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If It's Hot

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If It's Hotot

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
in
Creative Writing
Poetry

by

Elle Magnuson

B.A. The University of Alabama, 2015

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IF IT'S HOT

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Poetry Maps a Connection between All Entities: A Preface

Expelled from school once, they called me, *too curious*. In Sunday school, it was suggested to my parents, *Her curiosity confuses the other children*. I write poetry simply for the reason my curiosities have been deemed *too* foul, loud, or lewd to say outright, out loud in the presence of others. And I have never found big questions exciting, such as *Who am I?* or, *How'd I get here?* My simple questions get me in trouble: *What the hell did Jonah use to breathe in the belly of that whale?* For the simple questions turn out to be the big ones, such as *Who taught me to read?* or, *If it's hot, how well will the cabbage do in that plot?*

Poetry permits the space to ask questions, simple or not, wrong or not. And the speaker asking questions may be a man, woman, or palm tree. Should a palm tree ask, *When will the winds end?* we experience a blustering, windy realm, from the palm tree's perspective. And subsequently, we might ask with the palm tree, *Yes, when?* to acknowledge its yearning, otherwise unimagined.

Because poetry permits the space to enact voices that represent the perspectives of non-humans, such as animals and nature, such as a rooster, or a palm tree, we may well enter a realm dominated by humans and, in the content, experience a sense of oppression. We begin to consider the simple questions as larger ideas. We begin to ask with the oppressed, *When will it end?* out of respect for a certain shared yearning.

I find poetry capable of mapping a connection between various entities, human or not. My work attempts to map human-centered perspectives of the world to inquire and converse over our affect on other entities, as well as on each other.

As I try to create her, the speaker of these poems cannot shake her own human qualities. For instance, as she observes her history, I mean to suggest she cannot renounce her experiences with love, heaven, or hell. And because love, heaven, and hell are entities articulated by humans, she cannot renounce herself as human. As much as she finds herself dominant in love-governing the meals, the apartment's decor, the music played, the words said—she also experiences oppression perpetrated by those who love, or once loved her: a father who redirects her sexuality to fit a certain heterosexual social-system, a partner who leaves. Involvement with the human-entirety of love in these poems is meant to convey the speaker's connection to her inevitable human-centeredness—in which she finds a tug-of-war between experiencing domination and contending with oppression. The tug-of-war leads her to question, *What is justified or not? What has she done that is unjust?* as well as, *What has been done to her?* Conveying these contradictions allows the speaker to meditate on every day existence—on what is right to love, or *In which way should a person live? Should the spring-cleaning wait another spring? Should the last few dollars be spent on wine, or given to the man asking for fifty cents?*

The quest to answer what is right to understand, what is right to experience, and what is right to say inspires me. Using sub-narratives, I try to move the speaker in *If It's Hot* through anecdotal experiences of every day existence. There is the narrative of love, death, womanhood, manhood, the Gulf, the city of New Orleans, and personal history. Throughout the poems of the manuscript, I express the dual perspectives of a woman, or man, together with the influence of

nonhumans, to convey these sub-narratives. By expressing these dual perspectives I want to mirror a type of thinking that attempts to connect the justified yet differentiate the justified, that attempts to connect the unjust yet differentiate the unjust.

Poetry allows the space for voices to make just, or unjust statements, in which sound or questionable reasoning may answer. For instance, a speaker may insert a snap-remark, or judgement, in the first line, and later regret the statement at poem's end. Or, the speaker may observe a situation and try to justify its meaning throughout a poem—whether resolving it or not, whether the contradictions turn out to be wrong or not—just as the speaker does in “Cactus,” (19).

In writing “Cactus,” I began to realize I have experienced the natural world in two ways: in its natural state (e.g. a flower blooming from the garden); and in the way of handmade replicas (e.g. art, advertisements, decor, or other artificial representations such as refrigerator magnets, greeting cards, fine art.). “Cactus” attempts to establish a voice meditating on the speaker's experience of the natural world via two perspectives: the cactus as a part of the coastal fauna and as working material in social commerce. As seen from the voice in the poem's final lines:

...the way the cactus used to be wild, primitive
dry beast of the coast's fauna. When did she forget
she was a cactus, and who decided
to make her a forty-foot fast food sign?

