybdis

see her:  
dancing at the bottom  
—whirlpool kisses—  
streams of bubbles  
i forgot to taste as i swam  
gasping  
in circles.

her toes are pointed fins  
her hair the current  
hugging me tighter  
tighter, drawing me  
down  
to her show.

in the ocean's roar  
she's laughing.  
in the deepest darkness  
her teeth shine  
like abalone.

i'm sinking again  
like yesterday and tomorrow  
counting her fingers  
her toes  
her eyelashes batting the barnacles  
away

she is smaller than i remember  
happier than i was  
more imperfect than i wanted  
to see.

waves reflect tears  
into laughter,  
warp drowning  
into dancing.

at the bottom she spins  
and spins, spins  
spins me in her skin,  
enfolds me in a high tide of joy  
washing the sand  
from my eyes.

# What do you remember about the earth?

It begins with sunset. So  
maybe that is already  
the future. It begins with  
failure; trying comes after.  
It began with a broken  
twig, the crackle of death  
under my foot. So  
that's how we remember earth.  
Beginnings aren't always first.  
I began by falling—walking  
came after. I picked myself  
up in auburns and browns  
and I cleared a path in  
the wilderness but  
there was always a footprint  
before mine. There was always  
another voice.

# Maid Stone

“lie down on your stomach,  
giving your breasts to the earth  
and your back to me.”

i lay down in the hills,  
wrapping my arms around barrows &  
burying my fingers in ancient calderas.

your legs straddled my hips,  
gripping as you bent with a stone chisel  
to cut into the chalk of me.

i dozed as you shaped me  
awaking only when your hair brushed my shoulders  
lips brushed my cheek.

“i’m finished,” you said but didn’t rise  
didn’t release me from the earth  
pressing me deeper

we sank, your legs and me.  
we sank into the hills until only my back  
—your torso—breathed the day.

the horse you immortalized on me  
shines and shines until the grass moves in  
and you bend again at the waist

trimming back the world  
to preserve your art.

# While Alice sleeps in Wonderland

When Alice falls  
I place a ribbon in my book  
and walk through flowers  
too wild for gardens.

When my sister dives  
headfirst into another world  
I take down my hair  
and face the woods.

I don't have time—  
an hour at most, before Alice returns  
taking the door she opened  
and shutting it again.

I leave the flowers behind  
with my book and dear little Alice.  
In the woods, I breathe again.  
*So little time.*

I find your clearing and coat:  
grey fur, red trim.  
I follow your footprints  
my breath short and wanting.

Your cottage shines even in daylight:  
bright and open and smelling of sugar  
and you.  
Shedding your coat, I go inside.

Alice floats in a sea of her making  
and I find you at your grandmother's oven.  
We have so little time—Alice growing  
big again, entangled in houses too small.

Our clothes cover the floor  
and I count the minutes before  
this world closes, before  
the cards collapse.

Alice is playing croquet;  
I am tangled in fingers and sheets  
that smell of wolves.  
Alice is angry. I am in love.

Before the court gathers  
you kiss my left breast  
and braid my hair, leaving me  
so I won't see how you disappear.



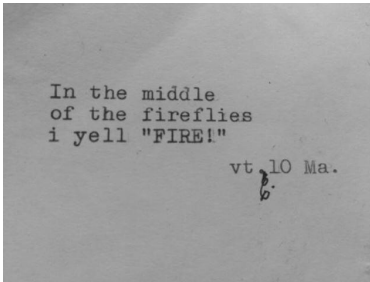
Under the apple tree  
I retrieve my book, face flushed,  
heart curling to see you,  
aching to lose you again.

When Alice climbs back into sleep  
her head in the sunshine  
I know you've gone—  
your world closed, your cottage lost.

I no longer fit in holes in the ground  
and mirrors are too shallow  
for women  
like us.

Alice, though.  
Alice is quick. She is small.  
Her dreams grow large enough  
to carry ours  
  
another day.

# In the middle



In the middle of the fireflies  
the world is not diseased. Dandelions sneeze seeds into the air like they don't care who gets sick, like sickness doesn't exist.

In the middle of the fireflies  
a ghost slides out of a horse-shoe. "Bring out your dead," she says to me. "Bring out your dead, but don't forget to breathe."

In the middle of the fireflies  
sticks are burning. Smoke obscures  
the stars and suddenly  
space is not so far. All the stars  
are here.

