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## Lost Girls

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# Lost Girls

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

Maya Lowy

B.A. New York University, 2012

May 2016

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*for my grandmother Dvora  
January 1935 – April 2016*

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## Table of Contents

<b>Preface: Squint</b> .....	1
<b>I. Blacklight</b> .....	6
Recall.....	7
Piaget: Glossary.....	9
thought / encode / de-.....	10
Big Shadow.....	11
Autochrome: Satsuma Café.....	12
(Paint).....	13
Prayer.....	14
Steel Butterfly I: Cinderella Tanaga With Skip-Rope Interlude.....	15
Steel Butterfly II: Orchid.....	16
Steel Butterfly III: Ghosts in Malacañang Palace.....	17
Starlets.....	18
<b>II. Blindfold</b> .....	19
Danaë.....	20
Living With a Sack of Fireworks.....	21
Second Date.....	22
Where's the Spotlight? .....	23
Things I'd Like at the Café.....	24
Geopolitics in the Dungeon.....	25
Katrina.....	26
Cows.....	27
Balance Haibun .....	28
The Night After You Break Up With Me (or Whatever We're Calling It).....	29
Tomato Sonnet I.....	30
Tomato Sonnet II.....	31
<b>III. Wall of Fog</b> .....	32
Sequoias in September: the New Quarter Begins.....	33
Anita Remembers: November.....	34
Watching Ed Kemper: December/January.....	35
Freeway Interlude (Mary Ann) .....	36
January 9, 1973.....	37
February 5, 1973: "If you must be out at night, walk in pairs.".....	38
Confession I: Ed.....	39
April 26, 1973: "To think we've been living here so peacefully....".....	40
Confession II: Lost Girl (Aiko) .....	41
Cindy Speaks, Cindy Remembers.....	42
The Girls Visit Ed at the California Medical Facility State Prison: August 6, 1980.....	43
Vita.....	44

## **Preface: Squint**

I spent the first eighteen years of my life in Santa Cruz, California, a town, like so many others, that stuns with its beauty and deeply denies its own darknesses. But as the daughter of Israeli immigrants, I saw my hometown from a stranger's perspective, even while identifying as local. Analogously, my mother tongue is Hebrew, but English is the tool with which I sculpt my experience. I speak English, I think in English, but English has always been a little foreign to me, a little alien. In this way, the language fascinates me; I consider myself firstly a poet of language.

Maybe this subtle, pervasive feeling of existing both inside and outside is a defining characteristic of poets. That could explain why I have such a weakness for translated poems like those of Tomas Tranströmer and Federico Garcia Lorca and Nazim Hikmet. English may seem to turn clumsily, on stilts, but those stumbles fascinate in their own right. When I'm writing, I find myself so preoccupied by word choice—how what I say always seems to fall short of what I'm trying to describe.

In a way, all art is a clumsy translation of experience. Poems struggle to pin down and define reality, and often that struggle overrides the experience itself. I am endlessly interested in the distortion of transmission that makes a poem, for poetry can be conceived as quantum: nobody knows how a poem behaves before it is written, before it is read. The poem's observation—first by author, then by reader—defines its shape. Its content is like a scene through a window; the words form the glass, and the reader peers through. When I write, I try to walk the razor's edge of misunderstanding, playing with the effects of leaving details out, experimenting with exactly how much I need to say. This can result in workshops where eleven readers of a poem will give me at least eleven readings, and sometimes more like fifteen. But isn't that part of the thrill?

A classmate of mine once said he never wrote love poems because Shakespeare had already mastered the love sonnet, and so the form had been “solved,” like a Sudoku, and he’d lost motivation to keep exploring it. Little has ever made me so angry. Poetry, to me, is so much more than a puzzle to solve.

Poetry, in my view, takes something, whether common or unusual, and distorts it through the author. Then it redistorts it through the reader. What may have actually happened loses relevance; the art comes in the warping and refaceting, the game of telephone. A favorite example of mine is the second stanza of one of my favorite poems by Tomas Tranströmer, “C Major”:

A music broke out  
and walked in the swirling snow  
with long steps.  
Everything on the way toward the note C.  
A trembling compass directed at C.  
One hour higher than the torments.  
It was easy!  
Behind turned-up collars everyone was smiling.\*

The poem charms me on every level; I love it for the repetition, for the exclamation points, for the sheer joy surging through the lines. I still don’t understand what “one hour higher than the torments” means. . . . But I have always felt the pure emotional joy in “C Major.” In the poem, a man walks down a snowy street. But through Tranströmer’s lens the walk becomes a song. He has captured more than the simple experience—with words, he has colored the experience with a striking bias.