I found that because the voice establishes the perspectives of both nonhuman nature, and handmade nature, a space opened for my speaker to ask questions of both the natural world and human beings. Observing the situation presented in “Cactus” attempts to establish the voice of a

speaker who cannot justify the situation—who cannot justify why we clear out land and replace it with replicas of the land, and line it with neon bulbs, flashing, *Eat Here!*

It is the questions that arise from unjust and justified remarks that I find most compelling. For instance, “By His I Mean the President’s” (pg 33) means to document unjust remarks in a domestic-like setting. Observing the remarks of the president moves the speaker into questioning, *What is the best way to respond to this remark?* as she sits in her dirty kitchen.

As I read Joy Harjo’s, *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings*, I began to notice the untitled vignettes of prose poetry featuring multiple voices—sometimes the voices of strangers, sometimes the voices of Harjo’s friends and acquaintances. “Had-It-Up-to-Here Round Dance” includes dialogue between her friend Charlie Hill and Harjo. Epigraphs from Native American figures, such as Muscogee (Creek) elder Phillip Deere and Dineh poet Norman Patrick Brown, evidence the kinship she shares with fellow Native Americans. The collection takes on many other voices, even that of the birds, to examine the violence created by humans and offer a resolution to our conflicts: we must understand how we were created, and that to exist in harmony, we must listen to one another and to our own souls. The collection’s strength rests in its spirit of voice—in its ever-changing form, ever-growing speaker, our forgetting, our waiting, and our ability as humans to love one another.

In a similar way to offer a resolve within human-centeredness, I find the insertion of other voices necessary. Since poetry opens the space where these voices may be experienced, or recorded, making unjust or just remarks, we may further inquire into why unjust systems exist. The imaginative act of poetry allows an experience for any type of landscape. Perceiving a landscape through the eyes of many humans may convey a new understanding of the complexities

structured in our social ecosystem. Once this landscape is experienced and *questioned*, only then might humans understand our connection to entities that do not have the capacity to reason, nor to weigh justice; for even natural entities still, like us, occupy the space on earth.

I

INTRODUCTION

I.

I've had to learn when not to speak:
it hasn't been easy. For instance,
at the cafe, the Man fired me, *loud*
and lewd (and my mopping *poorly*
finished). Why, I figure my craft
is not to wait tables, though even
in my craft, or sullen art
of waiting, the Man says I lack
censorship. Likely, I've been re-
dundant too often with the word
fuck.

II.

Rooted in the earth
a mouth spreading doubt
does say ugly things. Yet
who's to say
when we talk to strangers
intimacy must go? For
when I think of those
to whom I did not speak freely
I think I did not speak at all.

ODELA

On stage the light whitened your silhouette
the way the light celestially cuts through
an overcast sky with vivid strokes
of silver

as you sang, *Stella By Starlight*,
Sweet Georgia Brown, did, *'Round Midnight*.

Backstage I watched you move—the back zip-
per of your dress creased above your waist. O,
Odelo, Odeloo, our timing was off. Awaiting

my mother next to go on, my father
and I studied you—your sway, the down
beat, your sudden femininity—*I'd like*
to kiss her, I whispered

empty of doubt. My father
removed my hat, *Not that!*
Not what lesbians do.

HONEY

From the only window a soft block of light
piped through the café tinting everything orange,
everyone warm. After my shift, sipping iced wine,
I watched the cubes rise and fracture, all the while
listening to a stranger tell me about poetry after
I called Shakespeare a shit—

*It's ok, you'd have to be a poet to truly
understand. Some intelligent people
just don't get it either.*

I thought, should I tell him? Should I say
how jokingly I call everyone *a shit*. How,
on occasion, I do not wait tables but craft
long lines on the muscles that swell beneath

a deer's skin, how I lose myself in her skin
tightening and molding around her thick curving
bone like the honeycomb clinging to a panel
in a beehive box—

*It's all about the subtextual
language, don't you know.*

The stranger kept on trying to move me—
trying to match the way bees move me: drooping
and rising out of the bush more often when it's hot.
The stranger forced my gaze off the ice, curled
my neck with his hand—

*So, honey, stick it to me, and
why don't you only
say what you know.*

Actually, I'd prefer you with breasts.

