New Bruises

Katelyn Aquilo
University of New Orleans, kaquilo@uno.edu

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New Bruises

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

Katelyn Aquilo

B. A. Loyola University, 2016

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Abstract

The following manuscript is a collection of poetry based on experiences. Religious hypocrisy and abuse thread throughout the collection with both first hand experiences and fictional ones. It is divided into three parts: the hometown, the bodily abuse, and then, finally, the religion.

Keywords: home; religion; abuse; experience; hypocrisy.
The Voices

“The voice you hear when you read to yourself
is the clearest voice: you speak it
speaking to you.”

— Thomas Lux, “The Voice You Hear When You Read Silently”

I often think about Thomas Lux in my hours of need. I invoke God, His name, and then Lux. In my youth, I had often given up on myself. I sometimes still give up on the power of words, especially mine. I think, “How can I stand where they have stood? People like Shakespeare and Bishop and other greats—and even some greats still living, such as Ocean Vuong and Andrea Gibson, and so many more. How can I call myself ‘poet’? In these moments, I think too much on the term, “poet,” and not enough about “poetry.” These two forces constantly pull me, and my writing possesses a tension between me as a poet and the poems as poetry. My voice, my poet-voice, wants to overcome the art-voice to blurt out anything to get my point across; other times, the art wants to stifle my voice. But this tension drives my poetry as I seek a balance.

As I entered graduate school, I began reading Dan Beachy-Quick. I have met Beachy-Quick twice and interviewed him for Rain Taxi. One thing I admire about him is that he refuses to publish a book of poems without a story. His “one-off” poems, as I call them, about his personal life or his observations only appear in journals and magazines. To hear him openly say he does not think his personal poems belong in any work seemed weird at first. That’s all I write! On the other hand, he sees each book as a project. His book Shields & Shards & Stitches & Songs contains poems he has manipulated from Achilles’ shield by way of blacking out different each version of each poem. I did try this
themefr approach once in undergrad. I considered writing a book of poems devoted to
elevators to include conversations in and around elevators, exploring drama found there. I have never returned to those poems. My voice wants to come out NOW! Getting to know Beachy-Quick’s work better has, in a way, inspired my work to be even more personal than before. His voice is different from mine. In addition to the realization that my poem process is different than Beachy-Quick’s, I also recognize my innate desire to be loud. I am not a loud person, but shy, unassuming, small, and most of all, non-confrontational. However, raised as a female in the South as well as being a part of an abusive, controlling relationship has made me feel cooped up. I want to SCREAM. I want my poems to hit readers like bricks; I want my desperation, anger, or passion to spill out. I play around with my text for this reason, sometimes with what I like to call “yelly” words, such as all-capitalized words. They creep into poems. Usually I’ll cut them out, but my first goal when writing a poem is to get the word on the page. One example is my “Tally Marks” poem where I use capitalized words because the speaker is shocked and outraged at her life turning into sticks around her. My poet-voice wants to critique the caged lifestyle a woman faces when she marries a man. The art-voice, however, was not included in the original draft. My voice-vomit is the only voice present. When revising that poem, I needed to reflect on the poem as a poem, and give it space to be art.

Speaking of voice, in 2005 Hurricane Katrina flooded my home and forever changed my voice as a writer. As a resident of St. Bernard Parish just outside New Orleans, I lost my home, possessions, and clothes. What I most lamented losing at that time was my vast collection of books. I lost my entire Nancy Drew series, but luckily I evacuated with my Harry Potter books. I had the most beautiful print copy of Anderson’s
The Secret Garden with its deep-red velvet cover and gold tinted pages that I lost as well. I had read the book in 3rd grade before I knew all the words; its implications I would later learn had been lost on me. That didn’t matter at the time because I enjoyed reading about an ugly girl who discovered her new world within the confines of loneliness. My self-loathing, even at that young age, was akin to hers. But Katrina broke me. As an overweight, intelligent child with a few close friends, I wouldn’t say I was bullied, but I wasn’t invited to everyone’s birthday party. I went to a small school, so I was at the top of the class there. It was easy to be! When Katrina forced me to another school I was in a bigger pond and no longer the smartest kid. Not only was I the new girl, but my peers mocked my dialect. One teacher there told me the hurricane had happened to cleanse the area of “trash.” Like me. This bolstered a pride for my hometown even with its many flaws I now see as an adult. My hometown pride is a part of my poet-voice. My poem, “Gerald’s Donuts” reflects my pride through the parish’s local donut diner, an establishment integral to my home. With poems pertaining to my hometown, the art-voice of my brain finds it easy to wrestle my poet-voice. I can easily balance the word-vomit and the poetic using dialect, alliteration, and metaphor.

While my poet-voice overpowers some poems, other times my art-voice conquers. Some poems in this collection do not directly involve me, but their stories have touched me. “For the Okinawa Neighbor,” for example, depicts a coworker’s story. From the few details I know, I think of the story as breaking the barriers of language. Even though the neighbor and speaker don’t speak the same language, they eventually communicate as the neighbor helps the speaker get to the hospital to deliver her first child. In a new country isolated by more than just language, the speaker has a special connection with her
neighbor through this. I stole this story and made it into a poem. My art-voice almost overtook the poem completely at first. It was so muddled with metaphors and vague imagery that readers had a hard time comprehending the poem. I needed to insert my poet-voice into it. I had to give it a piece of myself as if the story had happened to me so that readers could relate to it.