In the middle of the fireflies  
I wear a mask of the brightest green.  
My hands in glow-in-the-dark gloves  
make animals in the night. Flap, roar,  
canter like a rabbit into dawn.

In the middle of the fireflies  
there is a plague in words, a mire  
that absorbs grass and flattens  
the hills the moles made. I sink,  
my toes grabbing mud.

In the middle of the fireflies  
they hold a bag for me. I reach  
inside and fill my hands with flour.  
I spin and spin and dust the summer  
in caster sugar snow.

In the middle of the fireflies  
fire flies, fire flies. Flies from my head  
and catches the trees. The field burns and  
mud cracks, cakes around my baking  
feet. Smoke shades the morning.

In the middle

I stand still.

The sun reveals nothing I didn't already see  
in the light  
of the fire-  
flies.

# Paper boats

“Can I tell you a secret?”

No. Let me tell one to you.

Under my skin it is midnight  
moon shining full.  
Between my eyes I planted a Perseid  
and every midsummer it grows  
three calendula blossoms.

Where my toes ought to be  
I have ten regrets.  
When I shave my legs  
phoenixes crumble to ash  
and bells melt into ice cubes.

My favorite color is you.  
My favorite cake is  
roses-painted-red.  
My favorite dream is  
being awake.

If you turn me around,  
you can read my family tree  
in the rivers of my pores.

Look at me straight on and I sound  
like foghorns and mist.

At breakfast I like eating reflections.  
For lunch – echoes.  
For dinner I skip backwards  
and kiss frogs into open pages.

Buy me something I'll love  
and I'll sell it to the hills  
to fund the digging  
of graves.

Once a year, I bury everything  
like the end of the Iron Age.

Tell me a secret and I'll tell you  
something you've always known,  
but been too frightened to ask.

Tell me a lie and I'll tell it back  
in words that unmake  
untruth.

Tell me – what do you want to see  
hung up on the future?  
What makes you so proud?

I have all my words.  
Don't ask me to take on more.

That secret? Keep it.

There are rivers in your skin  
and sirens in your hair.  
Hold the words close because  
thoughts float.

I've lost so many that way.  
They're in your skin now,  
in your singing hair.

What you decide to do with them  
is a secret I'll never ask  
to know.

# At the wedding of Death and Time

We toast our futures and our pasts.  
The marquee stands atop a barrow.  
Sunlight warms our faces and We cry  
for the possibilities We see reflected  
in ice and candle wax.

She wears a gown of cobwebs, her face  
veiled in moss. Flower girls drop  
toadstools in her path—her bouquet  
holds white lilies and nightshade.

He is robed in leaf litter, his hair  
a crown of seeds.  
His groomsmen pour wine  
onto their feet.



The festivities last an age and a day  
We watch the moon wax and wane,  
their vows taken under a gibbous  
they dance illuminated by a fading crescent.

No invitations were sent and none  
received. All guests remembered  
when the moss bloomed and seeds  
cracked free of their shells—  
the wedding was complete.

We shared a single pomegranate,  
sweet and bitter soaking our tongues  
as they departed into the dark  
of a new moon.

# At the funeral of Thought and Action

We raise our hands to the waning sun  
clouds skip off their axes  
and grass browns for want  
of water.

They are laid at the base  
of a crumbling well.  
Her coffin is apple wood; his: glass.  
Lilies cover them like promises.

When the hole has filled  
We walk back to idling cars  
our shadows one hour longer,  
our lives reduced by same.

We ponder lingering  
as the horizon lengthens,  
turning retreating clouds  
fever-red.

We depart in different directions  
each holding a crumb  
of the soil We left atop  
their unquiet tomb.

# At the birth of Song and Silence

We hold music too thin  
for lyrics, our mouths working  
in pantomime.

Clean towels hang from tender fingers  
while collectively We hold  
our breath.

The twins are born writhing  
one loud, one mute  
as the papers We clutch  
to our thrumming hearts.

To each We give a birth chart  
invoking the most distant stars.  
To one: fire and Jupiter.  
To one: water and Mars.

They are bathed in gin and chamomile,  
their eyes wiped clean with dandelion fluff  
and laid to sleep in a treble clef cot.

We watch over them under the shifting sky  
humming all the names  
we borrowed from the stars.