SIMPLE QUESTIONS

Picking pebbles out off my potted cactus
she asked me to run off and look for a dream—

Nothing massive?

No, and don't ask why you have to look for it.
Everything she said that summer seemed damned
important: *it just has to be a dream—*

May I ask a question?

*Yes, but not why, and nothing as big as
who we are or how we got here.* She meant
simple questions: *but rather, is the shade
of this one yellow—*

*Now that's big
somehow, I interrupted—*

for what she asked seemed big—as if music
were asked to be played, or not played;
as if it were easy to see the end of things,
but hard to see their beginnings; as though
the color of the pebble in her hand
could be defined; as though it were entirely
simple to linger
on dreaming.

COLORING

*Your brother got arrested, Ma said,
setting ice in her glass, then uncorking
the pinot—*

Why?

*He attacked me, threw me,
threw me into the wall.*

would have been easier to be a fish
swimming in that pinot—

So you called the police?

easier to have been ear-less,
unfamiliar with her redundant

coloring
of facts: *Yes, I did.*

Can anyone be a fish? Nothing
hard or easy, but speaking
makes it so—

Ma, you should not have done that.

for unlike a fish or the pinot
aging, a sister must crow.

QUIET WITH A LANGUAGE BARRIER

*For Mary De Rachewiltz
Brunnenburg 2017*

One person speaks three languages;
one person speaks two languages;
another speaks three, or four, and
another learns a fifth. Ten people

speak one language: A visitor
in the afternoon serves matcha tea
in a Japanese bowl. Mary's mother's,
Olga's, Japanese wooden shoes rest
on the Italian castle terrace table.
Mary says she buried her mother
in her mother's kimono, but forgot
to bury her mother in those wooden
shoes. Mary says her mother's buried barefoot,
*so she will be barefoot
in heaven,
or hell.*

*That's good, I say,
if it's hot.*

HIGH AND DRY

Up on the second floor, the sunlight
submitted to its fleeing, then fled
behind the tips of neighborhood roofs.
As if eventide were maiming the earth, night
folded into herself the way an ironing board
slides into a wall. I paced the apartment
rehearsing for hours, convincing myself
the line on Heaven I'd written moved me.
The rooftops remained rooftops, replaceable,
redundant. My line in night's folded light
remained equally convincing, equally re-
dundant, as I, too, became replaceable inside.

Outside, a colony of frogs chirped freely, loud-
ly, reminding me how easy comes mating.

IRIS

I.

In here, *Soft!* screams the acrylic iris. Huddled bulb flails. The food's out. The rotten bouquet bulge reeks around my doorway. The bulge of a rotten tooth tastes like iron when sucked. Iris reflects in the mantle mirror, fills soft, *so soft*, up the room.

In here the knobs crack. In here humidity lingers, leather sweats. Inside alone's quiet. It shifts, alone, from in to out, and *soft*, screams the acrylic iris. I sniff stale coffee grounds. I sniff raw honey. A cloudy sugar crystal catches uneasily tacky on my nose tip. In here from nowhere identity wanes. I understand nothing and forget the pervert asking, *Why's a beautiful woman like you not married?*

Iris in the nose of the mantle mirror screams, *Soften up the bad tooth.*

II.

Why's a beautiful woman like you not married, pervert

Eric asked me out front Frady's for the fourth time since January. It's March. And much as termites swarm in summer, I expected his remark; only, I'd just come out for cheap coffee; only, I'd just come out

my place where I'd hung the mock acrylic all morning, and no one thinks of termites mid-day. Iris fit best opposite the wall with the mantle and its mirror. I centered the iris to reflect the way a face reflects, controlling the mirror's center. Iris in pastels flails its bulb softly open on the wall, hung, also, in the mirror.