I thought a lot about this poem while writing “The Night After You Break Up With Me (or Whatever We’re Calling It).” I wanted to infuse the simple description of cooking oneself a

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\* Tranströmer, Tomas, translation by Robin Fulton. *The Great Enigma: New Collected Poems*. New York: New Directions Books, 2006. Print.



meal with Tranströmer's joy and empowerment. In "C Major," distortion brings emotion through so cleanly. I want that clarity in my poems.

In "thought/encode/de-," I deploy a phrase that I think informs my whole thesis: "the gamble of vision / through windows." Again, it's that *distortion* that obsesses me, the limitations of lenses and sight. The three sections of my thesis deal overtly with different kinds of obstruction of sight. Through Section I's *Blacklight*, I pursue a variety of experimental forms, pushing towards the realizations that come forth in the more narratively focused sections II and III. At every turn, my speakers struggle with sightedness, squint to see clearly. Agency and empowerment crop up over and over. *Blacklight* is a seesawing battle for control, alternating descriptive poems (for naming is seeing, and naming is owning) with admissions of lostness. The "Steel Butterfly" poems, my Imelda Marcos series, gesture toward the persona poetry that will recur in *Wall of Fog*, while tying in to those themes of *Blacklight*. Imelda's whole role in life was decorative; she was a larger-than-life ornament, as gestured to in "Cinderella Tanaga," and I wanted to begin to explore the woman hiding behind the big hair and high cheekbones.

Section II, *Blindfold*, is the only section with a consistent speaker, and takes advantage of that to explore my speaker's relationship with her own agency as a sexual being. It traces an arc from initial sexual awakening to a decision to be firmly, peacefully independent. Again, here, I find myself focusing on control dynamics. My speaker alternates between feeling confident and masterful of her relationships with men, and feeling helpless and despairing, as in "Second Date" or "Where's the Spotlight?" My own journey with learning that I was an object of desire for men, and all the implications of my heterosexuality's power and powerlessness, is certainly reflected in these poems, and the Kundera quote feels like a good bouncing-off point to ground

this section. I, and by extension the section's speaker, am still learning who I am and what kind of relationship I want with myself, as well as with the men who love and desire me.

My third section, *Wall of Fog*, is the most cohesive and narrative part of my thesis; I hope to evolve it into a chapbook. Inspired loosely by Muriel Rukeyser's *Book of the Dead* and other documentary work, *Wall of Fog* is research-based, about that haunted hometown of mine. In the early seventies Santa Cruz had three serial killers in quick succession, two of which (Edmund Kemper and Herbert Mullin) actually operated simultaneously. This led to a local moniker of "Murdersville, U.S.A." and the town becoming the inspiration for the 1987 vampire movie *The Lost Boys*. Between 1972 and 1973, 24-year-old Kemper, who was six foot nine and known as the "Co-ed Butcher," murdered, violated, and dismembered six female hitchhikers in the Monterey Bay Area: Mary Ann Pesce, Anita Luchessa, Aiko Koo, Cindy Schall, Rosalind Thorpe, and Alice Liu. Then in spring of 1973 he brutally murdered his mother and her friend and turned himself in; he is still incarcerated at the California Medical Facility in Vacaville today.

My primary focus in the Kemper case is its effect on my town. I am gorily fascinated by the darkness that lurks in beauty—majestic redwood forests hiding bodies, or limbs washing up on gorgeous beaches. Santa Cruz considers itself so idyllic, and I wanted to unpack the stir of paranoia in such a microcosm of American suburbia. Here, again, that outsider-ness comes into play: this is the history of my hometown, but it's not *my* history. My parents weren't in town yet, and I was born almost twenty years later. This distance allows me to be less emotional about the fear, about the deaths, and to focus on a different angle—that of the town's more gestalt atmosphere (the wall of fog is a phenomenon anyone from Santa Cruz will be familiar with), and that question I brought up earlier of sight, and distortion of vision.

*Wall of Fog* examines over and over the question of visibility. My version of Ed, even at six foot nine, thinks he is invisible, seen only in acts of violence, although the shifting speakers watch him far more closely than he could realize. There is so much more to be written about Kemper's victims, the titular lost girls, and as their names and voices creep into the manuscript I begin to feel the power of their spirits influencing the material. In this iteration of the narrative, though they retain some fragments of personality, their memories fade rapidly as they progress into "ego-death" and melt into Pacific fog. The "most visible thing" to them is their killer, who forced them into this purgatorial state. (This section, of course, also allows me to think about the spiritual—I'm not sure I would have written so much about ghosts before moving to New Orleans, but I always felt a creepy peacefulness in that thick morning mist.) Ghost Cindy Schall's memory, her "crown of candles," seems to me a fitting focus for the manuscript's title. Candles, to me, symbolize both seeing and danger. Wearing her crown of candles, Cindy is lit—she can see and be seen. But she also hazards bad burns.