Likewise, as I aged I began to see how people I loved were racist and homophobic. I befriended people not like me: people of color, Muslims, LGBTQ members. My extensive study of Christianity in college led me to question my faith as well as my religious practices in this regard. I wanted to pick it apart to see the flaws. Not only did this influence my writing, but it influenced my ideas about poetry. My confusion led me to read anything by someone not like me: for instance, Langston Hughes, Jean Toomer, and Gwendolyn Brooks. I also read the book The Help. I sought out homoerotic interpretations of Shakespeare sonnets (specifically the Fair Youth ones) as well as gay critiques of Robert Herrick’s work, such as, “The Vine” and “To the Virgins.” Herrick’s work seems about woman, but the poet never married, and many criticisms attempt to see through his hyperhetero-eroticism. I didn’t want to mimic those experiences but look at how people unlike me portrayed their raw experiences. My poem “The Color” expresses the racist tendencies I have had from my upbringing I wish to alter or abolish. The speaker is a made-up speaker, but much of that poem is taken from things I’ve observed around me. My poet-voice is there. These realizations about my ideals made me remember that in high school, I read young adult trilogies and series like Harry Potter and Hunger Games. In Harry Potter, the namesake of the series had to save the world from an evil wizard. In Hunger Games, Katniss Everdeen had to overcome and defeat a
corrupt government only to discover the new government as corrupt as the old one. These characters wanted to make a just world. These books, fantasy stories, portrayed a very black and white world with little focus on any grey. I could see the grey around me begging to be noticed since the literature I had read did not. So, I noticed it gave it a voice through my poetry. I used my poet-voice to piece together my own experiences, experiences of actual neighbors, and certain family members’ actions and thoughts to deliver a speaker who is racist and elitist.

Before I even began to see the hypocrisy around me, though, I was in an abusive relationship throughout high school and the beginning of college. I needed a way to show problematic situations without directly condemning them because I loved my homophobic boyfriend and my racist grandparents. These were grey areas those fantasy stories just couldn’t handle. I needed poetry. I wrote so much blank verse to distance myself from trauma I still feel iambic pentameter rumbling in my bones. Being fluent in Latin and having translated Ovid, Catullus, and Virgil, I enjoy meter and the nuances it can provide in poetry. Catullus manipulates meter depending on the seriousness of his subject matter. He has many ironic, bitterly sarcastic poems that are in more playful meters than dactylic hexameter, which is reserved for epics typically.

My traumas were too painful to approach directly, so I chose vague metaphors in traditional meters like iambic pentameter and iambic tetrameter as well as attempting to adopt the dactylic hexameter in English. This is when my poems-as-art-voice became the most powerful. Choosing the best diction was not as important as the structure. My undergraduate professor John Biguenet once told me that before he can truly approach a difficult subject, he must compose the poem in iambic pentameter to distance himself
from it. It allowed him to take a step back after writing and then to manipulate the poem to bring in emotion. On his advice, I wrote terrible sonnets and dreadful villanelles, but soon I discovered Thomas Lux. I thought he was the perfect mix of performance and page poet. His poet-voice never overpowers his poems as art. They are both in balance. His rendition of “And Still it Comes” haunts me still. His readings were beautiful and exciting but never lacking on the page. I strive, still, to write poems this way.

During this time I also began to explore ideas from my theology courses. I consider myself a Catholic who believes in the betterment of the world through Christ’s teachings. However, I recognize that much of our doctrine is manmade and serves only the Vatican, so I want to draw attention to issues within the Church. Being Catholic doesn’t mean I don’t see the problems of our doctrine, which can be homophobic, misogynist, and elitist. Rather than absolving my beliefs, I want my poetry to hold Catholicism accountable. I want to abide by what Jesus believed it could be. I don’t think the Vatican is inherently evil, but many problems need voicing. Ignorance and hypocrisy are different beasts entirely. My friend’s unpublished poem, “God Baking Cakes” inspired me to write my God as mine. In her poem, God is in His kitchen baking the cakes of humanity. The poem alludes to God’s acceptance of all people, including homosexuals and transsexuals, as well as his sadness with violence in the world. I realized I could counter the traditional ways people depict God with the way I imagine Him. My God cares about character and morality over following the Bible strictly. On the other hand, my Mary Magdalene poem exposes ignorance I have found in the Church. Similarly, “Trinitas,” too, exposes an ignorance that many Catholics hold regarding the
Holy Spirit. My poet-voice uses my own feelings about my faith to expose these ignorant ideas.

As I continue to write, I learn better ways shape my voices. I can vomit at first, but I then need to clean up my diction, grammar, and language for the reader. I can read anything aloud and make it sound amazing; the goal is to invite the reader in even when I am not standing there yelling in her face. I need my poet-voice to stop fighting with my poems-as-art voice so much.
I.
Gerald’s Donuts

a small diner in St. Bernard Parish outside New Orleans.

The mom n pop joint has
two locations in my small town:
one up da road, one down,
the only directions
in Da Parish. We’re regulars,

and the diner woman knows
my order: two chocolate covered glazed
with sprinkles. Her accent so thick
I could fry that and make a donut out of it.
Everybody got a regular order there, even

before Katrina hit and sank
Da Parish twenty feet deep.
We all wondered: who
coming back? You?
Me? We done?

