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GROWING PAINS: AN HONORS THESIS OF CREATIVE WRITING

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GROWING PAINS: AN HONORS THESIS OF CREATIVE WRITING

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Senior Honors Project

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Introduction

One Writer's Beginning

Most of the creative writing included in this thesis are nonfiction pieces; there are only a few that can be classified as fiction. They all connect to my own growth and development as a writer, and also as an individual struggling to find and establish my own identity. In the last four years I tried to make sense of my life and my struggles, especially my personal history of trauma. I can confidently say that I am in a much better place than I was when I first started my adventure at LC. Writing has been an important part of this adventure.

Learning how to cope with trauma has always been an ongoing and deeply-seeded internal struggle for me. I was brought up learning to keep family secrets a secret and that whatever happens at home, stays at home. I was made to believe that we would all work it out as a family, that's how I was told it should be. Writing became a way of expressing myself, but more than that it was a way for me to escape my reality.

Growing up, my father took a particular interest in me, he was grooming me, and when I say I was a daddy's girl, I truly was. He was someone who I was taught to believe was my hero, someone who understood me, did not judge me, cared about my wellbeing and wanted the best for me (or so I thought). I laugh now, when I think about how twisted it all may sound. I grew up confused about what it meant to love and be loved, and that some lines are not "blurry," they are there, and should not be crossed. My entire life depended upon my father's approval and his praises, but when I wrote things down it was different. There is love and there is hate, that specific fine line is the only thing that is truly, "blurry". When I wrote things down I had the opportunity to digest and reflect upon all of my convoluted emotions. I explored my own

psyche, my memories, and emotions. Slowly, my writing transitioned from fiction to nonfiction. I had a voice on the pages of notebooks.

I have always wanted to write, even when English was not my first language. At age four I wrote my first poem in gibberish about plants and the sunny day outside. I came to find several years later that my abuser, my father, had typed it all down and saved it on his computer drive. It's odd how things can be so sentimental and still so tainted. Even now I notice that my best work ranges from expressing hate and anger towards my father, to love, respect and adoration towards my grandmother. I believe that we are constantly growing and transforming and when I read over my work I notice that those two people had that biggest impact and influence in my life, whether it was negative or positive. I explore those relationships through my writing, not just because they impacted me the most, but also because I still have a lot of emotional unpacking to do on the pages of notebooks.

I never dreamed of attending college. It was not something I believed I could achieve nor something I believed I could afford. Yet I was writing. Prior to coming to college and taking Creative Writing courses, my writing was heavily concentrated on the genre of fiction. I wanted to create worlds that paralleled my reality, but was filled with justice and hope. My living situation at home was not safe. I did not feel safe sleeping in my room at night, even with the door locked my father still was able to get into the room. Since I felt trapped in my reality, I tried to create a world that was filled with justice and hope, a world in which I could escape to on the pages of notebooks. I now know that there is a difference between reflection and avoidance. Reflection is to seriously think about an action or experience and avoidance is to not do anything at all, to ignore. I always thought that I simply did not want to reflect upon my feelings or my

experiences, because it was too painful or too difficult to handle. The truth is that I was never reflecting upon anything, because I was too busy avoiding my problems, the pain, and the complexity of it all. Still, writing was a for me to confront and reflect upon my experiences, memories, and fears, I tackled them all through writing.

Literary Touchstones and The Growth of My Reading

This section of the introduction presents a chronology of literature that has deeply affected me and influenced my writing.

In the 10th grade, I began to learn about different styles of writing and became quickly infatuated with Emily Dickinson. Emily Dickinson lived a life of repression and expectation. I felt connected to her, as well as to how her poetic pieces were both incredibly introspective and imaginative. One of my favorite poems by Dickinson stated, “‘Hope’ is the thing with feathers -/That perches in the soul -/And sings the tune without the words -/And never stops - at all -”. Her work was rhythmic and spiritual, and was a means for her to share her voice (unknowingly) with the world.

In my junior year, my interest shifted when I was introduced to magical realist styles of writing. I remember reading books like *Perfume* by Patrick Suskind, *Pedro Paramo* by Juan Rulfo, and *The Things They Carried* by Tim O’Brien. I was completely blown away by that style of writing. They made everything matter, not because it was “magical,” but because the emotions defied the expectations of the term “reality”. It did not matter if the characters were actual human beings or ghosts of people from the past, the intensity in the writing was inspiring.

Suskind, Rulfo, and O’Brien taught me to think about the weight of life, the fragility of the living, and how closely connected we are to the dead. I often found myself thinking about the

importance of a memory, how to describe a scent that had long been forgotten, a touch, or the texture of a gift given by someone who looked at me with the expression of love. Those writers inspired me to dig deeper when it came to describing things that mattered, the little things, the details that make the past/memory real again.

An image that still strikes me even today as a great example of morbidity and a beautification of death is from Tim O'Brien's, *The Things They Carried*: "Stories are for joining the past to the future. Stories are for those late hours in the night when you can't remember how you got from where you were to where you are." Through the work I do, I am simply trying to find pieces of myself in every poem and story. I find myself scattered between pages trying to make myself a whole person. I realized that a lot of what I have been carrying is baggage, and in my work, I am sometimes simply unloading it on the page.

In Patrick Suskind's *Perfume*, the protagonist really struggled with himself and identity. "There was only one thing that power could not do, it could not make him able to smell himself." That novel displayed a constant struggle within the protagonist and his desire to understand his identity. The protagonist did that by controlling others around him and in the end he still lost control. In my collection of work you will witness the struggle I have with identity and finding my own individuality. I spent so long adhering to others wants and needs (my father's), other's expectations (my mother's), and never really thought about what I wanted or expected from myself before arriving to college.

When I arrived at Lynchburg College (LC) I felt out of my depth with my surroundings and people I interacted with. I was introduced to literature I would not have read on my own, but once again I quickly fell in love with writers such as Toni Morrison, Joy Harjo, and Gabriel

García Márquez. Now as I near graduation, I can confidently say that I have become more adventurous and daring with my reading selections. I have been searching for the writing style that fits me best. These writers all use the past to emphasize its relevance and significance in the present moment. In *Beloved*, the emphasis on slavery and the memory of it still being painful, “anything dead coming back to life hurts,” is relevant to the constant struggle society has with moving forward from past history and the repercussions of institutionalized racism it has left for society to suffer through today. This writing inspired me to continue to work on displaying my own internal struggle between desire and control as well as my past and what it means to be an individual separate from all of it.

Joy Harjo’s writing reminded me of what it means to have hope, to get rid of fear, and to keep moving forward. My favorite poem she wrote is titled, “I Give You Back,” and it is a moving piece that is raw, honest, and genuine in language:

“I release you
I am not afraid to be angry.
I am not afraid to rejoice
I am not afraid to be black.
I am not afraid to be white.
I am not afraid to be hungry.
I am not afraid to be full.
I am not afraid to be hated.
I am not afraid to be loved.
to be loved, to be loved, fear.”

The way Joy Harjo writes is musical, deeply emotional, and speech driven. I find myself believing that she is having a conversation with the world. I admire her craft and ability to make statements with her work. The language in her writing can stand alone. It carries the weight of a thousand civil rights protests and revolutions, while maintaining the integrity of hope. It inspires me to find my own feminist voice in my poetry as she does in hers.