Soft! Iris screamed. The inside-sun's white shifted and shot. Alone hid fat and privates and when the iris submitted to its filling and filled, I forgot

how like a bad tooth, I, too, make things hard. In the way, coming out for cheap coffee made cheap coffee hard when the pervert piped up again. Hard outside murmured; again, I answered the pervert,

Well, I don't plan on marrying a man like you, if you're asking.

II

STRAY HEAVEN

Blonde angel singing last night at the bar
started heavy with her guitar ringing. Upright

on her stool, she started with the crowd
empty. Not a crowd to mirror. Not even

drunk company. As a stray, I realized, *Why,*
in Heaven
most nights must also be full of emptiness.

COCK OF THE SIDEWALK

In the slow first hour when the dawn wakes
a rooster waltzes around St. Claude, around,
around
a sullen piece of filth slid off the disheveled
sidewalk's concrete, which the sun, too, wakes

with its glory-like glare on the gutters—
Cool it down, Brother! Say, better cool it

down! The rooster crows on my curb
not quite hot. If the weighted freight train

would simply pin him under cargo, drag
him slowly back, down along the rails

until he's fed up from the city—and if the city and if the city
would swell his lungs black with morning filth with ng filth

reflected off the oil puddles, then his cockerel waltzrel
would sieze waltzing, and his throat would be too full

for crowing. I realize, it is never quite mid-day
and I've emptied a pack. But in that true strangeness

of the first hour when the light awakens the crescent,
I think, *Come noon, I too, will be empty and crowing.*

THE BUCKET

See the begging
outside that

yellow
corner store?

*Don't pay no mind
to that fella. Poor.*

Poor like a crowd of sinners
in Heaven. Poor as any disease

that chokes what's easy.

*His rotted mouth
don't open, see?*

The cardboard sign taped
to the side of his measly

bucket wafts.

*About
to be kicked.*

THE SIREN

For "Slim Bodine"

Against the canal, a siren echoes. The street light lingers,
ripples waft dead-fish odors like shadows from Hades
over the black water. A rooster, with his stick, sits
on the edge of the canal—

cancer does not make anyone attractive—

no tongue to swing around, no tongue to whisper why
the radiation in his mouth burns, why—

*he could whistle any tall thing out of the water
and stick it in the Siren's mouth with precise
timing before she'd dive
back in—*

Fuh! The rooster screams for the siren, wishes
it were for him, wishes someone knew of him
burning, by the water—

*of the same canal he used to walk along to reach
the cockfights in the orange grove.*

Before the orange trees rotted, the birds would jerk,
hawklike in their spurs—*Caw! Heave!* Blood-water,
fifth and feathered muck-eyes ousted in the mud
daddy's-got-you now kind of cockfight under
the lamplit oranges.

Easy before things began to rot. Nothing
dead, now, only the dying, beached beside
the water's edge.

SOFT

A stranger's hand combs the edge of the salt-marsh and feels for the cordgrass' soft root. Soft salt-water, field settled. The patch of meadow

anchored and docked. A stranger's hand seized the sore on my thin neck, the sore from before I'd ever felt hands seize. Before I was not thin,

but soft as the cordgrass' root floating untouched. Soft, as the cordgrass' root low in the coastal saltmarsh.

THE SEA KISS

Sand dune, you aren't the sand dune I knew. Sparse
bristles flock. The saw palmetto's palms drab
and dry. Sand dune, you, smaller than a mound,
have meager mud clumps clumping in the crease
your breast shape drew from another sand dune.

Strong enough to walk up on, but I can't stand still, sand
dune, your breast crease bottom's hearts caked, not
fluttering. The wind skips, and me, I'm not the me
of what I knew: breasts waned to skin, throat
to sternum, and rib out flat bone, and

like the single harbor light, I burn
better alone—that is to say, in me a downright woman
still. That is to say, in you the sea kiss still glows.