After the refinery
poisoned flood waters with oil,
seeping into houses, making
em useless, Gerald’s came back.
The sweet taste of home
we hadda rebuild.

So let me tell you something,
Krispy Kreme and Dunkin Donuts.
Your chains ain’t welcome
here. We don’t want some machine
donut

saturated in fake glaze.
We want home-grown. We want
our own blood in our donuts.
Oh Say, Can You See?

as you walk away, the 30 of you, by the evening’s fading light
all 30 of you bat-swinging baseball-cap-wearing guttural-Adam’s-apple-trembling
cup-repositioning boys
when the game is over and you proudly march
when clink clink clink clink clink of cleats is not the only sound you hear
after the clicking cleats and closing chatter cease
when he drops his bulging baseball bag with a rattle, a clatter, Death shaking his chain
into the trunk

when there is an applause CLAP for the hand-to-skin performance
when the back of his catcher’s hand catches my flesh
as his fingers shackle my wrists against the car
as you start your own cars, clamber the doors, shut
out our seeing-stars bursting through air

even as you blast your radios so you won’t hear us
oh, I know
oh, I know you see by the daylight’s final gleam
but still you just keep going.
A Neighborhood As Told by Paint Colors

Double Latte

I learned a smidge of Spanish so I could speak
to her. Mathalda broke
a lamp in my son’s room. Said I need
not charge her for the week’s work.
It was awfully nice of her to offer repayment
for her mistake.
I didn’t call her back. I didn’t answer her texts.
However, it seems no cleaning
lady could do the job just
like dear, dear Mathalda. Just
the other day it rained so hard I had to sit
in my pearl-esque Chevy Tahoe until it all stopped
because I’d forgotten my umbrella that day,
and I’d not risk my perfectly ironed hair
in this Louisiana wet. The calm came. I dashed
for the door with such voracity I felt my wan cheeks
flush! Mathalda was cleaning her heart out, bless her.
The vacuum roared, and it muffled the door’s closure
as I slipped my shoes off. I couldn’t risk
marring her hard work! My floors looked
immaculate. Granted, Mathalda always arrived
exactly twelve minutes late, but the state
of my tiles made up for her tardiness.
She didn’t hear me come in.
Good gosh, she just
about leapt out her SKIN
when she saw me!
She called me fantasma! She pointed
and called me a ghost! I joked
with her that I wasn’t that white and asked her
if she had gone to any of the other eight
houses she cleans on my street. We’re a gated
neighborhood, so it’d be best if she got us all done on the same day.
Saddle Up

It’s either Jim or Ronnie, but I can’t recall currently. My neighbor down the street has a real good gardener. Real good. He’s black. Ms. Dawn leaves exactly three drinks on her mailbox for him: one red Gatorade, one blue one, and one cold water. My Lord, he is something else. I see him when I go on my jogs. He’s there at least twice a week. The Louisiana sun coats his slick skin with a glistening gloss like nothing you’ve seen, and he seems very nice. I even wave at him sometimes! Goodness, I feel awful about forgetting his name. I swear it’s either Jim or Ronnie. I know Carol, Cindy, Michelle, and Carol L. all use him. I wonder, is he looking for another house to garden?
Our best friends in the neighborhood are the Rodriguez’s down the street. Unfriendly neighbors wall my house from all sides. The Friday night cookouts? We never get invited. It’s rude! So I go down to Ms. Rodriguez’s house to drink a Long Island, and we gossip about the rest of our neighbors. God, Wanda had the weight-loss surgery and looks crack-whore thin. We think she looked much better before with meat on her bones. She’s healthier, but her arms are still flabby. Ms. Rodriguez, an older Cuban woman who refused to teach her children Spanish because in America, we speak English. She’s right. I’ve never heard her speak her own language, and I’ve never told her I know some phrases. It’s Fall time, and everyone around here tries to out-decorate each other with Harvest décor. Oh, the cutest pilgrims and Indians litter the neighborhood! I just love it. Ms. Rodriguez has this thing she does to keep her stress in check: she mows her own lawn. Imagine that! I could never. I don’t think my noodle-arms could push a lawn mower! That’s my husband’s job. But Ms. Rodriguez does it, and I have to say, she does a wonderful job with her manicured lawn. She doesn’t like decorating, so this time of year she hires her Honduran men to come with their long ladders for her tall trees. They labor so strenuously under the blazing sun, cooked to a golden brown by the time they leave! Ms. Rodriguez watches from the comfort of her carport’s shade, instructing with a wagging finger where they should move a giant pumpkin, where a brown ribbon can be tied just right. When it gets colder in December, they’ll be back. It’ll be near freezing by then, but they’ll be back. You can be sure of it. They come back every year for her.
Bred Brown

We have new neighbors.  
They’re not like  
us. They moved into the Doctor’s House.  
A doctor used to live in the mansion,  
and I’ve only ever heard about the interior.  
I would give anything to see the décor  
inside. I try to make nice and wave  
at the young man whenever I’m outside  
jogging, making sure my chestnut hair whips  
ever so lightly in the wind  
as I glisten. Southern women glisten,  
you see; we don’t sweat. I wonder  
if our new neighbors know that all houses here,  
with roofs as tall as pines,  
and among the stucco white  
brick, that all our pretty houses don our yards  
with welcoming waves from St. Bernard Highway. I wonder if they know that were they to tread deeper,  
into the thicket,  
that they’d see  
just how much color  
it takes  
to groom our neighborhood.
Tuesday Art Lesson

We head outside making hearts
for a sick teacher. Their tiny fingers
have never drawn

hearts before. The hearts are lopsided.
One asks, *Ms. Katelyn, what is that
in the sky?*

as she points at a greyish-white
not two miles from us,
ink-limbs reaching into clouds then splaying like hair.