Gabriel García Márquez is a romantic writer of magical realism. His pieces are seductive, sultry, and dream-like. One of my pieces included in this body of work was inspired by his short story, "Eyes of A Blue Dog." "I knew that she was sitting in front of the mirror again, seeing my back, which had had time to reach the depths of the mirror and be caught by her look, which had also had just enough time to reach the depths and return--before the hand had time to start the second turn--until her lips were anointed now with crimson, from the first turn of her hand in front of the mirror." The repetition in his work along with the contrasting sentence lengths is skillful. Gabriel García Márquez uses short sentences for emphasis of a specific moment, long sentences for description of an action or position of characters, and repetition to drive a point or idea. The voice of the piece is consistently mysterious, but that only adds to the readers interest in the seduction between what appears to be two characters. I attempted to replicate the seductive and mysterious voice that Marquez utilizes for his short story in a few of my own pieces. The inspiration of his work has driven me to further improve upon my own pieces, as well as how I format and execute dialogue to strengthen a speaker's voice.

As a writer I want to captivate an audience as the renowned poets and authors I mentioned above do. The body of work included here is a result of a compilation of what I learned from those writers that inspire me to be better. Those writers inspire me to find my voice,

strengthen it, and use it to bring hope, spread love, and find justice for those that are still voiceless. There is a quote by Gabriel García Márquez book that I try to remember when I write something and want the readers to get something out of it. It is from his novel entitled, *No One Writes To The Colonel*: ““You can't eat hope,’ the woman said. ‘You can't eat it, but it sustains you,’ the colonel replied.” When Toni Morrison, Joy Harjo, and Gabriel García Márquez write, their words are alive and the pages burn with hope, with a reason to keep going, and that is the type of writer I eventually want to become.

Reflections on Some of My Writing

This section of the introduction includes reasons for writing, places for improvement, and how some of my pieces came to fruition.

I am attached to the writing I have done. I am very proud of my own growth, my struggle, and even my weaknesses. My weaknesses are there to remind me that I still have more to write about and improve upon.

A poem that opened my heart and mind to freely write about my grandmother was “Lament,” which is based on my memory of my grandmother’s funeral that I attended shortly after graduating High School. The week of my graduation, my mother, little sister, and I, received a phone call stating my grandmother had passed away. Even now, years later, I still feel myself hurting from the loss of her in our lives. She was the connection my sister and I had to our extended family. She was known as the peacemaker and seemed so much older than she was. She died at barely sixty years old. So when “Lament” became a poem I wanted to concentrate on the mysticality of her moving on from this world to the next. I wanted to show the dream-like experience it was to attend her funeral in Panama where I feel like I am related to everyone and

almost appear to be related to everyone in that specific “barrio”. I wanted to display the impact my grandmother had on the people around her, while also displaying some of the superstitious customs I grew up around.

The supernatural, the superstitious is rooted into my culture, into Latino culture. I used Juan Rulfo as inspiration to add in the superstitious. I was reminded of a quote in his book, *Pedro Paramo*, where one of the characters has a memory of his mother, “My mother always hated having her picture taken. She said photographs were a tool of witchcraft. And that may have been so, because hers was riddled with pinpricks, and at the location of the heart there was a hole you could stick your middle finger through.” Gabriel García Márquez also writes with a style that I am used to hearing from my family. His writing gives an added validation to the superstitious stories I was told growing up by my own mother and grandmother.

This leads me to another poem inspired by my grandmother entitled, “Dirty Brown.” In High School a classmate stated that I was neither black or brown, but a dirty brown color that reminds him of dried soil, a sort of aged clay. So I referenced that term and used it to further explore my grandmother and the relationship I had with her. I have not returned to my birth country since her death and I have always felt like she was what made Panama home for my sister and I. My grandmother’s nickname was “Tita” and she was born on the Panama Canal. She had seen a lot of history, riots, revolutions, she loved to protest with bare feet, and was the only one who really attempted to speak English to my sister and I. In Panama, a woman her age speaking English was either considered rare or unheard of. People who knew my grandmother in her youth and compared her to her older age said that she had a couple screws come loose and that she lost touch with the world. Yet, when I saw her, when I visited and laid eyes on her, she

was always full of color and wanting to live life. No matter how seemingly dangerous some of her decisions were, she went through each day with a smile on her face and a laugh in her heart. Her aging mind did contribute to the loss of her birth certificate, she never wanted to leave Panama, seven children later and her grandchildren became her whole world, and that was enough for her. I write about a lot of things that shaped me with pain and anger, but when I write about my grandmother it really is more about that love that she shared with me and how she affected others around her.

The structure in the poem, "Dirty Brown," was inspired by Sandra McPherson's poem, "Black Soap," I wanted to be able to tell a story that paralleled my grandmother and her legacy along with myself and my similar appearance to my grandmother. I think of this piece as a mixture of McPherson's structure and Toni Morrison's language in *Beloved*. I often neglect my own culture and dialect, so with "Dirty Brown" I was able to use Spanish words to describe my grandmother's hometown and place an emphasis on the location as a part of my own roots. As someone who sees herself meeting so many different ethnic "categories" and still not wanting to be categorized by simply the color of skin, the title seemed to fit this mixture in ethnicities that exists in my family. I try to separate myself from my writing ever so slightly. When it comes to characters in my nonfiction pieces, no matter the point of view I pretend that it is a different person than myself, and in some ways the character is, she is often just a piece of my personality, a fragment of a memory in the past, though often enough the character does share my physical appearance. I learned this strategy from reading Toni Morrison's work, a way to subtly note the importance of roots.

One of my more interesting stories is entitled "So It Burned". This piece is a little more complex with the different types of elements I used in order to display the wide range of emotions that I felt at that time within the span of a few hours. This piece shows fragmented images of things that affect my life. I think the writing in the beginning is a little weak, but becomes stronger as it moves forward. It sounds like a diary entry, because it kind of is; that day really happened. I wanted to practice writing dialogue. In this particular piece, dialogue was used to display an actual conversation I had with my mother, and also to show how repetitive those conversations get. At that time, I would have a conversation with my mother on the topic of my father every single week. If my mom called, it meant she was giving me bad news and stress. I used the piece as an opportunity to portray my frustration through a specific scene. I am still experimenting and improving upon dialogue construction.

"So It Burned" was not the only piece of writing I had that resembled a diary entry. "The Tree of Me" also displayed the passage of time and through vignettes closely resembled diary entries. I was also exploring my relationship with nature. Nature is constantly changing and developing. At that point in my life I was going through a lot of changes that paralleled the changes in the natural world. I was interested in finding a creative way in describing the feelings I had about my experiences at the time, my pain, frustration, agitation, and most of all loneliness. The best way for me to describe the metamorphosis I underwent was to compare myself to a tree that lost its leaves in the fall and even after winter passed, the tree was never fully developed, but I had already transformed leaving the tree (and my past) behind. That is where the comparison began between the tree and myself, because I did change over the course of those months. I felt

like and looked like a different person, since at the time I had changed my hair color to red in order to make the change physically apparent.