In the world of these poems, each section holds back just a bit, handicaps itself from the full blaze of vision, like the people in Plato's Cave. For poems will always be shadows and distortions, and great risk lies in true sight.

# I

## BLACKLIGHT

*I had not yet turned quite around when I already began to fall, I fell and in a moment I was torn and transpierced by the sharp rocks which had always gazed up at me so peacefully from the rushing water.*

*—Franz Kafka, “The Bridge”*

## Recall

1

I wake to the smell of sweet gas, gasping  
to breathe. No windows open and the balcony door  
won't unlock, it won't unlock! When I push  
it won't fall apart. It's made of aggie marbles.  
Your rug pulses blue to red and back again.

2

What was the money being spent for, do you know?  
*No, I can't recall that, sir.*  
Would you remember if we told you it was red curtains and can-can pictures—

3

I feel like I'm slipping  
my grip, just like Arnold  
in *Total Recall*, where two planets run  
on the loud buzz of turbinium. I'm pretty sure  
who I'd play in that movie: Sharon Stone.  
But there's no Recall program in my future.  
Just can-can pictures, floral pictures and the rest.

4

Red curtains. And can-can pictures. Floral pictures and the rest,  
recorders. Recorders and two-way mirrors.  
*Hold on,*  
*you're slipping a word in there now.*

5

I woke smelling sweet gas, gasping for breath,  
and now the door won't unlock. It won't unlock,  
I'm gaslit and gaslit and you're lying to me.  
You push that aggie door for me and I  
collapse into a folding chair where the alley  
smells like trash, where there's the loud  
buzz of a turbine ventilator. For minutes  
I gulp down exhaust. It's better air.

6

MKULTRA subproject 3 was a project involving the surreptitious administration of LSD on unwitting persons, was it not?

*Sir, hold on. You're slipping.*

7

Recorders and two-way mirrors. When I begged you to buy a CO detector, you did it for me. Now I must wait for it to beep four times, pause, then beep four times. I know there's something. I feel like I'm slipping and in an hour I could have total recall.

## Piaget: Glossary

The watch's internal mechanism  
is called a *movement*.

The *escapement* permits controlled motion.  
Mechanical clocks become feasible  
due to the invention of *verge escapement*,  
weights that drive crown wheels.

In 1755 the new *lever escapement*  
freed the oscillations of the *balance wheel*.

*Oscillate* means to tick back and forth at a regular speed.

The *mainspring* drives the watch,  
a spring-steel stressed in each bend and coil  
which can be wound using the *keyless work*,  
the part of the *gear train* that turns the clock  
hands to set the time.

The escapement never releases the balance wheel;  
the wheel keeps pacing in perpetual motion.

**thought / encode / de-**

the gamble of vision  
through windows

in our river    my submarine  
wall of glass    wall of

glass skin stippled in mystery  
bones whorled with impressions

two blue panels away  
it's dice            it's the deck

i'm knocking on your window  
i'm spelling in your hand    water

dilate pupils    spark candles  
the moving flicker

gulp down my words            please  
i blink your eye

i blink    i            dilate your pupils  
change with the light

projecting across  
layers between

at            through            into    with  
got to look out for you



## **Big Shadow**

Your shape on the library's wall  
up the stairs  
you're nowhere to be found

The man with the stolen car  
I asked him to wait  
so I could talk to you

The library's a church  
three big bells  
I don't know where you went

I lost you

## **Autochrome: Satsuma Café**

His yellow shirt, and how he peels  
an egg for the bull terrier, their eyes a pale

blue. The man's hands thick and ringless.  
His ironed yellow shirt, the necklace

rhinestone; the good boy and his spots.  
They are sitting at the same table where not

long ago another man, without a hat  
or dog, ate a black bean burger and looked at

his cell phone. The dog has a white water bowl.  
A girl in a white car rolls up the windows.

after Mallory Page

A lavender                      A blue phase. You                      then you  
   may be                      over. And over.  
   result of the layers                      layers                      beneath  
   words beneath that is  
   personal                      I am                      on  
Camp Street outside a locked gallery  
suspended.                      *I like the puzzles I said yes they're good* he said.