I don’t right away answer
and help the children
cut their hearts.

*My daddy works at the smoke. So does mine! And my mommy too!*  
Mrs. Dooly my colleague replies,
*The refinery, which pays for your tuition,*

*your house, and probably your toys,*
*but now, kids, let’s look*  
*at our weather chart.*

*What climate do we have here?*
One student chimes, *but what do we color*
our weather today? *It’s not cloudy*

*so we can’t color that square,*
*but I can’t see the sky!*

I finally speak.
Color the sunny square.
Racetrak Chalmette Has the Best Ices

1

My icese routine is simple. After tough weeks, and there are many in high school, I buy an icee on Friday.
I walk into the Racetrak. I tongue the icee lid as it excretes coke liquid through the top, rim the sides clean, then stick my straw in. Let it push more out. Lick again.

My icese routine is sacred. Nothing can ruin it. Chalmette Racetrak has the best iceses.

2

Nothing can ruin my icese Routine. Noting except a

Hey baby, how ya doin?
Ain’t seen you in a lowng ass time.

An old customer from my summer job, but no window to close on him here. No coworker to pass him off to. With little barrier, his arm snakes around my waist.
He’s come To fill up.
(Racetrak does have cheap gas.)

What ya been doin? Y’all all okay?
I seen you got a icese—
Racetrak Chalmette has the best iceses.

I am pulled. My hands are pink from groping the icee cup. The straw sucked so hard. My cheeks burning.
I suck, and I
Suck. I suck.
Best ices in da parish, Racetrak.
When the machine workin yeah the best.
When coke broke, I get mountain dew.
Thas my routine.

He asks my age. When I
am silent he laughs with his friends.

Aw, man, bruh, you know he from down
da road when he walkin roun
here with a hunnit dolla bill and no
choos on. Haha, right bay?

He pays for my stuff with a rustle
of green from inside his wallet.
That icee has frozen my mouth
into perpetual sucking O
so I can keep it occupied.
I know he knows my age.

3
I say nothing. I continue.
I continue to suck. I suck
and say nothing until I escape
to lean
and press my forehead
against my steering wheel until
I cry to myself.

I know you know my age.
For the Okinawa Neighbor

I had never seen such a thick coat of snow before. My husband was on base, but me? Sheltered in our small home in the Okinawa suburbs.

The first day in my new Japanese residence, you had helped me with my groceries. You did not speak. You did not know my language.

A later day when the snow-coat blanketed our neighborhood, and my belly bloated in pregnancy decided to expel the occupant, like a lost duckling

I waddled outside. My car, fortified by snow like a multi-walled cell membrane, proved impenetrable to tugging with my cells ready to spring forth. I wondered if my husband could feel it, too: our fetus lurch. You, in a cruel game of Pictionary, attempted giving directions: follow the bus as it makes a path in the snow for you. I couldn’t get it. Drive. You kept saying one word in English. Drive. You labored for hours as you unpacked my car.

As the bus shuddered down the street, my feet carried me to my car’s driver’s seat, soaked in my juices. And I followed the bus.

It was 1993 when I gave birth to my first child, Amber, there. I do not know your name, but I remember you often, every time I look at her. I remember your crude green bus drawing. Drive, you said. Drive.
For Thomas Lux

“Lux sit.” – Genesis 1:3
Let there be light.

And still, it came.
An uphill bullet train full of black smoke and empty milk bottles.
Dust bowls, cyclones of them, pumping into tires, nailed.
Rain clouds clogging catchers, houses hacking up debris.
It came faster
When you were on your back,
Huffing.
When you were tasting your heart on your tongue,
Red lace regurgitating.
It came, brutish.
It came, sudden.
Apt.
Anything but smooth.
It breathed through its mouth,
Which was three holes in one.
It breathed like a vacuum
Sucking in its belly.
It dementored you.

Lux, sit.
Relax.
You are in bliss.
Expectations From My Ex For Our Future Children

Don’t you dare bring home a negro
or I will belt buckle pop;
I’ll snap you with a steel-like blow.

Your grandpa hit us, materialized a white glow,
stars in our eyes from the buckle top.
He would say, don’t dare bring home a negro.

Don’t stray too far out the closet, though,
and if you choose the gay lifestyle, stop—
I’ll snap you with a steel-like blow.

Obedience: You—all of you—must show
total respect, or I’ll show you with my fist top.
I’ll snap! You’ll feel my blow of steel.

My catholic children, fear the Lord’s plough,
able to pluck you right from the crop.
I echo, don’t dare bring home a negro.