“Puzzling Visage” is a short prose piece of my present self looking at my past self. I tried to describe myself as that girl holding on, but simultaneously I wanted to be that person watching the girl barely hold herself together. I was making an attempt to be reflective of what I may have looked like, or looked like to an outsider. I also thought, if others could physically see the internal pain I was going through, what would it look like? This image of vulnerability and hopelessness is what I imagined I would have looked like. This piece was very reflective in the way I am both the watcher representing the future and the girl holding on to herself, representing the past. This piece was symbolic for me as a means to give myself hope that eventually I will hold on just fine.

Some of the pieces I included touch upon the topic of power, racism, revolution, and displacement. Connected to all of my other works that focus on identity and development those pieces are there to display a sort of social awareness to oppression that occurs in society. Whether the oppression is from being seen as a minority, whether that is race based, religious, or gender, there is a sort of perspective I attempt to add by adding those pieces into this collection. All of my writing pieces combined are a declaration of my freedom to speak up and use my voice to talk about trauma, injustice, and hope. I am finally speaking up for myself, and I can not say I am doing it for others, but if people can relate then I am more than happy to lend them my voice as well.

The most difficult piece to write and edit is the prose piece titled, “Daddy’s Favorite”. This was the first piece of nonfiction that I ever worked on and it was emotionally draining. I

wanted to get some perspective, some understanding into why someone would harm their own child in the manner that my father had. I wanted to make sense of my past and thought that by writing everything I knew and remembered down on paper, that some pattern would come out of the whole thing, or that I would get some answers. None of those things occurred. I neither gained any other perspective, except that I am grateful to not be in that situation anymore, nor did I really feel relieved from writing the piece. I think what actually ended up happening was that this piece just opened up the part of me I tried to keep hidden for so long and it was what started this trend of me unloading my baggage on the page.

There is a difference between reflection and avoidance, and the difference is in my writing. I no longer avoid the problem, the pain, or the memories, but instead I choose to reflect upon them and endlessly expand. Every thought, and painful memory was written down and transformed into writing that would not hurt me anymore. From this one piece, "Daddy's Favorite," I created at least six more different pieces. It was all to remind me that I am where I am today, because of my decisions and capabilities and not because of my situation, or trauma. This body of work is a form of my own poetic justice.

Table of Contents

Daddy's Favorite.....Pg.14

Bloodlines.....Pg.19

Carousel.....Pg.20

Puzzling Visage.....Pg.23

The Tree of Me.....Pg.24

I've Yet To Live A Life So Long.....Pg.29

"Hands of an old Soul".....Pg.30

Lament.....Pg.32

So it Burned.....Pg.34

And Though He is Gone.....Pg.40

Stained History.....Pg.41

The Uprising.....Pg.42

"Dirty Brown".....Pg.43

The Weeping Willow.....Pg.46

For the Huggers.....Pg.51

Daddy's Favorite

The accident. Not the grinding sound of gears or a car horn going off as two cars collide. The accident was two bodies joining as one in a night of sweaty release, the night that I, the accident was conceived. The night my blood father became an adulterer and my mother a home wrecker. I often wonder if she knew, if she had any idea that the young soldier she met at the dentist office, the one that asked for her number was actually a very married man with a new baby daughter at home waiting. I think that was where it all began, a curse of temptation and sin placed upon my family, marking us all, the family was destined to fail from the very beginning.

I was the accident that broke up a family with screams, thrashing, and tears. I was the accident that caused ripping pains from my mother's womb until my baby cries were first introduced into the world, until I was free to roam the world as a tiny person. I was the accident that came with collateral damage that rippled the fragment of many different destinies. I was the reason Panama is no longer my mother's home and also the reason why she left her family behind. I was my mother's accidental miracle, her joy, her little angel. I was my father's property.

A two-year old girl. Wide eyed, curious, and also fearful to disappoint anyone ran around exploring her grandmother's home in Puerto Rico. The air was filled with moisture creating an unpleasant humidity. Black ringlets stick to the back of my neck. Rain fell heavy with a loud hammering against the metal ceiling as a persistent blubbering came from the new crying babe my mother held dearly in her arms. I'm alone and playing around with anything my hands can reach.

There is a machine with black and white buttons, laying on the floor in the room next door. I touch one and a light sound comes seeping out of the sides. I press another and the sound is different, it's lower like a rumble. Two small hands come crashing down on the buttons, over and over again. The sound is chaotic, but it's fun. I giggle a little, no longer hearing the crying baby.

“Angelica, I’m going to tell your dad!” My mother yells from the other room. I stop playing. The neckless baby begins to wail again.

Another year passes by and I’m waking up in a muggy room warmed by the Georgia sun. The ceiling is far from my bed, the room is spinning, I’m still tired from sleep. There is a low hum. I don’t know why, but there is always a low hum in the background of this memory. I woke up to a new day, my little body climbs off of bed. Then I see a tiny pale and limp figure on the floor.

My baby sister was blocking the doorway, foaming at the mouth and unresponsive. My throat tightened at the sight and it almost felt like my gut was being held in the hands of another person. That person was squeezing my insides as I ran to the baby. Weak and still determined, I managed to move her head out of the doorway, just a crack. Just enough to yell out for my mother to wake up and come quickly.

“Mami! Mami!” I remember my mother being home, my father being gone, and also being left with the neighbors as the baby was taken inside a red, lit up car with my mother inside crying. The cause of all of the hysteria; carbon monoxide, the silent killer - it failed to kill anyone that day. It was two days until I saw any family. I vaguely remember a blown up alien doll held by my pocket sized hands and running around the strange trailer home, it was my

neighbors home. I would roll into a ball on the large sinking grey couch and wonder where everyone went. The neighbor lady would rub my back over and over again, no words said. No words needed, but they were all I needed to know.

I'm in the hospital, cold, white and green. I see a baby covered in white dots, presented on an altar, beep, beep, beep, beep, beeeeeeeeeeeee-

She was gone for 2 minutes, then the masked people brought her back and put her to sleep for a week. The hospital was home then for my sister, mother, and I, until the season changed and my baby sister was no longer sick.

The weather was getting colder, leaves fell swiftly to the ground in different shades of red and gold. The air outside was crisp and whooshing. We moved to a different country and I was going to start school soon. I remember being four years old and being told to lie about my age so I can start classes as quickly as possible. I was still bad at speaking English, and yet now I also had to learn German. I couldn't tie my shoes at the time, let alone learn a third language.

I remember being warm inside the apartment. Mother left a few minutes ago to the gym with her best friend. I'm sitting on the couch alone, stretching my legs out, trying something I saw on TV called leg lifts. I remember watching Adam Sandler for the first time in the movie "Waterboy". The house was quiet and my baby sister was still at preschool. I laughed at something Adam said, then a small creak of the floorboards had me looking up from the couch. My father was behind me.

He looked down upon me "What are you watching?"

I looked at the screen, averting my eyes. "I don't know, but it's funny."

He moved from behind the couch and sat next to me. "What are you doing?"

I stopped doing the leg lifts. "Exercise."

This was the moment the curse woke up from slumber.

Somehow on that very day, my father was no longer a father. He became a red eyed monster wearing human skin, walking around like any human could, but doing inhumane and sinful actions to his blood relative, his daughter. His property.