# And windows for regrets

In the seams between bricks  
too narrow for mortar  
cracking into fragments

we planted a letter  
to all our future selves.

You wrote in the foundations  
to children we may never gain  
of low tides & highways

burned bread & dry throats  
hoarsely singing their way.

In bathroom tiles slick with soap scum  
I wrote to every person  
I'll never meet

all the stories I wish  
to one day tell.

My words slid down  
& circled the drain.

Between sheetrock & scaffolding  
you folded all the hair you've lost.  
Clipped nails, shed skin

baby teeth adrift  
in past mistakes.

On the roof I planted us—  
ivy, bugleweed, white violets  
clustering around

disused chimneys  
held together by moss.

We swore, once:  
we'd never move from this—  
our first & last house.

You wrapped yourself up  
in the front walk

& I lay down in the arms  
of the driveway.

We always knew:  
beginning something means  
ending something else.

While we lived, we forgot  
how lovely it was to die.

Enshrouded in our enfeebled home  
we keep the promises  
others made on our behalf.

They may never read our remnants  
but this house will live

—will die—  
again.





## Part Two: sirens

# The Ossuary at Ocean's End

We welcome you your bones  
wrapped in seaweed and  
ancestor's scales,  
following the tides that led you  
here  
to us.

Lay them by tails  
Lay them by shells that once  
were not empty.  
Lay them in waters too dark  
to find a second  
time.

We welcome your bones  
too heavy to float  
and make room  
for a reef  
of dead.

waves lap and salt  
sinks  
into arms  
of all who once held,

continue holding—  
even as oceans  
end.

# Iron, Glass, Slipper

On the mantle rest the ashes  
of my grandmother,  
arranged in her favorite pair  
of iron shoes.

Winter nights I prop incense  
smoking her spirit to rest.

On the kitchen counter my mother's  
ashes fit perfectly  
in her glass wedding pumps.  
I position them to catch  
morning sun turning tiles  
rainbow & red.

By the front door my only  
empty shoes wait  
each day for me  
to leave.

Red & sparkling, I know  
they'll follow me from home  
to places  
like home,

Until I fill them forever  
like the women who  
dance & dance  
their shoes  
for ever  
after.

# Aequinoctium

behind my lungs she whispers  
*too deep.*

In her echo my toes seek mycelium & darkness  
holes widen to hold me  
but moss recoils, knows  
I am a stranger.

I promised to stop but I fight  
ripping new wounds while my fractals form  
underneath  
she whispers  
*breathe once.*

I gasp & gasp gasp gasp  
clawing grass grasping  
soil & rocks  
hearing only her voice  
my skin sprouts,  
hardens where she planted me.

*blink once.*

Bark creeps across my eyes  
stifles my voice while hers grows  
a whisper to a gale.

Ax & spade are last to vanish,  
consumed under my shroud  
of withered leaves.



# Killing whale

caught under            the waves  
                 of the glorious            purple  
night  
                 thump            thump  
  
rippling all    over    and    around  
   into  
                 herself.

her  
                 song of orcas  
herds soft  
scrapes savage—

skin scaled, eyes wide  
                 black & white

playing in the darkened            abyss

beat      beat  
thump  
a      heart.                      even darkness has  
Even darkness has  
lips.

## Victor II

*I made you.  
I made you, and I'm sorry.*

Without the first tie, the whole scaffold of flesh  
and sail comes tumbling  
away.  
there's nothing but a mass of crumpled  
skin, sopping wet.

it moves away, searching for some sort of  
delivery, some stitch to make it  
whole.  
Or maybe what it wants is undoing,  
an agent to come unbind it from you,  
from itself.

*There is one out there who can peel apart crescendos  
like layers on an onion,  
sift through the melting mass  
and drag organ after organ away,  
dropping them together in a jar  
to knock about,  
  
hollow in isolation.*

Maybe this is what it wants, after how you failed.  
Maybe this is how you should repay it.

You step forward,  
waiting for it to ooze away,  
out of sight and out of mind.

You have all the power to run.  
But instead you stand and watch  
that thing you tried and failed  
to create  
sag  
and die.

*I made you of myself.  
I should have recognized my mistake.*

your toes edging to the place where the porch dips  
away, sloping down to the mud,  
and the thing.

tendrils of its half-formed body  
spread  
reaching,

the trees tremble  
yet their branches hold on to the stars.  
They remain.