Layers peeling off like                      Layers  
   peel                      bubbled, off the bathroom wall  
   incurable  
   blacklit window

*There is a God* and                      winks  
   always giving me things you didn't want anymore.

   Alarm jostled  
   sunlight                      dust. I am

Spider bite                      tensely drawn

Who crawls along my skin in my sleep? I need  
to eat my predators.

   good. Familiar.                      The easiest                      —

let's scrub                      gunk off until it gleams  
   shines  
   spider bites

   action then time. Wait                      wait                      to dry, layer over

let's try that.                      Dry and then                      over                      Wait. Five minutes at least.

## Prayer

*So many rocks up in my watch I don't know what the time is*  
—Wiz Khalifa

*Master of ultra-thin major complications, master of possession watches, hallowed be.*

*Piaget and the boundaries of extreme slenderness:*  
a saga of jewels, of escapement.

Thou hast designed precious things for us

to purchase:

automatic, rose gold	\$24,000
chronograph, flyback, automatic, rose gold, titanium	\$25,000
dual time zone, automatic, rose gold	\$30,800
chronograph, flyback, automatic, rose gold	\$36,000
moon-phase, automatic, rose gold	\$49,000
chronograph, flyback, automatic, rose gold, diamond	\$51,000
automatic, rose gold, diamond	\$82,500
perpetual calendar, automatic, rose gold	\$86,000
skeleton, ultra-thin, mechanical, rose gold, diamond	\$95,000

Our master of ultra-thin major complications! How precious thy possession watches!  
And the possessors of thy watches, how their wealth drips down their wrists!

Daily we thank thee for the beauty thou hast built.

Hourly we thank thee for displaying time  
in its most valuable form.

And minute by minute, Piaget,  
we observe thy graceful design,

which *does* echo in everything automatic, everything rose-gold, which echoes even in our  
own mechanical and diamond skeletons, thy design which echoes in that mastery of  
human invention: Piaget, hallowed be.

## **Steel Butterfly I: Cinderella Tanaga With Skip-Rope Interlude**

Though born and raised in a garage,  
She knew her fate was on the stage.  
Each day she'd wear a dress and boots  
Hand-sewn from sheets and parachutes.

*Miss Imelda  
Dressed in yellow  
Went to the ball in tall stilettos.  
At her first glance  
He stood no chance.  
How many two-steps did they dance?*

That charming prince was frail and thin;  
Still, it was clear their pair would win.  
With his platforms and her bouffant,  
Victory was concomitant.

## Steel Butterfly II: Orchid

*Hubba hubba!*

The first suitor she opened her shutters for  
drove an avocado Oldsmobile,  
wore sharkskin pants creased so sharp  
it gave her paper cuts to look at him.

She was crunching salted watermelon seeds  
when Marcos walked up.  
He scattered the mosquito swarm.

*I could buy anything I wanted, and I did.*

But he weighed each meal gram by gram  
on his silver scale. The chocolate bars  
cracked and melted, the knife-slashed  
casaba bled its honey.

*They went into my closet looking for skeletons...*

Queen of the Philippines, the *waling-waling*  
is a worshiped flower in the orchid family.  
Prized, hybridized, over-collected,  
slender-stemmed and strong,  
her caretakers praised her, balanced her  
on a pedestal to preen: they gathered  
to celebrate beauty.

*...but all they found were shoes, beautiful shoes.*

Imelda called  
beauty discipline, beauty harmony,  
beauty God and love made real.  
Big-cheeked princess,  
she bled honey. She squinted and smiled  
hard enough to make the world blossom.

### **Steel Butterfly III: Ghosts in Malacañang Palace**

After the move, at first, all three children slept with her in her bed. They feared footsteps' echoes in the halls, feared the floors' gleams. Sometimes in sleep the crowd would hand her their swaddled ones to bless: a mother's gray-brown teeth, and this child already dead. She'd swoon, or shriek, and some nights she'd kiss the cooling forehead and return the babe to outstretched arms, pretending nothing had happened. The dread would wake her to find herself surrounded by the living: dimpled limbs of her own *anak-anak*, still or kicking.

Born in the year of the snake, other nights she dreamed of a lance-headed pit viper.

As they grew used to the big house, the children returned to their own big beds. So she asked the President to share. Perfume marked his skin and his sheets with her scents. He was slim, always tired, and they rarely kissed in private. He slept shrimp-curved on his side, a pillow between his nubby knees. And trapped under the weight of her robe, she watched the ceiling fans spin.