Two years later and I was in second grade, living in Kentucky. The house was empty when I arrived home from school. My mother was getting better at speaking English and she had a job. Slowly, I stepped in the direction of my room, my shoulders sagging and my feet dragging along the carpet. I passed my parents' room without a second thought, before the door squeaked open. I stopped walking. Looking straight ahead at the door that was my room, I exhaled, letting go of the breath I was desperately holding onto. I couldn't even make it to my room safely before I felt a large hand on my back. The backpack was already taken off. I felt no warmth from the monster, but I did feel a chilling cold that left me numb.

Somehow I was alone a lot. Somehow I was always left vulnerable.

Four years go by and Virginia has been my home longer than any other state or country. My mother is now aware of the monster in my closet, but she can't do anything.. She was still not a citizen at the time that I told her, but she is now. I didn't tell her the whole truth. I didn't want him to get into trouble. I didn't want her to feel too much pain. It doesn't matter anymore, he promised he would stop. The monster disappeared for a little bit.

I was twelve years old and scared to sleep with the door unlocked in my own home. I was scared anytime I was alone. I started to lock myself in cabinets whenever I could. It was never enough. This particular night I tried to sleep in my bed, but I still had nightmares that awoke me.

It took more than several seconds for sleep to leave my eyes. The slick and hard feel of a small pressure inside of me was the first thing I noticed. Me a sleeping being in a locked room, unconscious in the safety of my bed. Me sleeping, alone and vulnerable. Waking up to a stinging pain between the innermost of my thighs was as shocking as getting shot in the back without realizing who the perpetrator was. I let out a silent scream that was muffled by a heavy hand. The rhythm of the intruder within me became erratic and increased.

The darkness surrounding me was as suffocating as the large lump of mass on top. My body squirmed against the red eyed monster, against the dark shadow that pinned me down. I kicked my legs at it, I tried every bit of force that I could muster to get away. The desire to disappear into the oblivion itself was immense. The want to fold into myself, into nothing, was eating away at the corners of my brain. There was audible breathing beside my ear, it was shallow and ragged. There was no whispering or words of regret as a chest rose and fell against my own. A very low groan erupted from the monster as tears streamed down my face.

I was reduced to nothing, I was no longer a human or a girl. I was no longer innocent, I was used up and ruined. Sweat droplets fell from his face onto my own, meshing itself with my sadness. The monster removed apart of himself slowly from within me. The pressure on top began to lighten, until the monster was gone. I lay there, a shell of what I used to be. I lay there as a living corpse, stilled by shock as heavy footsteps inched away from me and moved towards the door. There was only a quiet creaking noise heard as the door was opened, then silently closed. This was a whole new meaning to daddy's favorite.

Bloodlines

Binding ties of red rope,
genes - with black strings attached
blood trickling down the rusty river,
our Ancestry - lives
the lineage keeps flowing fleetingly,
descending - with spoiled time
keeping the pedigree stained.
Sins - of the father
corrupting the offspring,
ties - that bind us to obligation
breeding the sickness of abuse,
blood - like faded rust
pain of a thousand lives
our Ancestry - dies.
The silver razor drenched in,
What remains - the stain.

Carousel

Fall leaves died below my feet as I walked above their disintegrating bodies. The air was crisp, cool, smelled like after rain. Trees created a lopsided canopy of shade over a large rickety wooden park out on the camp grounds. Half of the leaves were already golden, orange, or brown. Those that fell to the ground had been trampled by what I imagine were animals and people; they had muddy footprints imprinted on them. I am 4 feet and often called cute as a little bear cub, all hair, all talk and wanting to be as strong as the big adult people.

The campsite playground was enchanted and full of secrets. I ran around with my arms extended out trying to feel the wind blow through my face, I wanted to feel what a bird felt at high winds, flying freely in the sky. My black curly hair was wild and sometimes the wind pushed it back towards me, I inhaled it a little, but I still continued to smile and laugh.

I ran past the three swings on the swingset, the old loopy-looped slide, and my all-time favorite monkey bars. I couldn't play on the monkey bars, I still had little pain bubbles on my hand from climbing them yesterday at school. My third grade teacher Mrs. Bell told me something about falling on my head if I kept climbing, but I didn't fall on my head, I just got pain bubbles on the palm of my hands. They burned sometimes, but didn't keep me from having fun.

Some kids that came camping with me from my church group ran to this circular spinny thing. I have never seen anything like it.

It went in circles, round and round, and round. It only got faster depending on who pushed it.

My eyes widened like the way a dog yawns. "I want to try!" I squealed "I'm a big kid and I can hold on, and I want to go fast, and fast, I'm strong. I can do this." I walked by and kept boasting to the younger snotty kids who were, avoiding this circular disk of fun.

I wanted to get on it so badly. I jumped over a brown murky puddle, that was created by the rain from the night before, and I grabbed onto the light brown wooden circle disk. I held onto a rusty pipe that was in the center, just like all the other kids.

I whispered, "What is this toy?"

Jordan my church school classmate said, "My mommy called it a carry soul."

"It has a soul? Is that how it moves?"

"No, Daddy moves it."

Jordan's dad looked like a large sheet of paper in need of sun and a shaver. He came over to move us along. It was getting colder out, but the patches of fur on his face, arm, and legs seemed to be keeping him just as warm as my own head full of hair.

"I want to spin, I want to spin. I can hold on!" I said excitedly

"You sure little darlin?"

"Yes, mister."

Jordan's dad grabbed a rusty bar with his giant bear paw hands and with his whole body, he pushed the carry soul around.

My cheeks flew back and I felt like a chipmunk. My eyes began to water, and my heart was beating faster than the drums on *Pocahontas*. I loved that movie, I wanted to be like her. I wanted to feel more wind, I wanted my hair to continue flowing wildly. I moved further down to the edge of the carry soul, holding on to the farthest end of the rusty pipe.

My face split into a wide gap toothed smile and I hoped not to catch flies from this high speed fun. Round and round we went, like a freight train, and I began laughing and sweating. The pain bubbles on my palms started hurting and my hands were getting too sweaty. The rusty pipe began to feel slick, but the speed was only increasing. My body ended up horizontal somehow, with my 7 year old arms fully extended still barely holding on to the pipe. Mr. Jordan was too close, way too close to the carousel, I think he wanted to keep pushing us, but my legs dangling and spinning, and flying in the air caught Mr. Jordan in the shins. That's when my hands slipped and I flew out of the carry soul like a doll, or a bird with no sense of direction. My heart was in my stomach, threatening to burst.

I fell in the murky brown puddle. I came out of it with mud slathered all over my clothes, face and hair, I think I resembled the Scooby Doo Mud monster.

My stomach felt heavy, my mouth dry, and my eyes were holding back what felt like a sprinkler of tears. It was embarrassing, but I'm a big girl. People can't see me cry. Jordan laughed and pointed, his dad was still trying to get back up from the ground.

I just remember being scooped up by someone, taking me back to the camping ground.

I never went on a carry soul again.