CACTUS

On the side of the beach highway along the Gulf, where all the tourists stop
for a landscape photo of the narrow road running off
 into the arid sand dunes, two
workmen posted a crane,
adjusted and fitted an arm
onto a forty-foot cactus. *No regrets, cactus, I thought, the piping plovers, sea-*
gulls and terns have fled. And soon, a ton or two
of asphalt will be poured and painted over
as parking spots, where the raw beach
used to be wild the way the cactus used to be wild, primitive
dry beast of the coast's fauna. When did she forget
she was a cactus, and who decided
to make her a forty-foot fast food sign?

GOOD DEER

The deerskin: thin, and cut slowly
as if someone has traced the outline
of a hand. As if someone started below
the thin neck and split down each leg,
down all sides, skin down, working
down her body.

Her path: thin,
for she came out
from the bush straddling two
 fallen trees feeding
into the blue-green
dew-bright pasture.

In the scope—
moisture,
an icy fog
intruded upon
the stalk.

The meat: cold inside.

She's cold,
hung up
after field dressing—

all in one gesture: gutted
and cracked sternum
to pelvis, her tailbone

butterflied back-legs.

In one pry: yanked

the organs
and fetus out—

her shape: lost.

The branch,
barely rocked,
hoisted her up.

A seasonal

hit.

A low hanging

chandelier.

Good supporting rope,

good tree branch,

good deer.

SYMPHONY

I take my morning, stop at the corner for a coffee,
stay for a cigarette. Some cats there on the side benches
chat with me, when out of nowhere
this Maestro leads his horse
down the street. It shits.

And I'm in awe of this Maestro's disregard—
far from anything easy the wine
by now having certainly disappeared.

In my pockets, two dollars—how absurd
to breathe! A gust of wind
festers through this measly

Satsuma tree—*Wave your hand, Maestro,*
can you hear the orchestra
of the leafed quartet? I ask, in a voice that means:

With my open arms I will join you, but if I stumble
through the second movement may I try again?
Try to make it move, that is, I want it

to move, and, *I want it to move you*, like a train
dragging its cargo across town
an interlude ringing blues and classics
of dew gathering on my coffee cup

of my arms open to any morning's extempore symphony
of shitting. Tied to a bundle
of chili peppers, a rooster cocks by,

Caw me Jefe! some cat rasps as if he were the voice
of the rooster tied, and I realize, how terrible to be awake
always this early.

III

INTO THE AIR

On my hand,
the veins bend
like nurses, between
the knuckles, then
unfold into their path
like ironing boards.
Blood runs as deer
run. Into the air,
I raise my fists
to reach and figure
how big I am becoming.
And sharp!
as a signal,
my veins reflect
a yellow
river trying
to be blue,
the way one
expects blue

veins. But!
tap-tap, uh,
bip-d-t-bop—
yellow,
my veins signal
I am as big
as this room
and the air
and the time
I have spent
on this earth.

CHINESE ZODIAC

Born in the year of the rooster, breach
and early, I had a brother already. Half
of him, me. In the year of the Ox,

May '09, my brother met his son
early in the morning in the bright
stale white delivery room. At nineteen,
he held the seven-pound infant, half
himself, tucked unevenly between forearm
and blue paper robe. Behind the nurse,
he stood, frozen in new fatherhood,
stared at his son's gummy mouth, now
wailing, yellow, his new body bloody,
the muck still in his hair.

Born in the year of the horse, my brother,
who gave his son up to the nurse,
who thought, How much easier
it would be to leave—for
neither a horse, nor
a boy, can a father
be.

And as for the rooster,
all it can do is crow.

ENROUTE TO MY FATHER'S SECOND WEDDING

the sun hanging under the backwoods passing
cast shadows of limbs across the dashboard
like marionettes dancing. At the end of the drive,
deep into the lines of the trees, the heat lingered
above the road:: a mirage traveling with me,
overshadowed— dowed—
my father at the altar, overshadowed—
that bloody ceramic vase
on the floor

from years ago
amy mother split
my father's forehead open, point-blank:
Go to your room! She's too soft hearted.
Our girl, you have nothing to do with this.