Pray for forgiveness, pray the Holy Spirit may flow
from the graces of above, that you not be homo!
Don’t you dare bring home a negro
or I’ll snap you with my steel-like blow.
A Reflection About Love From A Poet’s Youth

She was your world, at first,
Her laughter like bell-chimes,
Your making out during Dark Knight

She was your world, next,
Your Adam’s apple bulging,
Her body rubbed raw at your insistence

She was your world, last of all,
Fearing the men at the mall
She sashays even now, navigating
The least man-ridden path she can find.
II.
Losing My Hair

*I’m cutting off your prom hair!*
Brittany told me years ago snipping some inches

how weird to think
of hair as time
split ends a record
of straightening done for dances

refreshing
I thought
to begin again
to have shed the dead

*normal. normal to lose it.*
75 pounds down and I lose my hair

make mounds in the drain

Mary my dietician said
*normal* it’s *normal* to lose
strand by strand

by strand with my sweat beads
and shower bouquets
the drain
down

*God damn it, Katelyn.*
Dad uses a hanger
to pull the dead slug of my hair from the drain
slug, like the one that lived under my ex’s arm

*normal* she said as I could feel my crown slipping, slipping
down

And that other time after a night out gone snipped
and that other time with cum from the night
shedding like skin
  a fresh raw
    left
  75 pounds

shed, my dead cells, past
self, nesting when I wash clothes
  and the fresh raw
    shedding the memories of his touch
down the drain.
  Have I gained a loss,
    a needed one,
      in my attempt to lose?
Showers Alone

Horror movie solo showers:

I take showers alone.
The rain’s attempt to break
into my home bangs and clatters
the windows and does not bother
me; I steam
my bathroom. I shave before
dark because not enough
light pours into my shower
for me to see. I always miss
my knee. I tap
my razor against the sink
every few seconds
to observe tiny hairs drift
around the sink-pool.

I do not notice the man
behind the curtain. How
do they get in here, the bad guys?
No one knows. Yet
waiting like a trapdoor spider
for me to tear aside
curtains to step in,
naked, to slice
my neck meat. Oh how
sad to die by the hand of
another, not my own.
Always, I’ve wanted to go
romantically.

Real solo showers:

You are not here right now.
I masturbate in the shower.
I’ve stopped shaving.
The light above my sink
illuminates my pimpled
skin, unwashed and picked.
Love Note To Nic Cage

I choose you./And I'll choose you./Over and over/And over.
Without pause./Without a doubt./In a heart beat,
I'll keep/Choosing you.

-Poem Hunter, when Googling “love note poem”

When I first saw you
on a movie screen
in National Treasure,
the leather coat torch swinging
clever thief of the Declaration,
big and glowing,
I knew I loved you.
I loved your receding hairline,
large forehead,
and John Wayne gait.

Later still, I watched your face
change places
with John Travolta’s in an old movie
I’d only just discovered.
You were mad then, Nic, mad!

You hijacked a plane from a hijacker
and I thought,
*Oh, I like em bad,
but only a little bad
til they show they’re surely
the protagonist.* I knew
I would marry you, then.

We were so close when you lived, briefly,
Right, Nic? I would have lived with you
in LaLaurie Manor until you moved out,
the failed horror novelist.

Horrific, that separation; we’ve never known
what it’s like to be together.
The closest we’ve been
is when I bought a Nic Cage eyeshadow
called “Nic Cage Raking Leaves
on a Brisk October Evening”
and secretly I knew it contained bits
of you—skin and hair. Those kiss marks you hate
on your tomb stone in St. Louis Cemetery,
they are all mine!
In Chihuahua, Tarte Cosmetics.

And yes, this eyeshadow sucks!
Sucks so bad it smudges, leaving my eyes looking like a raccoon’s.
And yes, you voiced Superman
in that awful Teen Titans remake
and played Noir Spiderman in Spiderverse,
but you always loved Luke Cage (your namesake) more.

Still, I love you, Nic.
Who said love is easy?
Ten Steps To a Tidy Household

No matter how many times you mop, scrub, and clean, the everyday stenches and stains of life prevail. As long as you cook, play, and well, *live*, they’ll win. So here are tips to keep your house looking tidy as ever!

1. In a respectable pose, scour at the messy living room and the messy couch.

2. While you dust take pictures of all family members (kids, the husband, both of you) so you don’t break them and pack them away. Get rid of that clutter, clutter, clutter!

3. Just dust everything! Ignore your allergies! *Bless you!*

4. Mop next! Well, vacuum, then mop. Those neat little piles of dust won’t stand a chance!

5. That white stain on the cushion? Don’t worry about it! Scrub it until you want to chop your arms off!

6. If the stain doesn’t disappear, shampoo it with toxic fabric shampoo.

7. Discover the panties hidden between two couch cushions; the pink thong may not be yours, so promptly throw it away and ignore the implications.

8. Once you’ve abused your muscles to get that stain out, reconsider the panties.

9. Now to take real good action against this mess! Using a convenient kitchen utensil, stab your husband when he returns from work. That way, there’s no need to ask questions.

10. Drag his bloodied body into the living room between the couch and coffee table; he’ll make an excellent conversation starter accent-rug, don’t you think? It’s recycling! We love a tidy queen!

Once you’ve done these things, you can marvel at your awesome skills, lady! So take time to sip some Merlot as you watch your favorite Netflix flick. Lock your children in their bedrooms to achieve the ultimate alone time. Rest your feet on your new throw-rug. Your visitors will thrill at your skills!
I am sixteen and in love, and I tally mark each time my boyfriend and I tell each other “I love you.” I tally and tally until—

Tally marks leap off the page and surround me! Cage me in a prison. Four tallies fashion the basis for the house. Stick couch and TV neatly form, looking like a child’s rendering of a family’s living room.

Suddenly, two stick children jet by. Crude stick children demand dinner. I hear them demand dinner, their voices ringing like Catholic school church bells in my ears.