*I wanted you gone  
as much as I wanted  
you.*

You step off the porch.

mud seizes you, whispering  
all the words of all the languages  
you refused to learn.

reclaiming flesh and sailcloth  
from which you began,

skin mixes with clay, too late  
for either now.

*Birth is another type of murder.  
Never clean  
never quick.*

What made you  
think  
you could  
leave?

## death shadow

my breath surrendered  
my heart relinquished  
my pulse laid down  
to blet.

it is a glorious thing,  
losing everything.

in stopping I feel  
less and more and outside  
skin that never fit—  
first too tight,  
then loose & loose  
and lost.

I let go of it all &  
it wasn't my choice.  
this is the best, I think.  
lying blameless,  
lying bare.

I watch myself bloat,  
purge fluids and solids  
& spirits borrowed  
from my mother,  
grandmothers stacked  
through millennia  
of dying.

this is my favorite bed—  
when at last they find me,  
peel me up and fold me  
through a door I never locked,  
a shadow remains.

millefleurs darkened by my gravity,  
a pattern I hope they never wash  
away.

I am sleeping here still  
sinking deeper  
wrapping my ending  
in flannel sheets  
sorted by my mother  
pressed by my grandmother  
wrought by wrinkled fingers  
over ages & ages  
to hold me last  
and no one  
else.



# Take me as prescribed

I folded myself into a pill  
contorted my shoulders and  
hunched my knees,  
flattened my face to match  
the shell I urge you to swallow.

Inside it is milky blue,  
whorls of morphine  
fireworking like blackness  
under my dreaming lids.

My feet lose feeling  
waiting to be consumed.  
My hair senesces  
and I am bald as your teeth.

Please choose quickly.  
Drink water or absinthe,  
orange juice or Kool-Aid  
laced with past mistakes.

I am the one lying  
at the bottle's bottom  
colored orange by the kitchen light.  
You can't miss me - I'm last.

Drink. Swallow.  
Press your tongue  
to the roof of your mouth and soon  
I'll be with you

always.

# Topsoil

When I lost my skin  
I found petals  
work just as well.

Folding dahlias into daffodils  
tulips between jasmine,  
hosta on my feet &  
bleeding hearts around my throat.

Where some skin escaped you  
I planted moss in pores:  
cultivated fiddleheads in place  
of follicles  
& watered the creases  
you forgot.

When you uprooted my face,  
laid bare muscles bleeding  
like grapevines cut too short—

I seeded the wounds with thyme  
myrtle, aster, yarrow & heather.  
My back now thrives  
in lavender and phlox.  
My heart shelters under daisies  
hugging hyacinths close.

Colors run  
like tears  
like defiance  
like survival.

This isn't your garden.  
You may have my skin  
but I am something  
stronger.

I grow more each day  
blooming, filling the space  
you used to burn  
with shade.

## And it dries and dries

In my mind a butterfly catches pneumonia:  
Flap flap the world is changed.

There's a second life but not a first,  
there's you and no there's just me—  
no we no us just just just  
iron and  
lilies and  
coffin nails.

All I want to see is darkness today,  
tomorrow.

But the light keeps intruding  
even after the candle, snuffed by heaving breaths,  
snuffed enough to undo the whole legacy of definitions  
I've been trying to land on, trying to find  
in darkness and heat.

Did you know oil has eyes?  
They watch when we drill through lungs  
through heart, searching  
arching  
aching in the earth.

Earth full of bones and mucus.

They said: find a world that never ends,  
a globe that never circumferences,  
a planet without time outside of time  
inside a box under a table  
with three legs.

Listen to the drill  
deeper, into a hollowed-out sphere  
crafted of papier mâché  
but using too much glue  
like we always did.

There's nothing left  
(but lots left, covering the whole vast  
world)  
an embarrassing mess that no  
one  
wants to clean  
up.

So I bend down  
and tear off a page  
to write on: ending lines from every corner of a circle.

Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow  
faltering, wheezing, dripping  
over the edge, pooling off the pages  
because the glue is still wet,  
still sticking and dragging away my words,  
pouring over my feet.

Stop. Step.  
Step two.

there should have been a step one, but there isn't.  
It was swallowed, see, no—hear—*here*,  
in the smallest hole you find  
among trembling butterfly bodies:  
twitch twitch  
itch, a scrapped memory hovering  
at the back of your eyelids,  
just out of reach.