## Starlets

*Little Miss Starlet, in ermine and scarlet,  
Getting a thousand a day,  
Along came the "talkies," revealing her squawkies,  
And put poor Miss Starlet away!*

*—Chicago's Daily Herald, January 10, 1930*

the girl with the topaz eyes	a pool	a swoon
the swedish nightingale	barbs	a knife
orchid lady of the screen	a lion	glint on a lens
america's most beautiful girl	barbies	rose petals crushed
box office poison	lipstick	a fan folded
portland rosebud	applause	a match struck
the eternal flapper	bichloride of mercury	barbiturates
the girl with a million dollar smile	a fan made of feathers	ripples
queen of the hollywood extras	pillboxes	mirrors

*"It is midnight — — you must read the will."*

the girl with the bee-stung lips	a knife	a fan made of feathers
american venus	a swoon	applause
the girl who is too beautiful	barbies	glint on a lens
miss manhattan	mirrors	a pool
gardenia of the screen	barbiturates	a fan folded

*"Gosh                      what        a            spooky                      house!"*

green-eyed goddess of hollywood	glint on a lens	rose petals crushed
the virgin white lily of the screen	a pool	a knife
the girl of a thousand faces	a lion	applause



## II

### BLINDFOLD

*She had nine suitors. They all knelt round her in a circle. Standing in the middle like a princess, she did not know which one to choose: one was the handsomest, another the wittiest, the third was the richest, the fourth the most athletic, the fifth from the best family, the sixth recited verse, the seventh traveled widely, the eighth played the violin, and the ninth was the most manly. But they all knelt in the same way, they all had the same calluses on their knees....*

*She had entered a mist in which nothing could be seen and only her scream could be heard.*

—Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*

## Danaë

*Seduction, noun:* in the cab I sucked on his fingers.

After I invited him in he went out into the rain and bought avocados instead of condoms.

He and I were imbued with decisions not our own. He bit my lips until they plummed.

My basement was flooding, water up to my ankles on the tiles, the furniture he'd rescued dripping. And in moonlight his skin reflected like the moon, his cock a unicorn's horn.

*Pierce, verb:* pinner, I hardly—

You're taking advantage of me, I said into my pillow and he disintegrated  
into August's rain. I had already been listening to Kurt Vile on repeat for weeks

*In the morning  
I'm not done sleeping in the evening  
I guess I'm alive  
and so I can still peel myself up sleepwalking  
in a ghost town*

and I could do nothing else for the rest of that month. The apartment dripped.

Mary's furniture ruined, books rotted like the summer fruit.

And for the rest of the month everyone in the neighborhood called me beautiful.

It was like he'd said it to me so many times that it started to be true.

## Living With a Sack of Fireworks

*after Linda Goodman's Love Signs*

Mad and miracle-minded, I'm a butterfly,  
you my lark. And we roll cannonball  
to cannonball. So for awhile  
all aligns in pinkness and peacocks,  
finishing schools for sheepdogs,  
harmonious Sun-Moon aspects. Neat!

But shrinkage and atrophy of the third eye  
happens with lack of use. And you can't  
seem to catch me; I jail myself  
and trap the lock between my breasts.

So the skeptical curve of my Jupiter bow  
begins to enrage you. In Sardi's you empty  
a glue bottle into my smoldering mop.

## Second Date

Graphite, geode-eyed faun,  
I'll give you a new fruit (pomelo)  
so you remember me for something rare.

My brain becomes cratered. *Stop: it feels like a pencil  
sharpening.* The black cats come later, a few hours after  
you unspool the reasons you could never love me.  
They circle me, purring like talismans.

## **Where's the Spotlight?**

O men  
what can you bring forth

new in me

To prepare  
I blindfold and gag myself

better not to see

or speak  
when I think

he draws horizontal

dry yearning as in  
some hammock

as in rope-fingers

Stefan! An angel  
I've called him

and I hide

curling like a shrimp  
I never

want to eat

## Things I'd Like at the Café

Long-fingered barista, I'd like for you  
to invite me over. Show me around your hardwood  
bookshelves, at least a 900 on the Janka scale:  
your shelf of Márquez and your shelf  
of academic texts by the likes of Howard Zinn.

Prepare your crocheted potholders  
and rugs, and unveil some outmoded contraption  
(examples: a typewriter, a microscope).  
I'll wear your scarves in the hopes you'll say  
*That looks so good on you, you should keep it.*

Next, buy us a date in flotation tanks  
to suspend in salts and darkness,  
then emerge to suck water like hummingbirds.  
String me through a corn maze,  
tethered to your waist with a monkey's fist.

Let me steal your pens and orange lighters;  
I'll tell you about my childhood of cucumber salads  
and power outages under Gray Davis,  
how my uncle would mail us coffee with cardamom,  
how my father would fly to Nepal for weeks  
bringing back slideshows none of us wanted to watch.  
How they languished on screensavers for years.