My stick house is double-floored like my parents’ home.

When I wander to the kitchen a stick man wobbles as he prepares tally marks in a pot. You can hear the kids like thunder upstairs, a clack clack clack thunder.

They start screaming MOMMY! I see no mother. The stick man turns to me: “Go on, dear.”

Their stick smiles protrude off stick faces. “Me?” When I look,
I see stick arms
down at my sides, and stick legs. Stick feet! Stick stomach!
Stick body.
I’d always wanted to be skinny, but this?

I peer into the stick mirror
and catch a stick figure peering
back. I run to the window—
stick trees! Stick kids
still pegging
around upstairs.

Outside, the stick tire swing sways
as the stick kids
play after their dinner.

I wake up, the notebook
with the tally marks
on my face,
the page stuck
to my skin,
my drool on my chin.
My boy
friend snores loudly, his arm
across my chest keeping me
from rising.
New Bruises

Purpling bruises map the landscape
On my back, on my collarbones,
On my wrists. If one were to
Connect the map they’d
Know my favorite places.

graduation crawfish boil, a bruise garnished
my left collarbone
I groaned each time I moved
wrist bruises—I tripped down the stairs—
for the millionth time?

the reason I don’t want you, Mom,
helping me pack my stuff
when I move;
the box under my bed I can’t
let you see—the cause of new bruises

bruises
bruises pepper across my skin: my back,
neck, wrists,
teeth marks dotting down my collarbone,
spread between my breasts,
constellating between my hips and thighs
—new bruises have materialized,

Christmas, 2017.
Then when Mad Max came out.
A random summer trip to Florida.

My new bruises are consensual.
Ode on My Dandruff

I hope to be like dandruff when I die.
Waging war, beautiful,
as in bella from the Latin.
War
drobe choices. I fight, dandruff sneaking into caverns, camping in knots
and wooded areas; tea-tree
oils prove fruitless; the Stormtroopers that never surrender.
It’s almost beautiful. When there’s so
much of it on my pillow I can draw pictures with my pinky finger on the pillow case.

A snowfall
collection on shoulders causing
a shaking shirt syndrome
I’ve grown comfortable with. Like when you spill
a box of empty Snowcaps whose white dots scatter. You know you can’t pick all of them
up no matter how many you scoop;
the white stuff will haunt you forever.

Like Dad’s favorite candy. Long after he dies
those snowcaps he spilled
on the carpet
while we watched Star Wars Episode VI
I’ll still be monkey-picking from the fibers. And Mom?

She used to comb with her fingers
through my hair to pick
my dry scalp and loose bits
of dandruff. Like a momma monkey
picking bugs. Loose pieces of skin flaked
from my scalp whenever I ran
my own fingers through my hair.
No matter how much she combed,
dandruff still spread like a spore.

Like the stars that freckle my favorite Star Wars shirt collecting behind Darth Vader: camouflage for my condition. Oh, they say hair is just dead scalp skin,
cells that grow into strands; dandruff is dead skin. Hair stays contained; dandruff runs amok, saturating everything it nears. I hope when I die to persist like dandruff.
Losing My Hair Pt. 2

lost in diameter,
my hair

I’ll do it, I say,
I’ll really do it, flush it
down the drain, there,
and offer, threaten even,
to shave my crown
dandruff snow-scalp exposed

my bald will not be smooth like
your squeaky windshield head

plop like the check
your cancer delivers to the plumber

pepper hair dots
everywhere you walk

I’ll do it, I say
I’ll really do it

your capped head shakes
your lips quake

a firm no.
You still got a lot of it left.
III
In Kindergarten, my teacher in her dove voice said

The Holy Trinity, the three persons in one God
is like
the sun!
The sun is a star, right? But it also
has heat! It also sheds light over all
the world
like Jesus!

Teacher, you were spouting Arianism.

Arianism: A christological concept which asserts that
Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit
are creations of God the Father,
therefore not equal to God the Father and so
not one in nature with Him.

So, in my teacher’s analogy,
heat and light do not
comprise the star itself.
The star created them.

Arius, the founder,
realized many Christians
did not have a clear
understanding of the Trinity.
His explanation?
Branded heresy.
II.

In 5th grade, my Religion Teacher shouted at us; how the hell Can three persons be in one God?

The Holy Trinity is like water.  
You can have water in the three states!  
Ice as God! Liquid Jesus! And vapor the Holy Spirit!

Actually, she proclaimed Sabellianism.

*Sabellianism:* the belief that the three persons occupy three different modes of one God as perceived by each person.

Opposing the idea of three distinct beings within one God, Sabellius, a third century priest, recognized that the Old Testament never referred to three different persons. His explanation of the man-made doctrine? Condemned as heresy.
In high school, my Theology teacher began,

Okay, guys, I know it doesn’t make sense, but think of it like this: a three-leaf clover!

She held one up,

A three-leaf clover! That’s it! The Trinity.

No explanation. Which makes it Partialism.

*Partialism:* the belief that the three persons of the one godhead only together can fully complete God-ness and that separately each is Only $\frac{1}{3}$ God.

I know we attribute this analogy to St. Patrick, but did he know he initiated in Catholic schools years of heretical teachings?

Never having heard the correct metaphor nor been taught, are we merely repeating what we’ve heard? Are we never willing to learn real doctrine? To take the time to know our faith? Do all we know to do is spread heresies like Partialism? Like Sabellianism? Like Arianism all the time?