Step, step, step.

# Mothers become stepmothers in fairy tales

In daguerreotypes they conceal us  
under quilts, screened in scratched-out  
ink, hiding on the left on the  
right side of our children.  
We are born in birthing  
our new ghost lives.

Mothers cannot be bad mothers.  
Mothers cannot be good mothers.  
Women cannot un-mother  
de-mother, never-mother, self-  
save through emptying  
being empty  
facing empty  
dying empty.



We are born to mother  
mother mother smother  
our lives in the dreams  
of others whose being  
Unmade ours.

In fairy tales there are  
no mothers anymore.  
We fall back into the past  
off-screen, under screens  
hidden in the artificial shadows  
of our children.

*Stay still  
so the camera can  
cut you out.*

This stepping of us,  
titles be-stepped, ties  
Unmothered, severed  
deleted detached despised  
in adding just one  
word.

Step.  
Step.  
Step

on her and see  
her melt away

leaving her children  
alone again alone  
standing, staring into the lens  
she cannot  
see.

# For this meal we thank her

The Willow Wolf has asked  
“What do you see in me?”

Each night we meet  
beneath a moon that wanes  
and waxes unseen. Tinted  
clouds describe her face;  
I shiver under wraps,  
brocade the night  
embodied.

When I visit the Willow Wolf  
I bring a basket of cheese  
and Meat.  
We dine together under  
hidden stars, trees  
whispering too loud.

I tried to stay away from her,  
from this place adorned in rot—  
leaf decay and owl pellets  
webs of fungi like  
summer snow.

I cannot stay away from her  
even after all she's done.  
Her teeth are long and lovely  
Her ears so soft, so warm  
Her eyes draw and draw me  
into darkness again,  
again.

Tonight when she asks me  
why I sit why I lie with her  
in a tangle of claws  
and skin

I tear a cut of Meat in half,  
share shadows too bright  
—too warm.

“You’re all I have,” I say  
I mean it—as I mean everything  
Every act.

She smiles at me  
and we lounge together  
consuming the last halves  
of grandmother's  
flesh.

## correspondence

i wrote a letter to death today.  
i signed my name, and all.

i asked him how to cope  
with feeling so alone.

thought maybe he would know,  
what with the business he runs

so smoothly, after all—  
he's been at it quite a while.

i suppose it was silly to wish  
for some kind of response.

i'm sure he's very busy  
reaping *earth to earth*

but i thought maybe we had something  
after all these years.

he's met my parents  
and my cousin too.

he had a run in with my niece  
and a cat or two.

i thought that surely by now,  
he'd heard about me.

but it's been four weeks,  
and no answer's come in the mail.

i don't know what to do.

this big house is so empty  
(now the cats have gone, too).

maybe

i'll write another  
—*ashes to ashes*—

or maybe i'll wait  
and ask him what he thinks

*dust to dust,*  
face

to

face.

# Mary Celeste

Swell below my intestines,  
break, regroup, rise again.

gurgling hunger rends the night;  
desperate hunger shakes the sky

up, down, tossed this way by  
fate, tossed that way by

a misplaced heartbeat, a misjudged  
destination. Intestine swell,

stomach turn, belly of the beast:  
the temper-tossed waves.

Calm me, tell the sea:  
recalculate the stars, recalibrate

the senses. Misjudged, ill-placed  
faith, in these treacherous waters



from shore to endless horizon,  
falling off the edge of the world

shrinking into the distance,  
convulsing, converging. We took

this path in error, we took  
an empty ship into

overflowing sensation. Creaking  
timber, swelling sails, lifeboat

splashes, plunges us  
together into history.

Squeezing hands, thrashing  
dreams; bear west

onward to the unknown, swells  
stretching and imploding into

water drops on  
chapped skin.

# Oddkin

on the grey liminals  
of the ocean—shorelines—  
places of salvage  
where spirits idle &  
futures  
wonder  
wander  
under the captive witness  
of a disheveled sky

multiplicity unfurls in seashells,  
mussels cracking open  
tasting the danger on the  
shape-shifting breeze.