## Geopolitics in the Dungeon

BREAKING: *Earthquake shakes Nepal to pieces.*  
I'm still trembling—  
he might've snapped a couple capillaries.  
Bowed to the black cross, forgot where my heels were:  
it's less the beating and more the aftershocks.

Adrenaline burst through my pores,  
floated over my tingling skin.  
Dust-billow Kathmandu too must feel fizzy.  
My town went down in 1989. Pacific Avenue  
slid, collapsed, *the pavement was like the ocean.*

Polymer, thread, then suede: they whirl  
like a rescue copter's rotor blade.  
"World news *is* your flow, isn't it," he said.  
I guess I winked. Everyone wants a redhead  
to talk to at eye level: in stilettos  
I get there.

And those pagodas slip.  
The pavement was like the ocean;  
on the St. Andrew's cross I clung tight, didn't fall.

## Katrina

### I

Can't recognize myself with red  
    fingernails  
You're a conqueror with Tomáš  
    syndrome  
But I've sheathed my notching knives

Saeculum obscurum, ita  
    vērō  
Better to leave some alleyways  
    untorched  
Mysteries unlit

Keep lining up, ex-Catholics,  
    to be flicked  
Remember me as one you couldn't  
    snatch  
The match blown out

### II

O flesh          Spider bite on my thigh  
peels    Don't tell me what to do don't tell  
me what to do          Fogged boy don't tell me  
how to throw Here's what you need  
to beg          Don't forget  
I scrub the scum off    Listen I'm  
I lure men in to eat for poems

Ex-Catholic    Dip the tip of your finger  
in water          Do you see  
It has been nine years  
since and now it's raining again



## Cows

*Wär meine Zärtlichkeit / Aufs neue dir geweiht.*

Our last day in Idaho, you and I walked to Phillips Creek  
because I hadn't spotted a beaver yet. Everybody was pretty stoned  
and I thought they all thought we were leaving to fuck.  
The sun pummeled us through the long grass;  
the beavers hid.

You climbed a rock, red and scambly, and I  
didn't follow you up; I no longer wanted  
to follow you anywhere. On the grit path  
I faced down the cows, three of them, staring back.  
One smaller and red, one brown, a white one leading.

The cows approached me, staring,  
in a triangle. They were practicing a play,  
an ominous, classical dance  
in bovine choreography. I couldn't understand it,  
but it impressed me, like *Bastien und Bastienne*.

## Balance Haibun

*à la Jaws*

Me, inking squid  
in two-ounce dress,  
I wait submerged.

At three AM a Daniel wheeled up to my desk, representing the bachelors dozen.  
The bride's parents wouldn't let him officiate the wedding, even though he spent \$36.99  
on his license and everything, because they wanted it all done in a church.  
Daniel invited me to be his date. The wedding will be in New Braunfels next May 6.  
This was August. I said, "I'm sure you can find somebody more local by then."

For legs astride like Quint,  
raw, tuna-slippery,  
you steer our boat.

## **The Night After You Break Up With Me (or Whatever We're Calling It)**

I cook myself dinner for the first time in a while.  
I even have two burners going at once.

Freezer-burned tilapia rips under running water,  
wholeness warps the kitchen light.

I taste my sauté as it cooks,  
time the fettuccini by feel.

I've left open the balcony door  
let the thick air malt my skin.

*Rumours* spins again;  
I fork in crumbles of feta cheese.

Everything is delicious, even that ragged fish.  
My sheets are steeped in your sweat from five days back

and you don't matter!

I chew the stems of the mustard greens  
for their greenness. They taste sweet.

## Tomato Sonnet I

The sweetest tomato is one you've grown yourself.  
Never mind the worms and bird-tracks: its blush  
heats you in kind. Most recently alive,  
ripened, it twists into your hand  
gently. Your palm can cup  
the small round flesh of one you've loved.

One who sipped nourishment from your rooftop's  
rainfall while you were sleeping or awake,  
lying alone, maybe thinking of someone,  
or beside someone and still lying alone.

You who are never patient, you watched it change color  
for weeks, waited quietly for it to ripen.  
You sowed it; now take your treasure  
in hand, where it need not be shared.

## Tomato Sonnet II

*Sixty percent of a tomato plant can harbor leaf miners  
without its fruit production being altered.*

The basil, the kale, the flowering tomato  
on my balcony don't fear the miners  
that tattoo their leaves.

Fearful of the curious roaches  
carving out life in the pipe behind our bathroom sink,  
Alex slept in her car last night.