*Amen.*
Exodus 14: 10-15

I have not seen
The Plague, but I collect berries
and vegetables from the garden
I have cultured
to cook for my family before
I mend and fix their clothing.
I usually start my day at a brisk 3AM
and do not finish until after dusk.
I eat only after my husband and children do.

I feel pains in my joints
from the strenuous labor, and by now
I may be pregnant
with our fourth child
at the age of 20. The chickens
I have spent many months caring for, both for
eggs and meat, have just been eaten
by a predator
I did not get a good look
at. My husband is not pleased, and I fear
his hands.

***

When I attend the mass
at my feudal lord’s property, I hear it in the language
I have grown accustomed
to even if I don’t understand.
The harsh tongued language of the elite.
The passage he reads today is from Exodus.
He says,

\[ \text{cumque adpropinquasset Pharao levantes filii Israhel oculos viderunt...} \]

In other words, as the priest explains,
“All you have to do is believe

---

1 Full Latin passage: \textit{cumque adpropinquasset Pharao levantes filii Israhel oculos viderunt Aegyptios post se et timuerunt valde clamaveruntque ad Dominum et dixerunt ad Mosen forsitan non erant sepulchra in Aegypto et videte magnalia Domini quae facturus est hodie Aegyptios enim quos nunc videtis nequaquam ultra videbitis usque in sempiternum Dominus pugnabit pro vobis et vos tacebitis dixitque Dominus ad Mosen quid clamare et proficiscantur.}
in the Lord, and he shall set you free. Believe, and you shall be free.”

I wonder why I am not “free” yet.

---

2 English text: As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the Lord. They said to Moses, “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn’t we say to you in Egypt, ‘Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians’? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!” Moses answered the people, “Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.” Then the Lord said to Moses, “Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on.
Pope Gregory the Great’s 33rd homily in the year 591 A.D. declared Mary of Magdala the same as Luke’s sinner, the one stans retro secus pedes eius lacrimis coepit rigare pedes eius, the prostitute. We conflated her with all sinful women in the New Testament. We write this letter to express our utmost, deepest, most genuine, most sincere and heartfelt condolences on others, not us, having attributed such an atrocity to a woman who exemplified Christian living to women, daughters, wives, and sisters. We may have misspoke which caused others to mistake the women. We always knew who she was not. The original intention of aforementioned incorrect association of the woman in question was done in order to create a more understandable analysis of the Bible to those unable to read and had to rely on us as their only source of the Catholic teachings since at the time our dominant language for the educated was Latin. We have come to realize that could have been a mistake.

After all, it is not our fault others were not able to grasp the concept in the following years. In 1969, our brethren recognized a change in the Easter reading and homily. Before, Magdalene was referred to as a sinner and prostitute, meretrix, scortum, but now she was reiterated as no such woman. The prostitute status then revoked, it should not fall on us to rectify the public’s opinion. This has been such a grave mistake in matters of sensitivity to not only one woman, but all women when it comes to the female essence. In honor of the consecrated woman who first witnessed Jesus’ resurrection before any of his male apostles, something we question often, we will celebrate a feast day on June the 22nd that people silly surely remember. She is the women who should help women see themselves as the aid we, men, need to experience a spousal relationship with God. Women's dignity has often been unacknowledged and their prerogatives misrepresented; they have often been relegated to the margins of society and even reduced to sexually deviant.

Our Bible, having never mentioned Magdala as a prostitute, tells us that she was mulieres aliquae quae erant curatae ab spiritibus malignis et infirmitatibus Maria quae vocatur Magdalene de qua daemonia septem exierant; her brother was raised from his eternal rest by our Savior as well. We have now done all that we can to ensure that Mary of Magdala is no longer a sinful woman in the public eye and interpretation so we can only hope this letter’s circulation will prohibit priests whose homilies subject her as such. It is out of our hands now. The public must learn. However, we are sorry, Maria Magdelena. Being in the public eye, as well as being a people devoted to public service, is about being honest even when you make a mistake, and we, the Vatican, have done so. We are proud to admit our wrongdoings and will continue to address them as they arise.

Sincerely, Gloriously, Repentant As We’ve Always Been,
The Vatican
Fall, Jump, Accident

Project MKUltra: a top-secret CIA program for covert use of “biological and chemical materials.” Frank Olson “died” at the Manhattan Hotel, November 28, 1953. MKUltra is thought to be involved.

Ruled a fall.
Ruled a jump.
Ruled an accident.

A fall, a jump, an accident.
A jump, a fall, an accident.
An accident, a jump, a fall.

Rumored jump.
Ruled a fall:
accident.
It was an accident.
It was a jump,

A fall. To fall. To jump.
To accident.
To fall into a jump,
Fall, jump, accident: push.
Hypocrites

I.

Hu-bump

Hu-bump

With every turn of the tire, I felt the hu-bump. KILLER RUBBER SQUASHES BIRD!
The headline resounded like a choir, a reverse
echo that got louder with every hu-bump of the bird murder.

Think, Poe’s “Tell Tale Heart.”
only,

Hu-bump

Hu-bump

So I ran over a bird. Call it involuntary bird-slaughter. Accidental.
Pile of concrete colored feathers thunked the hood
of the neighboring car at a red-light, his neck careening to—
PLINK went the green-light and
bird slid off, perfectly timed with my tire.