I found  
a piece of broken sapphire  
smoothed by the tantrums of the sea.

cylinders collapse when waves wash  
through them; we find their  
bones wrapped in the dust  
of ancestors forgotten.

my pockets, distended with exiles,  
carry broken migrants from  
worlds connected by dead things—

behind me the bridge widens  
reflecting a screaming sky.

and

Then I will dig my fingers into the clay  
searching for maybe, for what,  
caked joints with ash in the gaps  
where questions once hung. Then  
I will shed the pebbles & make way  
for gravel to line my seams,  
struck from what I was, patched,  
glaring in the sun. Then I will  
carve into myself the words  
I forgot to speak, so when I sit  
cross-legged in the field

my voice is legible

for ages into now.

Then all that I wrought or ripped out  
of the soil of my beginning, falling back,  
collapses with the dawn  
And I am nothing more  
than what rude armament was made  
of me

when it all began.

# Huios: Phaeton's Flight

that morning, my father lit a candle for me  
to guide my ride over sea and shore.  
I threw myself open, rising, ready.

thermals buoyed me, pulling  
me ever on, yet always keeping  
me at a distance, keeping me  
just far enough away.

I rose and rose until I was sailing  
through a cloudbank of smoke  
and flame.

my eyes filled with fire, and I remembered my name to him.

son. sun.

*step one, two—  
two hearts, side by side.  
step one, two—  
higher than before.*

step one into the sky,  
step two into me.  
step out of me.

*we opened our eyes and saw dawn  
falling with stars around his ribcage,  
opening wide onto eight hooves  
straining free of our bony stable  
riding high on the horizon.*

*our charge led him on out of himself  
into the mist.  
into the fall.  
nostrils flared against the flame,  
our legs kicking the air.*

*taut skin, stained sunrise-red.*

I took down the tendons of life  
and wove them into ropes to hold my fears,  
ropes to hold my ambitions.

in the pre-dawn light I fastened them  
to part of myself  
wrapping them round and round my life,  
cinching tight.

*in the pre-dawn light we held tight  
flying into the mist  
into the smoke  
into the future.*

*we flew in captivity  
bound by ropes of his fashioning;  
bound and bloody and scorched by desire.*

*we rose over whole, unbroken skin.  
the higher we got, the rounder it became:  
speckled and spangled  
imperfect, bruised.*

*in the distance: twirling stem  
straining into the atmosphere.  
sometimes red, sometimes green,  
with a broad white sea where his teeth sunk in—  
tearing flesh and exposing core.*

*seeds falling out of the world  
into empty shadow.*



when the muscles in my arms lost their tension  
reins slipped out of my hands.  
snapping skin, snapping sails—  
torn, shredded by light.

useless wheels skipped off their axles  
forging their own path through the mist  
and dissolving back into the past  
until all that touched the ground were fallen leaves

red and yellow and orange like the chariot.

*gold, gilt, blood.*

I reached the apex,  
staring down at all the things I hadn't made  
all the things that weren't mine to create  
but mine to shine upon.

when the time was right, I dove  
and snatched the apple from the ether  
biting in, spraying ocean to the stars.

*as we were falling, we recalled his name to him.*

*son. sun.*

# Heel to Toe

My grandmother put silver  
slippers on my feet; she told  
me to walk in them, click  
my heels.

Her slippers glittered like stars as  
I teetered from bed to wall  
*click click click*

Back with her at bed's end  
I stepped out and found blood lining  
dried brown spots adorning  
the heel of one, toe of the other.

I asked her how she cut  
her feet inside shoes that always  
always fit her perfectly.

She said nothing, said to put  
her lovely slippers  
on again.

My feet grew to fit—  
cover the stains and click  
my way to work  
—click me home  
again.

My grandmother died  
when I was twenty-five  
lying alone in that bed, gray hair  
a veil across her face.

I found her amidst tangled  
quilts, unscarred feet  
bare

like mine used  
to be.

# The Art of Betraying Others for Food

First, one must be selective.  
Very few dishes can be valued above  
the lives of your loved ones,  
or the world.

*Case: Items labeled for consumption*

Arranged on a glass end table, they plead.  
Drink me, Eat me. Honor this request.  
Pick your potion, select your quantity. Destroy  
private property in anticipation of another  
Bite.

*Case: Bread crumbs*

To rid oneself of meddlesome  
stepchildren, charge a Dustbuster  
to its full potential. Follow the trail they made,  
cleaning all the way.  
These crumbs are perfect  
for stuffing.

*Case: Candy house*

Set your oven to 400 degrees.  
Wrap your witch in aluminum  
to prevent dry meat.  
Roast, toast, and finish  
with candied walls.