I was sent, overshadowed, to forget
I, too, am my father's blood seeping
into the carpet, off the broken shards of the vase.

THIRD BIRTHDAY

Nephew, my brother is a drifter. One day,
he will have to be explained to you. Nephew,
I must tell you he is lost in his own low-down,
down in Mexico, has forgotten you are his. Oh,

Nephew, I must tell you, when young,
you belong to someone. That's easy. Maybe,
your father likes the comforting pain of deserting
you, then coming home again. And what he left

behind, dear boy, one day, sure as the sun
cannot experience the sullen art of sight,
he'll come home to find
you are no longer his.

SPOON

A damp thing left with nothing ages. The cardboard cigar box out of what my brother left had nothing to show for what it held,
or hid,

if it even carried cheap tobacco. Smelt like damp papers rotted and dried. They say rot is rot. Yet a mean cigar box covered with blacklists carved

in knife print—as if more than rot was kept. Some drifter’s mind was made up, some renegade’s baby conceived: a son born, and bad

judgments left— yet
best of all: that mean cardboard cigar box trashed beside the wooden spoon splintered

down its bowl from years of pops on my knee. Ma kept a wooden spoon in the car to scare me into behaving. Now,

I can’t trust any wooden spoon not to swing back on my knee, pop,op, swell a cherry.

TO THANK

Ma, you colored the world by saying
I should be thankful how flesh covers
bone, how the moon stays up in the day-lit
sky, and how childish gifts of laughter heal
the unseen sores: Somewhere in your soul
you will find how to face love. Along

the banks at the cemented river walk, I tried
to stroll, then lie under the big light of the
southern
Sunday afternoon, and wait

wait for the silence over the Mississippi
to strike. But Ma, your lying has misled me,
for if only it were that simple to stroll and find
love, how instantly could my pacing
rest, how easily I could face heaven
and thank hell.

HAMMER

Remember the clerk-ad posted up—

some ad-hoc internet site asked for a lady clerk? Asked for: *Large knockers*. We figured: *Naked*. And remember the effort you took responding, overdoing a metaphor for the sound of those large knockers naked. You kept on, *What do you call? What do you call it?* And I played along: *Ha! A hammer?*

Not well serious, but you took it,
began responding to the ad with your new metaphor:
Exactly! A hammer.

I should have told you then, it is never *exactly*. Too much to say: *Exactly*.

THEN OFF, THEN

At times, I never think to do the best or better thing to do. For instance, I once had the inclination to stare into a light flickering off, then on, then off—until the bulb hummed, died out—then off, for good.

That same night, I held a wet kale leaf soaked from the last bits of ice (water) left against my forehead. My body needed something wet, something soft—no-light, no air, the power having been off for more than ten hours before I thought, *I should have left*

the leaf, the dark. I should have run off where the light bulbs flicker, but never die, then off. But I never think, like maybe, with my bad tooth, I should have quit smoking. Like maybe before the ice melted, I should have fled with you.

MAY I SAY I DO NOT KNOW

how to be alone, nor how to place you into a rondeau—
and would it be all right if I just came home
tonight? In a way, I wanted precision with you,
the way dancers ought to shift as a clock shifts, where two
arms curve, chasing the other's back, folding low in a tango,

forming agile steps around resolutions—with a stone
and detached calm, the ease of nothing to know,
only that in this room you also breathe—how I wanted you.
Is it too much to say, *I do not know*

why I speak, or do, what I say and do. Why, a cuckoo disowns :
its children to ease its life, and leaving things unknown
has eased ours, this two of us. I did not mean
to laugh when you asked,
but your question baffled me: *Is this easy*
when something harder comes tomorrow??

BY HIS, I MEAN THE PRESIDENT'S

You are the woman, and you are OK with dirty. In fact, you prefer dirty vines spawning from windows, weeds disheveling the concrete, cockroaches belly up—the back door, not a door, but a hole in your kitchen wall. Centered in your kitchen you are the woman eating. On the TV, his voice: *Grab her by the pussy*. And you feel it, again, you, the woman.