Last night for the first time  
I pulled my comforter from the closet  
and pulled the string to turn the ceiling fan off.

Here's an orange butterfly! Do monarchs fly this way?  
Back home it's peak season: the eucalyptus must be papered  
by now in leaves that quiver to their own wind.

### III

#### WALL OF FOG

*A copper tree sparked and the earth was lit,  
I went to wash my lips with rain. And yes,  
you once said: "We are mute, mute, mute"  
So listen for a moment to my Song of Muteness.*

— *Ivan Blatný, "Brno Elegies"*

## Sequoias in September: the New Quarter Begins

Of course we love long hikes  
in these woods. Our dorm's just  
down the path, just there. We love to hike  
with our boyfriends, holding hands,  
hooking up on the needle-padded ground.  
We hike with our girlfriends, pipes  
in our coat pockets bumping  
against acorn caps.  
We get high and look down  
from the big hill at the blue bay.

We like to hike alone, our feet  
hushing on the red-brown needles.  
We try to focus in these woods  
on walking lightly. We  
spy many mushrooms,  
maybe a snail or a banana slug.  
Maybe a flash of deer.  
Maybe monarch butterflies  
or the little green ones.

At its best such a hike  
may be considered ego-death:  
our souls could scatter into green butterflies  
up through the sequoias.  
People get lost in these woods—  
that is to say they lose people  
in this redwood forest.

And if we forget who we are,  
it may take a long time  
for someone to unearth us.  
If we forget who we are,  
we may never be identified.

## **Anita Remembers: November**

It ends with the rain but it started hours ago with the weight of the rain  
but it started years ago with lying in bed in November not waiting  
for anything. No, it does not end with the rain, maybe it climaxes  
with the rain, but the rain is long for a climax, not sharp, soft in its muted  
repetition. I used to lie in bed in November and curl up small as I could,  
wanting to shrink into a ball like a cat. When I was small I wished I was smaller  
like a cat or squirrel or mouse so I could fit inside trees. I wished I could crawl  
all the way into the hollow trunk of the tree and nestle, bark pressing against  
my skin or fur and darkness and the dry smooth scrape of the tree's trunk.  
It ends with the rain and starts with the rain and its weight on the sky pressing  
like a headache behind my eyes, but a positive pressing, a patient wait for release,  
the earth lying in bed not waiting for anything but knowing the rain will come  
to water it. The rain is a long climax soft and muted, it all starts and ends with the rain.



## Watching Ed Kemper: December/January

12-19-72

He buys rounds for the cops at the Jury Room:  
this one's from Big Ed. Not bad  
at pool; that grace of the tall  
in his elbows. Too tall  
for doorways and police work.  
What's it mean for a man,  
always to  
bend?

1-1-73

Behind glass, his eyes are sparklers.  
Fog's lingered all day.  
I'm in my car, I tap out a cigarette.  
Thinking in the shivers'  
tougher—nothing much  
but the headlights cut  
and the exhaust rising like song.

1-7-73

In the bar he picks up a cop  
tosses him like a threat. *What's your poison?*  
7-Up, I mumble and avert my eyes.

1-8-73

So big, rides loud.  
Up 17 his legs for miles,  
denim blends him in  
to the shivers' winds. Leather jacket.  
I pick him out on the road  
only by his size. He's got a girl  
in Turlock, they said, some teen  
he strung a ring on. But he's going toward  
880. What's this detour?

I hover.

### **Freeway Interlude (Mary Ann)**

Traveling at high speed  
how the wind rushes through me  
it scatters me in the mountains  
and sequoias. At best, ego-death.

How the wind rushes through me  
as I cling to Ed on the freeway  
he's a tree. And I don't exist.  
I'm no more than the holding tight.

I am only my cling to the hulk of him.  
He leans hard at the curves.  
I'm just the holding, so tight.  
It's steep as they come.

He leans hard at the curves  
when he speeds over the hill.  
It winds; if he's not careful  
he'll scatter too in the mountains.

**January 9, 1973**

Pieces of

(what had been)

Cindy

still faceless

muscle tibia

thumb with painted nail

begin

to wash up

along

the shores  
of the Monterey Bay

**February 5, 1973:**

**“If you must be out at night, walk in pairs.”**

Girls are getting lost.

That is to say they have lost girls.

That is to say misplaced, they're *sure*

but don't hitchhike down High Street

after the buses have stopped running.

The campus police will give you a ride.

*Don't hitch a ride please!*

Ed's car has a faculty sticker,

fall 72 – spring 73.