Puzzling Visage

There she sits with an invisible anchor tied to her shoulders and tugging, tugging, her downwards. She is lost in a spiral of her innermost thoughts, legs and arms crossed, holding, holding onto her rib cage, to herself as if pieces of her puzzle would crumble without the support. Her muddy eyes fixate on the window beside her. People walk on the other side of that glass with arms open wide taking the whole world in. Each breath they take, she catches with blinking eyes. Their inhales and exhales bring to life the little busy street of the city. She is trying to steal life from those outside living it, their hair taking on the sun's illumination, their smiles revealing a feeling she is not familiar with. She is too busy looking outside that window, trying to find something she doesn't have, and I'm too busy looking at her, trying to figure out why her dark hair shadows over her face in large snake-coiled curls. Why her spidery lashes leak black ink of poison down her cheeks, cracking that olive colored visage. Her child-sized feet hover just above the floor. She is not grounded and I wonder what she is looking for. She feels the static touch of my eyes attempting to grab her attention through the back of her head. Her head cranks slowly to the right like a ticking clock. Tick, tick, tick, and we lock eyes. She looks at me with those muddy eyes, empty, confused. Her eyebrows furrowing in and her eyes squinting as if she could not see in front of her over the clouding thoughts of her mind. Her mouth is stuck pouting, the edges curved slightly down. Her hands still holding, holding, holding on.

The Tree of Me

August - October

The amber leaves flickered against one another as they fell to the ground with a quiet whisper. I began contemplating how the rest of the school year was going to go, swiftly like the converging seasons or with the turmoil of a hungry storm. I swayed like the branches of trees to the wind very easily, it was natural for me to do as I was told, to not take chances or do anything out of my constant. I always fell short. Instead of shedding my leaves, or cocooning myself, I tend to stay stagnant, unchanging like a magnolia's green leaves in the heart of a sterile winter. There is a tree that I walk past right before reaching class, all its leaves have already fallen without a single goodbye. The first of many to go.

November - December

The leaves left with a hopeful brown crisp as I stepped on their scattered remains across the dell. It was as bright as the sun peering through the blinds of dusty clouds. A leaf off of my own tree finally dropped. I was beginning to shed my skin. I changed my major with the uneasiness of a squirrel trying to search for another nut buried in the ground. My nuts were scattered around, still buried, but I found one. I found a major that made me feel passionate and got rid of the anchor that held me down. The air was filled with the hopeful scent of peppermint, 'tis the season for holiday cheer. Although, there was still no sign of Frosty.

December

The house was unforgiving. The cawing of crows was irrefutable. The desperate scratches on my bark were prominent, and I no longer wanted to be a tree. I wanted to be a bird

that could fly far away to another section of the world. The weather outside was still having a midlife crisis and attempting it's hardest to hold on. Inside, was filled with frozen internal bruises. The emotional blows kept coming as the days turned, the weather was still trying to catch up. I shed more leaves and went out with friends, the dawn was soon my enemy and that night had become my best friend.

The wind was blowing, but I only moved a little. There was a little bit of kindling at the party. The cold house was being ignored, while a warmer touch caught my attention. I got home just before God let there be light, and Judgement day was going to ensue the next day. I woke up with only two-thirds of my leaves. The trees outside were already in the middle of their slumber. I pretended I was still no different, but after trying to be the best person my family wanted me to be, I forgot who I was. I didn't even know who I was, but I was starting to investigate that. It was a Merry Christmas without snow, but I already made my decision to gift myself with the release of the rest of my leaves. My black roots, turned burgundy a couple weeks later. I looked a little brighter in the mirror and my hair a lot redder. the leaves that fell were no longer green, they were burgundy and beautiful.

January

I started the New Year awaiting the Spring. It was not about having a new me, but finding out who "me" was. On January 6th 2015; the east coast finally got its first good taste of snow. I was ready for the months of contemplation and discovery ahead. I was ready to put to bed, the things of the seasons before. There was a warmth from that party in December that transferred over to the New Year. If I was a christmas tree, I would say that my lights were

shining brightly, with a mistletoe at the top. The stresses of a hectic household became less important.

January - February

Although the sky was transforming, shifting, crossing into dimensions of colors, filled with confusion and thought. The frigid mother held an indecisive air, she either wanted to burden the critters with the dandruff of her hair, or give a radiant shine of her smile. There was a tree I began to observe, it was me until I stopped letting the wind decide my movement. The tree still had dried dead leaves clinging to it, like a mother holding on to her stillborn child. I was unsure of what I wanted to do pertaining to the guy that I still seemed to be fond of, take a chance and see how long it lasts, or remember it fondly as a Holiday fling. As snow covered my branches, the warmth inside of me was slowly melting it away.

February - March

The branches of the tree I spend hours watching, start looking like the inside of a human body, nerves and arteries are represented by the branches. At the soul of the trunk, somewhere in there lies the dormant heart. It beats steadily, passively waiting for spring to return. The dry cold is still clinging on to the days, making my skin increasingly rough, and causing me to scratch insistently. I'm tired of slathering up the pounds of lotion, just to avoid looking like the abandoned snowman from a couple weeks back.

Every once in awhile you may hear a small chirp lingering through the wind. If the birds are still not hooking up, the human animals sure are. Love is in full swing, and the tree is still

lonely. It's finger like branches seem to try to make a connection, with its extension. I'm too low on the ground to share the warmth that I've been getting. I'm growing apart from this lonely tree, my tree is almost ready to blossom.

March

Before I leave for break I observe the limbo tree once more. In the beginning of the semester the bark resembled shards of glass covered in mildew, now it just looks like shards of glass covered in ice. My warmth can't seem to reach it. So, I leave the area like a bird going south. Along with my pair and flock, I enjoyed a week of cold listerine colored waves, eerie fog that engulfed people only feet away, and great grainy photos.

My tree also blossomed. I started to grow again, in a different sort of way. Gone was the dark-haired girl, that was made into a victim of her past relationships. In the mirror, I saw someone new, I forgot about the dark-haired girl and I saw a flushed red haired young woman, that was finally able to have a choice and make the choice to share herself with someone she cared about. No longer the tree blowing to the beckoned call of the wind, an empty shell, a ghost of herself. I was not forced against my will, I was not tricked or coerced, but instead I shared myself with someone that shared themselves with me. The sun was hotter, the water wetter, I no longer felt like I was living life through an endless dream.

The night before arriving back to Lynchburg, I went on one last walk at the beach. Wispy winds warn me to move with the flight of my hair whipping my face. The temperature had fallen in the darkness. Soft stabs still my calloused feet with the grainy, slowly freezing sand. There is only sparkling lights and a spotlight from above and so below, on me. The opera singer sings,

sinking her beats to the tones of gurgling waves of ooh's hitting the bass of the beach in consecutive times. This was the background music to my thoughts as I stared out into the dark ocean. I never felt so guiltless, so innocent, so restored, until that week that I blossomed by choice.

I returned to Lynchburg, and winter was no more. Buds started to creep from their nooks of trees all around the dell. Color was being splashed around like that of paint on a canvas. Just like I had blossomed, it seemed like the world around me was doing the same. Finally, I felt like I had been reunited with my connection to nature. Looking back to my observational tree, my limbo tree, it stilled stayed unchanging, during the time I was gone. It's mythical and dream like appearance with the lumps on the branches and the bark itself, appearing more like dragon scales, I realized, this limbo tree was more like my past. It is still waiting for its warmth to arrive.