Someone asks, *As a woman, is it your nature to fight?* You pause—to brawl, or fight? You understand the difference.

To fight? Of course.

You are the woman, and, for example, what faced you—dessert. You had to decide—eat, or let it rot? What would it have ended— digested, shit out—

To fight? Of course.

But on the way to ending something. Water on fire, or the fire will grow, or, deception is the dessert before you at your kitchen table—as of course, you have given up sweets.

OUR LAST SUNDAY

Listen to the Sunday, you said. Nothing, but a live blue enormous body, big as the hand of God, a rounded sky of mid-day light. I nodded—

our last Sunday together: quiet, warmly bashful, disheveled with cracks in its eye, the painful filth and adulthood burning like a match—

the light leaked through the trees, foreshadowed leafless limbs hanging in cold air. A car hummed on its way home crackling over broken glass— dust—

a rotten roof uncovered our shit. The final sound on the street clicked by on a red bike: air took up the smashed can for a slide—no breaks on its back tires, no wine left in our bottle—

simply the two of us, loaded and waiting, placid as patients on gurneys, sitting in awe of this silent Sunday. Godless, injured, quiet thing: outside, with you.

HOME

The busted window screen stays busted,
provoking itself without mending itself.

A yellow smoke blemish centered
on the uncovered duvet: a nicotine ring left

from the direction air sits as it tints the matter
it rubs. I sit on my brass bed frame and bounce

just as I did as a child: under the box-spring dust
and down heap like moss—like Spanish moss

beetling the branches of the live oak I stuck myself in
that time, refusing to come down, all the while

crying for help: *Dear ranger? Worker-*
men? Dear rope? Crane? Good dear,
hear me. Stay with me till I come down.

HOLINESS I HAVEN'T

The sax strikes
in the wind,
the iris hangs
in the mirror.
I speak simply
about the holiness
I've faced, the
holiness I haven't.
Hands centered
on my chest,
somehow polished
my heart's sore
to a fine marble.
Ma sent fruit
to the door.
Every morning
the rooster'd crow,
and my love,
you'd pop out
the busted window,
then give a mean
glare at the sun
for that rooster
who'd crow. And now
as far from there and us,
as the rooster is far
from the sun, you still
linger as a phrase
unuttered. As I move
from in to out, away
from our bed, our table
cloth, the assembly
of our language—
I know now
we will never be
our Mothers with fruit,
our brothers running,
nor our fathers standing
at the altar. Even
in dreams, I find
no holiness, no!
Simply roosters
piping.

THAT HANGING

The iris won't rot. Never
will an acrylic canvas de-
compose and rot. Wind
sneaks into the apartment
and through the torn
canvas, wafts the center
of the acrylic-iris forward
and back. Still hurricane season, a rooster
at noon pipes *C-something, C-sharp, Caw!*
over and over, yet under

the chatter of the palm tree's palms
that clap in the rain passing, the church bell's noon
chime down the block re-
dundantly chiming, and my
tea on the stove mulls
after brewing, his three-note crow
is just out of hearing—

and the iris still
hangs as if there is nothing to hanging
but to waft on, just without rotting.

SOUTH

The first change I made after you moved out of America: I sleep
head faced south, now, not down to earth's center, but as a compass
points south. In dreams

I play something other than your skin, as though it were earth's finest
organ. And now, I avoid talking about my sexuality, because I am not

having sex. *That's shit to tell me not having sex*, you'd say,
but sweetie, these are my changes and I can shit
when I want to. The apartment,

an orchestra assembled by dreamt-up papers, without you
plays something less complex than Brahms
but louder than anything you'd ask for. Like you'd ask for

the neighbor's rooster, *Cool it down!* per diem as if that rooster'd
recognize earth beyond its fence and'd can it. I proposed, *Lob*
pebbles over! *It'll stop piping!*

Had you stayed in the south,
would I still, now, hate the rooster as well as you, I ask, in a voice
that means, because you moved
am I better?

VITA

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