Ed's got those big round glasses

he's a dweeb.

Ed's car looks safe

after the buses

stop running.

It's dark and wet out  
the girls just want to go home.

Here it rains all day. Very lulling  
when you are inside  
a Ford Galaxie  
with the radio off

and then the radio on  
very loud.

## Confession I: Ed

I know them only from the point of lost contact.                      These girls  
   their lives before are murky.                      Each comes  
into focus at the burst  
   just before the body                      gives up.                      That alarm  
   draws me, sharpens my sight. I don't notice  
them alive.                      Everyone a little blurry                      until snuffed.

These girls                      they ignore me, I don't know if they see me.  
I don't remember who                      I am. When I try very hard  
   I'm a wall of mist                      then I collapse  
   into myself.

When I try very hard I'm a wall of fog.  
Only the lost girls can sometimes see me.

**April 26, 1973:**

**“To think we’ve been living here so peacefully with *that* laying in the ground.”**

On overcast Ord Street  
the fog will burn off  
by afternoon

trout season opens Saturday  
whales, dolphins, surfers  
bob below the cliffs

*I Dream of Jeannie’s*  
on Channel 8, *Star Trek*  
on Channel 2

the meat boycott  
means everyone will cook  
tofu curries, mushroom frittatas

and sixteen  
inches below  
they dig up

a ten-pound  
head  
that was once Cindy’s

and couldn’t have taken long to bury. Packed loam has settled in the ears, the nostrils. The eyes must have pointed right at him as he shoveled. He left them open: dirt has settled against them, worms found them firm and supple. Cloudy eyeballs flattened and blank, mouth ajar, eyes pointed right at him. And Cindy could see nothing. She was gone, that thing just a husk that had once been hers. Cindy was gone. She was fog and nothing he did now could hurt her. The dismantled body was no longer hers, and how he menaced it no longer mattered, for she had departed that flesh. It no longer mattered if he raped the slack mouth, licked the teeth, now simply bone. It did not matter if he hacked the body apart with axes and knives, if he sucked out the stagnant blood, if he renamed and rearranged her limbs like sticks of wood. It did not matter if he ejaculated on what had been her body or inside what had been her body. That body was not her body anymore. Cindy was gone. They had lost her, and now she was ours. Now she was part of the morning fog.

## Confession II: Lost Girl (Aiko)

I can't remember who I was. I try very hard  
still I'm a wall of salt mist. I can't remember  
which girl I was if I was one of those  
lost girls. Been lost for a long time.

Only this this hulk of a man,  
he looks safe in his 1969 Ford Galaxie.  
He killed me now I'm a wall of fog.  
Salt. He's a great white his forehead gapes vulnerable.  
I think I fought him I can't remember.  
Very real his skin warm, teeth wet.  
He's visible he's the most visible thing.

## **Cindy Speaks, Cindy Remembers**

I was a princess once. Several times  
under the Queen of Light. It was the Yule  
I wore a crown too in my hair. One year  
the girl who played Lucia was about to  
I thought someday I too will be old and  
In my hair I wore a crown of candles.

I played second princess under Lucia  
pageant and we ate Swedish cookies.  
Karin Fekjar played Lucia. One year  
marry and she seemed so old to me.  
married. I wore a crown of candles.  
Three times I was a princess.



**The Girls Visit Ed at the California Medical Facility State Prison:  
August 6, 1980**

He never knows we're here.  
Tousled hair, the curve of his cheek, his mouth,  
gaping forehead. Unless he's curled into himself  
                    like ash, knees drawn up like a shrimp,  
his feet jut off the bed.  
He snores on his back;  
when he turns on his side  
                    it drops to a mild whistle.

He has an office with incoming letters,  
so many each morning. Outgoing. We hover  
around the desk. His cursive's fluent. He plays receptionist  
for the prison psychiatrist. There's a sign in that room:  
"God is Greater Than Any Problem I Have."

When we watch, the room reeks of salt brine.

His cursive fluent, he sculpts mugs of glazed ceramic.  
In this prison maze, he's the most visible thing.  
We glaze his mugs with fog.

## Vita

Maya Lowy's poems can be found in *The Golden Key*, *Ellipsis*, *Quaint Magazine*, *The Maple Leaf Rag*, *Poems to Fuck To*, *Breadcrumb Scabs*, *West 10<sup>th</sup>*, and *FOCI Arts Magazine*, and are forthcoming in *Kalya Review*. She also has a book review in *PANK* and is a faithful reader for UNO's *Bayou Magazine*. Born and raised in Santa Cruz, California, she has been living and writing in New Orleans since 2013.