I've Yet To Live A Life So Long

I've yet to live a life so long,
and still, I've lived too long.
I walk along a path so cold
with soul already sold.
I've lost a million parts of me,
a million parts of me.
For reasons I cannot explain,
I'll always be in pain.

Oh yes, scream loud to your heavens.
Maybe, you shall be saved?
Sometimes, good things come in sevens
or, maybe it's the omens you craved?

So long I've waited for some peace,
I still wait for that peace.
"He will be our guide to death,"
still waiting for your last breath.
I warn you at what is to come.
For you, for me, who knows?
Yet I do, and still alone.
I hope to still atone.

Sigh, with my insides badly bruised
from healing wounds that burn bright red,
with any tender touch - misused.
It's easier to be just dead.

I've yet to live a life so long,
And still, I've lived too long.
I walk along a path so cold
with soul already sold.
I've lost a thousand times before,
I'll lose a thousand more.
For reasons I cannot explain,
I'll always be in pain.

“Hands of an Old Soul”

After Gabriel García Márquez, “Eyes of a Blue Dog”

Then she ran towards me. The moon hung low creating shadows of everything its light touched. The closer she got, the larger her shadow became. I thought that she was planning on attacking me at first. But then I realized she was dancing under the moonlight. Dancing and spinning towards me. I then realized I was dancing and spinning towards her. The moon’s light caught on to her white laced gown, she glowed in the middle of the night. I stopped dancing to watch her. I took a deep, long, shaky breath in, trying to catch some of her spirit in my mouth. But I exhaled and let her smoky spirit evaporate into the cold air. She watched me breathe her out.

For a few seconds that’s all we did, we watched each other’s shadowy frames under the moon. Then my arm extended itself towards her, hand opened in offering. Her eyes fire. The heat making me breath out more of her smoke. She lifted her hand out high towards mine. The moonlight accentuated every line and crease on her palm. That is when I remembered, when I said to her: “Hands of an old soul.” Leaving her hand up high like a queen waving, she watched me with her fire eyes and smirked. “That. We can never forget the paths our lives take, nor how many.” The moon traced the map of stars in her hand, the ridges, the grooves, the lines that overlapped each other and the ones that broke off into nothing. Then she dropped her hand and moved further from the light sighing: “Hands of an old soul. I hear the whispers everywhere, but I never hear yours.”

I watched her shadow shrink. The light only catching her warm toned skin. I watched her circling around the trees. Like she was apart of their past, like she knew them longer than the

darkening leaves. I watched her watching me with her fire eyes teasing. Her lips pursed and cheeks reddened by heat. She danced in the shadows away from me. I watched her. I watched her dance and in the darkness of trees pull a strap of the gown down, then the other.

She watched me, watch her with her hands of an old soul persuading me, manipulating me, hypnotizing me with knowledge I never possessed. She spoke in a whisper "I'm afraid that the light will be gone soon and so will you." Her fire eyes blazed as the gown fell in a puddle of white light on the ground. She said to me "Can you still see me." and I said to her "Always, in this place. Your body burns its own flame. Makes its own light." Then her fire eyes shimmered and she laughed with her hands stretched out high above her in way of presentation. "Hands of an old soul." she said. Then I said. "Your light will never burn out." I stepped further out into the moonlight, as the moon slowly began to drop. I watched her, watching me trying to catch more of the night, more of her, before it was gone.

"Now I feel it." I said. "I won't be here much longer, but I'll find you again." She didn't answer. Her eyes burned low. She extended her arm towards me from the darkness. "I will always find you." The moonlight did not catch it, but my eyes did see the lines of her hands continue to burn. "Hands of an old soul." I said. Then I slowly walked from out of the moonlights gaze. "You won't remember me in this life, but you'll recognize me in the next by my hands." She said. "Hands of an old soul." Her fire eyes burned out. The night consumed us both.

Lament

My white flowered heels sunk into
necropolis soil where the rotten worms creeped.
Unforgettable,
the giant palm trees looming, watching, guarding over,
the sea of graves.
Mosquito thirsty for more red to feed on, but
as my grandmother asked
the dark people, my family, came in waves of white.
I felt the sun stick to my skin like a bandaid.
Ripping it off,
Leaves a residue of sticky perspiration.

My white flowered heels descend,
within the soil.
The petals of my heels are stained with streaks of brown goo.
The chorus of my relatives voices matched
the music of those beyond the Jordan
as we marched
above the stone markers.
Faces falling,
wrinkles eaten away by maggots, the life eaters.
The eternal glass hovering above the brown bread, my grandmother.
Grey metal digs up the weight of life,
Just to pile it all on top.

My white flowered heels fall,
onto the soft opened earth.
Wrapped in the terracotta clay, the decomposed and old.
My aunt attempts to throw herself into the crypt, we stop her.
Hands raise to aid the passing.

We throw crumbling rubble in fist fulls onto the shrine.
The cries from the earth were louder still,
my family wallows
with the opened wound.
Until it was covered,
as my grandmother wanted,

not with pushed daisies, but instead,
with white colored roses.

My white flowered heels were now dingy brown,
soil clogged the petals.
We marched back in ceremony,
a ritual for the departed.
My grandmother's home filled with generations of relatives,
branches I never knew existed were introduced.
We washed our shoes covered in cemetery outside the door.
It was out of respect for her, her spirit,
we covered the mirrors to help her soul pass,
we prayed for hours until the sun dropped,
and the moon was the only one listening to our spells.
We beat crescendos into the dark, incense filled our nostrils,
we breathed her out into the night, the sky, out of our lives.
I left my brown, flowered heels to age on my grandmother's porch.

So It Burned

It sizzled like a plate of sirloin steak being served at a restaurant. It was not cow meat, but the animal was me, and the sun was cooking up my cells. I sped up my pace feeling no wind to help keep the sweat from cascading down my brow, the salty drops irritating my eyeballs. I squinted the rest of the way up the sidewalk to my building. Around me - birds flew high, almost like Icarus too close to the sun. Their wings spread wide out, casting moving shadows down below. The squirrels rolled themselves in the soil like dogs, and a few jumped around eager to find their buried treasure. Students lined the Dell with their bodies on towels and their clothes miniscule in nature. There is something about a sunny day that brings people out of their caves and has them laying out like snakes. The cold hearted animals are always the ones needing the warmth. I was feeling too hot already, didn't want the rays to change my DNA any darker.

I entered the building quickly, without a second glance at the blinding light touching my back. The cool air struck me like a shock wave. It was relieving, I felt as if I could finally breathe at last.

Following the concrete staircase up to my haven, I reached the fifth floor and rushed to reach my room. Light filtered through the dark purple curtains on the window. My bamboo plant was greener than the lush fields of grass on the dell, often appearing like a mini rainforest beneath my feet. I just needed time to escape the world, the people - without really leaving. There is a moment in which I'm in my room and am able to find solace in the silence.

Then a little tapping sound comes from my door.

"It's open!" I yell as I drop my backpack on the floor beside the window.

One of my residents pops her head into the door frame and gives me an impish smile, “Angelica, I forgot my key and -”

I try my best to sound unbothered, “You locked yourself out, I got it. Let me just go downstairs to get the master.”

She moved away from the door as I walked out. “Thank you!”

“*Noo* problem.” I state as I turn the corner of the hall.