Three hu-bumps
and I knew he was dead.

October 20 2015, the day I murdered the bird.
Also the day Ohio delayed executions
for seven
death row inmates: 2017 would be
their death year.
My previous theory that Ohio
held only four people within its borders
was proven wrong.
II.

Meet Robert Van Hook.

Bobby was injected on July 18, 2018. He had married a week before to his Australian pen pal. He waited 33 years to die.

Meet Sr. Helen Prejean, the one who told me how; I know what will happen to Bobby. The three drug givers will sit in separate rooms out of view of the audience, of Bobby, of the doctor, only here to declare a dead Bobby. A doctor, there to make sure death is safe. There will be a button for each injector. There will be a light above each button. When it comes on, Injector will push the button. The three do not know which of them will deliver the final dose.

Button One. Sodium thiopental. Anesthetic. This unwinding will be unknown to Bobby, unless they do it wrong. If they do it wrong, his stomach will swell in unknown hernia, and his gasping for air will penetrate the glass in between him and his spectators.

Button Two. Pancurium bromide. Liquid will ink into veins, muscle relaxer—if done right. So they say.

Button three. Potassium chloride will stop the heart. Some will say this heart stopped long ago, in 1985.
Reader, do you know how the death penalty is performed? Performed, they say, as if it’s a show or talent that we can watch. That at the end of we can clap and say, “Bravo! Again, again!”

Three rooms, separate. Four if you count Bobby’s, imprisoned on a gurney, a word I hate for how it comes out the mouth, like regurgitating a word we can’t remember from long ago. Gurneys, wheeled beds that roll patients to their saviors or bodies to their graves, now also used for those in between, those rolled to their final living destination; straps will coil around his wrists and legs.

Patches and heart monitors will pepper Bobby’s chest. His lungs will expand—*in-out-in-out*—rapidly, as if they know that soon their job will end. Two needles will prick and enter his epidermis. They will slide into place with trouble at first. *Poking, poking* until the right vein pops.

Enter Isotonic solution. Harmless. So they say.

There will be a curtain call because an audience will have gathered to watch the “performance.” Spectators: loved ones of both Bobby and David. Curtain between Bobby and his spectators, and curtains separating the other three rooms. A second injection will slither in, will render Bobby sleepy.

All I’m saying is I knew I did it.
M.A.C. Lip Colors

We take a *sushi kiss*
from a dead fish
and apply it to our mouth meat;
peeling flesh
the color of raw salmon
to coat lips with shade.

We call it Saigon because we miss
Saigon. We call it ‘the fall
of Saigon’ because Ho Chi
Minh Summer doesn’t have the ring

**Saigon Summer**
has, not naming it a red
lipstick because red signifies blood,
and we’ve forgotten war.
Now, we visit Saigon on vacation.
When you held the sun’s threshold, 
dragging rays behind you, waking humanity, 
you heard him. There is nothing like the cry 
of the Phoenix. In that moment, you dropped 
your reins. The blood-red beauty did not stop for you. In his song, you heard the trembling 
that carried lamentations of time in vain. “Let me die!” came his cry. 
He was old. He was dying. Young and seething in your own jealousy, 
you stomped him into dust. You then held 
morning still. 
When the bird emerged from dust, 
you crushed him again. 
And again. 
Until finally, he asked to switch places. 
You, a god, had never experienced 
death, so you complied. 
Death took its hold of you, 
the world blanketed in darkness.
Making Roses

Every spring Sister Flaviana made roses
with fingertips so rosy and soft
from aged skin. Her voice never rose
above a whisper. She’d

My sweets, take a ribbon
in the color you want. Any color
your precious hearts desire. Purple,
gold, pink, red.

She gave directions to anyone
willing to listen,

Fold one end of the L the other way in the opposite
direction—yes, like so, dove. Very good!
Ignore the piece you just folded and take the other
piece of ribbon—like so, yes—and bring that one
to the other side now. Goodness gracious,
you are doing so well! Repeat these steps until you have a tall stack of ribbon.

Then she’d take
our ribbon dangling below the rose
and wrapped it around a fake
flower stem. She would use green
tape to make the stem natural.

Even after cancer had tugged
Sister away from us abruptly
in the middle of the school year,
after my second grade teacher
was suddenly missing in the classroom,
after a real adult I had known and loved
was suddenly plucked from me,
the tradition continued;
students and colleagues
kept it. I can still hear her,

Take this tiny square
in your little fingers and press
on the flat part of one section of the ribbon. Then push
them all up—push the entire stack upward. There you go!
It will become a rose as you push the ribbon down. Beautiful,
 isn’t it? Flowers are a gift
from God much like artistic talent and craftsmanship.
They asked me
to speak at her funeral. At eight, I couldn’t
have done the elegy justice. I stuttered
through my sobs, choking,
reading my words through slippery
glasses, distraught that death
takes only prisoners
even among people like her.

_We are blessed, my children._

People would leave varied
colored flowers in places
all over campus. When someone
found one, it was like getting
a gift from her. It was like Sister
whispering, “Congratulations!
You made it through the winter!”
Katelyn Aquilo grew up in the small town of Meraux, Louisiana, outside of New Orleans. She earned her undergraduate degree in English Literature at Loyola University, New Orleans. She is currently an M.F.A. candidate at University of New Orleans. Her poems appear in *seafoam.* and *Maudlin House* magazines. She also has an interview in *Rain Taxi.*