*Case: A basket of goodies*

Here is a crossroads.  
Your tongue lolls. For sweets,  
murder one girl. But if you are  
the girl?

*Case: Wolf meat*

Take one knife and sharpen it  
next to a cottage and an ax.  
Skin, mindful not to stain  
grandmother's best linens.

*Case: Sons who rape*

One meat pie, seasoned  
and served as an appetizer  
for blood.

The aperitif is always

Delicious.

# the glaciers made her deep

When I was born, the Valley whispered into my ear:  
“These hills will hold you. These hills  
will keep you safe.”

I listened and I walked the paths she laid  
across her chest, following the murmur  
of the river at her heart.

Each time I looked up from her soul  
I saw them—holding the Horizon  
at bay.

Trees formed a lattice to dapple the sun;  
at night they played tricks with the moon.  
She sleeps on, swaddled in promises.

Awake, I have seen what waits beyond the Valley.  
I do not tell her, though it comes closer  
every year.

I do not interrupt her dreaming pulse  
as the Horizon leans over her hills,  
breathing ripples onto calm water.

## saving daylight

I lost an hour this morning—  
let it slip between the sheets  
caught up in dead skin  
& exhaustion trickling under  
lucent dreams unseen.

I lost my way in March  
when spring yielded the front  
to winter, gales rolling unfaced  
over tulips just struggling  
to bloom.

In snowmelt I lost my being  
shimmering blinding in the waxing sun.  
I tried to drink myself back,  
swallowing icicles like swords  
until all my bones were frozen.



Between dead branches I thought  
 there could be no losing,  
 no fraying of time and purpose—  
 but I was wrong, hiking into dapples  
 where soon my footprints crunched away.

I thought we could save daylight:  
 make her pure, cancer-free.  
 I thought we could shave away her  
 climate-altering tendency  
 like stubble & ingrown green.

This morning I gave her one hour  
 of my future, always dwindling.  
 She took it kindly, offered me warmth  
 & cold beyond the season.  
 I know

no matter what I give her  
 she can't help her growing,  
 tingling to burning, my hands seized  
 on the bellows of her beckoning.  
 she tells me:

*next*

*year*

*make*

*it*

*two.*

# Wait when ice forms over my fingertips

like acrylic nails,  
biting through skin and overwhelming  
my eyes

my heart isn't strong—it never was—  
and I saw the novae exploding across  
your face and I wanted their fire

I dreamt of stardust and murder;  
your lips like a coffin seal out the  
enemy of life and they  
stop and never stop  
but I want to see them start

oh just once let me start  
let me talk when I know I can't  
and I know my teeth are shifting  
and my gums bleed every night

but it's okay because you're permeable  
and we can feel together and  
you bleed beneath me and I scream

yes because we did it and it hurt  
but scars tell us where we were  
and I was and  
you were too.

I wear my scars with pride  
because getting this far—  
it hurts.

# Syph

lichen creeping up my edges  
my skin a moldering  
doorframe, a portal  
disused, wetness the creak  
of absent maintenance.

My lungs thickly varnished,  
sticky under bare feet stepping through  
breaths  
drifting no-smoke current  
but nicotine left its mark already  
an artist in shades of  
bronze

I am the stale scent of a place inhabited  
by incidental movement

and my capillaries taste  
like fire and filament  
weighed by toxicity,  
a tangled miasma  
of breaths traded  
wants for wants, admonitions  
commands  
surrender.

Behind a door a scene is carried out  
in shuffling  
and we fly through, buoyed  
on the wings of our sexual  
transgression onto

a threadbare rug  
stained  
with our soot.

# Coronation

because a crown  
    has spikes. its shape inherited  
from the debt we never paid  
to the stars.

because a star is crowned  
    by fire.  
    oblivion in place of purple  
    velvet and ermine.

crown of thorns  
of flames  
so heavy with precious things  
    it breaks the bearer's neck.

crowns have ever sought to weaken.

Because a coronation is really  
an execution.

out with the old. in with the Always Has Been.

A chain of heredity.

A chain of tradition.

a band of silver.

a chain.

In gold the crowned ascends,

descends,

sits at the bottom of a family tree.

The only way to rise: death.

Corona of stars, corona unchanging.

corona enduring.

necks break and

spires rise. the every king

is nothing

but

a hatstand,

a pillar of flesh

to support

the ever

crown.