I descended the staircase with a sigh. *Got back just in time I guess.* I opened the small office space room, to retrieve the master key and I ran up the stairs, wanting to finish the chore as soon as possible.

I waved the key in the air, once I got close enough to the resident, “Got it.” I smirked.

“Thank you,” she said again as I pushed her large door open.

“No problem, try to bring your room key everywhere you go. Tying it around your wrist with a scrunchy usually helps.” I made a show of displaying my own key fastened securely on my wrist.

She nodded. “I’ll try that.”

“Okay.” I walked away and hoped that I wouldn’t have to unlock her door for a fourth time the same day.

Back in my room I breathed easy once more. Stress rolled down like waves off my back. Things that were once bothering me no longer mattered at the moment. I just needed to get out of the maze that was my head.

I sprawled myself out like a cat on my futon and looked out the window. The sky cloudless, with a thousand whispered voices of birds, too fast to be heard correctly. The glass

window a little too thick to hear the distinct whispers. I imagined them speaking about the freedom of taking flight and escaping whenever they felt the need. I needed to escape, but the best I could do was a four walled concrete room. My nest far up, higher than a few of the trees outside on the campus lawn.

My mother called earlier today to announce that her relationship with the only man that acted like a father to me was over. He called me earlier in the morning asking me how all my classes were going and inquired like a wise old owl on my well-being. My sister was in a car accident the week before and my mother failed to inform me of any details. Her text was only a sentence that consisted of the occurrence. My passport, like a sneaky fox has disappeared and left a heavy elephant sized weight on my chest. I still have not told my mother, too much to worry about and I know she will find a way to make me feel worse.

I wish God would grace me with purifying droplets from the sky so I could baptize my negativity and lay to rest like rotting wood my worries.

Then my phone rang, penetrating my thoughts like a hammer.

“Hello?”

“Hey, honey.” My mom cooed on the other side of the line

“Hi mom, what is it?”

“You need to call your father.”

There it was. She wanted something again. “For what reason?”

She waited a moment, probably attempting to collect her thoughts “You need him to send copies of his retirement papers so you can get an updated ID.”

I don't want to. “Why don't you call him?”

“BECAUSE THE SONOFABITCH IS TRYING TO TAKE AWAY EVERYTHING I HAVE,” then she managed to pause again and lower her voice. “He is trying to leave me on the street. I have to find money to pay for a lawyer, because he is attempting to take me to court.”

“WHAT?! Are you serious?” I was not entirely surprised, I felt like every year my father tried something like this, but it always came at a cost to us and not him.

“Yes, damn serious. Now call him and ask him about the ID situation!”

I still don't want to. “...Okay. Bye.”

“Bye, I love you.”

“*Yeah*, I love you too.” I clicked the phone off with finality and put it on Do Not Disturb. Staring up at the ceiling, I felt my eyelids drooping like a sad flower. I fell asleep to the sound of my A/C blowing like the faint scream of the old nonexistent arctic snow. It may have been desert outside, but my inside still remained cold.

I dreamt of burning fields of green paper. Money flew and ashened into dust drifting away by the wind. Everything green, turned dark, became meaningless. Green bills fell from the sky, but as soon as it came reaching the ground, the fires burned it all. My own skin darkened by the lick of the flames. I was engulfed in the ash of lost money. As stuck as a mouse in a snake's cage, there was nowhere for me to go.

I woke up bothered by the reminder of more things that seem to pile around me. Yesterday, I found out I owed the school a substantial amount of money that I couldn't possibly

afford without some sort of financial assistance. Speaking to my mother was like speaking to a parrot that would continue to repeat back to me everything I said. She was only good for tying the noose of stress around my neck.

I got up again to look at a different perspective of the world, before my thoughts drowned me. Down below my window, the human ants scamper like animals. They shuffle, they drag, they jog... they lag behind, one after the other. The trees, like giants hover above them - too few, to seem threatening. Too few, to cover my view. I never really know distinctly what is said but, I recognize the hollering and screeching. Occasionally the scent of undercooked cafe meat wafts in the air. Down below the human ants almost always travel in pairs. When the skyline bruises, they all disappear into their homes.

My eyes zoom out from the outside world and pick up something moving close to my face. A small eraser sized ladybug lazily makes its way across the window pane. One, two, three times right next to my head. I can't help but wonder where it came from, as if the sun's rays were guiding it along. I wondered if it was alone or if its friends were near by. Did it have friends? The ladybug was on its own little quest today, trying to find itself among the wild of the world.

The sun plummeted down beyond the horizon. The ladybug disappeared along with the light. I began to settle myself in bed once more. Dinner time has passed and my wolf like hunger ignored, it has transformed itself from a growl to a catlike purr. *I'll hunt something down tomorrow.*

I left the blinds open, hoping to get some light from the stars, but they seemed absent from the sky. My A/C was not working quite right, sweat was dripping off of my arms, slicking my body all up like oil. Instead of curling myself into the safety of a fetal position, I laid

sprawled out once more. *I'll wake up early to do my work, I just need a break.* I prayed for a peaceful sleep that never came.

The blaring hurricane warning sound of an alarm went off in the building. There was a rancid scent filling the halls. I avoided breathing from my nose, instead like a fish I opened my mouth in the shape of O's to get in some air. I made sure to get my residents to evacuate the building and we all went outside. I was met with a sort of liberation, as God's apologetic tears met my face in showers.

The searching eyes of crows, waited for security to allow everyone back inside. For once I just wanted to stay outside and match God's tears with my own. The residents all went back into their homes, and I sobbed outside hoping to be freed of my own. My own internal cage that I kept fighting against.

Like the microwave that caught fire on the second floor of the building, my stresses were lit up. I was stuck. So it burned.

And Though He Is Gone

Please peel off the layers,
I promise to fulfill your prayers.
Of innocence wrapped up in sin,
of a good time waiting to begin.
A night of moans
and groans.
A night of candlelight
and maybe one little bite.
Take time off the table,
I promise to be more than able
to bend over this or that way,
to be willing to play,
with vibrating toys
and balls that cause noise,
with chills that trickle down my spine,
and maybe I will call you mine.

Please peel off the layers,
I promise to fulfill your prayers.
Of innocence taken by sin,
of a good girl breaking skin.
A night of moans
and groans.
A night of moonlight,
and maybe a lot of fight.
Take time off - the table.
I promise to be more than able:
To display the leftover scars,
To remember the scent of cigars
on my body and forced upon me,
and my screaming pleas!
On the man that would not stop ...
And though he is gone - his shadow is still on top.

Stained History

Yes, Masir they will learn to read the words of god,
the white pages will entrap them into submission.
They will then be educated, they will think you expect them to do more
than the labor that curves their black backs, callouses their white paws...

Yes, Masir they will think they are free,
they will march in harmony to words and lies of those
hidden behind white sheets of "truth" and fire.
They will win "rights", but will always remain fighting...

Yes, Masir they will work, not in fields of white,
but next to the whites, in offices that almost reach heaven.
Those undeserving will remain in rotting slums, forgotten in the country,
left to continue their labor under the hot blistering sun, to darken their skin further...

Yes, Masir they will never be good enough,
you will give them power, just for show,
just to pull the puppet strings with pieces of green in your pockets.
They will remain, branded-red by ancestry...