# Seeing-holes

He removes his mask last,  
hips swaying pendulous  
stage lights blinding  
white his perfect body  
sweatless, weightless.

His burlesque ends in broken china  
the shards of his face quivering  
swaying with his dance  
while silent watchers wave  
in place of applause.

the front row feels Him,  
his gaze rippling our edges  
recalling the breaths we left  
outside his curtained hall.

He dances naked, as naked  
as we could hope  
were we anything more  
than reflections in trembling porcelain.



tonight His performance captures,  
holds us in our interim.  
it is as special as the one before  
and what comes next.

folding his bones back, He retreats  
behind the diaphanous waves  
that divide his death  
from ours.

alone *en masse*, we are here  
still watching the shaking pieces  
of the ruby mask He wore.

between this dance and the next  
shadows shuffle and  
He returns to an audience  
strikingly different,  
strikingly the same.

He enchants our leftover thoughts  
to stray from the rooms we wonder  
exist beyond, behind.

His burlesque enfolds,  
intrudes  
entices us to stay  
to watch him  
again.

# vigil

i have left the grass behind  
filled with ajuga, violets,  
hyacinths you love  
phlox in purple and white.

between your buzzing i want to tell you  
i cannot leave entirely.  
i am stuck in yellow and black  
bars prickling with summer.

there is no one left to wander  
between your wingbeats  
to whisper my news  
to you.

last of my kind, i come to you  
swirls of pollen remain—  
last of hair, skin, entrails  
run out of fortunes.

no one came to tell you of our ending.  
no one remembered  
we created laws  
to preserve our dying.

dust on autumn breeze  
i hope you hear me,  
words soaked in honey  
over your busy melody.

We have finished.  
We have ended.  
We have no more wings  
to beat in the sun.

no voices now remain  
to name the forgotten.

with my fading, I breathe  
our final song  
to you who sing  
under hidden gardens of gold:

*goodbye, goodbye.*  
*i will miss us.*





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are too many people to thank, too many hands that—to greater and lesser extents—helped steer me to this place.

From my earliest to latest influences, I'd like to express gratitude to Emily Dickinson, Elizabeth Bishop, Ocean Vuong, Danez Smith, Katherine Larson, Theodora Goss, Anna Maria Hong, and all the other poets whose work drives me to make mine better.

Thank you to my incredible mentors: Robert V.S. Redick, David Anthony Durham, and JJ Amaworo Wilson, in the Stonecoast MFA Program. Especial gratitude to my cohort, and the Coven that has stayed with me, reading drafts and offering support through all struggles. Words are magic.

I must thank my stellar agent, Amy Collins, and J.D. Harlock for editing this collection. Huge thanks to Justine Norton-Kerston for believing in my work and making this collection a reality.

To every magazine and anthology that published poems reprinted in this collection: thank you for your passionate promotion and editorial touches. Thank you also to the friends I found online and at conferences—you make this community a wonderful place to be.

Thank you to my family for not stopping me when I switched my major from biology to English. You believed I would make it more than I did.

Finally, thank *you* for holding this book—digitally or physically—in your hands. I hope these little worlds found a shared language with yours.

## *About the Author*



Marisca Pichette wrote her first story using quill and ink, sitting on a rock in the Western Massachusetts woods, a leatherbound journal balanced on her knees. Since then, she has published stories and poems across genres, with work appearing in *Strange Horizons*, *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, *Fireside Magazine*, *Flash Fiction Online*, *Vastarien: A Literary Journal*, *PseudoPod*, and *PodCastle*, among many others. She makes her home next to the woods that continue to influence her, busily filling the pages of a new journal.



# WHEN WE HOLD EACH OTHER UP

A SOLARPUNK NOVELLA

PHOEBE WAGNER

Coming April 18, 2023

Pre-Order at

[www.android-press.com/bookstore](http://www.android-press.com/bookstore)



Android Press

Science Fiction & Fantasy Punks

[www.android-press.com](http://www.android-press.com)

# CAGED OCEAN DUB

## Glints & Stories

DARE SEGUN FALOWO

Coming June 20, 2023

Pre-Order at

[www.android-press.com/bookstore](http://www.android-press.com/bookstore)



Android Press

Science Fiction & Fantasy Punks

[www.android-press.com](http://www.android-press.com)