Yes, Masir they will never know they remain enslaved,
to the blood shed on the now red land, to the words engraved on skin,
in DNA of those less than human, of their animal ways.
They will never know how or why, they're still slaves...

The Uprising

Black hearted,
the words I speak are poison,
a venom.

That spread with a whisper,
kills with a scream,
but those that die are lucky,
those that don't
can't leave.

Soulless,
the things I think are deadly
a disease.

That spreads with a touch,
kills with a kiss,
but those that die are lucky,
those that don't
aren't missed.

Demonic,
The acts I commit are horrid
a sin.

That spreads with a thought,
kills with a sword,
but those that die are lucky,
those that don't
are ignored.

Evil,
The things I see are common
a habit.

That spreads with a leader,
kills with a command,
But those that die are lucky,
those that don't
Get out of hand.

“Dirty Brown”

1

Sawdust, “dirty brown,”
layers of clay clinging to bone.
Constantly forgetting the DNA,
the shared resemblance to a woman
I once knew. A woman who once knew
me.

“Tita, Tita” - She died.
Forty years younger than she expected
or forty years older than I am today.
Her roots still live on
among the generations she
planted. Leaves of memories
still sprout in our subconscious.
Her face still lingers
when we peer into mirrors.

2

She pricked her finger on
a spinning wheel long ago, and
finally fell asleep forty years later.
She cleaned floors with her tears
and fed her roses blood to add
some color. That was the time
the machete slipped from her hand
and cut her fingertips straight off.
I held the cup her hand bled into.

She was a seamstress, a gardener,
a maid, and a mother. We breathe
her in, anytime a candle burns.
We hold her hand, when we play
cards, and water reminds us
of her cracked bare feet always shoeless,
always appearing leathery and brown
a mixture of age, family, and a strong sun.

I remember her three-toothed smile.
She would cackle until the sun fell
behind “la montaña,”
and Dios brought us “la luna”.

3

“La luna” was full faced when
she gave birth for the seventh time.
And when she became a part of “la tierra,”
we found her, bright faced, in the dark sky.
“Tita, Tita.” Oh so bright she is,
she was. The sun didn’t rise
for several days, until her spirit
left “este mundo,”
until my family no longer saw
her imprint on beds or felt
her breathe into their ears at night,
when we slept.

4

The mirrors were covered to
let her spirit pass, crossover
to the other side. Yet, we hear her
whispering through the wind,
her cackle echoing off shadows.
We see her when the sun falls
and our eyes close.
“Tita, Tita,” is always there when
we each look in the mirror.

It’s the sawdust, the “dirty brown,”
clay we all share that covers our white
bones, the mole she had
on her face we each acquired.
As descendents, we live on
like the blood filled roses in her garden
and the stitched pieces of material
she used to make masterpieces. We cry
her tears, and feel her pain. Forty years

later, it's the Sawdust, the "dirty brown," it's the same experience of a woman I once knew.

A woman who once knew me.

The Weeping Willow

Like water, the soil just soaked it all in. Taking in the energy, taking in life force, red liquid. My blood. I laid sprawled, feeling the wet blades below me trying to engulf my body. Like a venus fly trap the whole earth was folding itself around me. My eyes were wide eyed and staring off to the side, to the distance. There was no light or flame behind them, just darkness. The vivid rusty brown color gone to the shade of dead leaves. The skin no longer vibrant was slowly beginning to ashen like coal does when it stops burning, it just withers. Down below the ground, the earth opens up its capillaries, its tunnels that drink up the rest of my life for sustenance, taking it down to the depths, replacing my life for many others. I am no longer that body that lays below the willow tree, I see all, I hear all, but I am no longer anything. My essence has become that of the sound that the wind makes when it tries to be heard. I try to be heard, but no one listens, no one can hear me. I'm dead, but I'm still here. A part of the earth now, and unable to leave until I find out how my body ended up below my bedroom window, forgotten.

I wake up to the beams of sunlight playing tag with my eyelids. The clouds across the sky move rapidly, covering and uncovering, the great bright star. I stretch my body out, expecting to feel the softness of my pillow, instead my hands glide over moisture. My eyes slowly blink open, like a camera lens trying to adjust, trying hard to focus on the scene in front of me. I was laying outside. My body disturbing the morning dew.

Why am I out here?

I look up at the sky, watching black birds gather in clumps, circling around the nearby area. Winter was on its way, many of the trees around the buildings have already lost their leaves. The school's campus was completely silent. Unsurprising, the night before, many of the students went out to celebrate the long awaited end of term. I remember listening to my hallmates raging with the latest EDSM spotify playlist. I watched people stumble out of the dorms, dropping bottles on their way out. A couple of them running back in to throw up what they had just drank. The end of the semester is something to celebrate, but I already had an exam scheduled the next day. I had watched mournfully as my roommate got ready and left for the night.

I hope she had a good time. I thought to myself as I slowly brought myself up from the grass. Turning on my side and sinking my hand into the ground I tried my best not to get grass stains on my night gown. I found it already difficult to take the stains out of blue jeans, let alone white material.

My head was pounding, by the time I finally managed to get up. My dark curly hair was holding remnants of the earth hostage. The world seemed to spin a little, my legs were unsteady, unsure of what solid ground was. I didn't remember going out last night or drinking. I had just planned on staying in and studying.

How did I get out here?

I breathed in a bit of the morning, eating the scent of metal and wood. I could feel the air static, waiting for some rain to fall from the rippling sky. The only sounds up this early were of the natural world. I began to make my way towards my dorm. Slowly. My feet dragged on the sidewalk feeling a little unhinged from my body. I was working hard to keep my head lifted. My

eyes narrowed to the door, trying their best to stay focused. Each step I managed to take began to create echoes of vibrating sound in my ears. It was as if I could hear the crunching, the sliding, all of the touching that was occurring between my foot and the floor. Then I no longer could focus on the door, but instead became aware of the increasing number of black wings above me. The *cawws* coming out in unison. The flapping of wings vibrating through me like breaths, as if every beat of their wings was becoming a whisper I could hear.

Caw, Caw, Caw, Caw, - whoosh- Caw, Caw, Caw, Caw - whoosh-, Caw, Caw, Caw, Caw
- Whoosh - Whoosh -

I shifted my gaze back to the door and I was almost there. But the *cawws* were too strong. My attention went back towards the giant birds and their circled dance. I was feeling the sound as if it were stuck in my throat, a motored scratch from my larynx spewing out of my vocal cords.

Caw, Caw, -Whoosh - Caw, Caw, - Whoosh -, Caw, Caw - Whoosh - Caw, Caw, Caw

I no longer moved towards the door, but instead towards the birds. My legs stabilized with each step, my head gradually lightened, then I heard a piercing scream that broke my peace.

I stood motionless. A thousand beady eyes stared at me, silently.

The screaming continued as my roommate stood over what I thought was a dream.

This can't be. This can't be. I was beginning to mutter something, then I was trying to yell at her.

"Rachel I'm right here, look at me!" But my voice was silent. Instead the birds *cawwd* louder.

I was right next to Rachel as she sobbed and screamed for help. I stood right next to her as she fell to the muddied crimson ground. Her knees sunk into the soil along with my body in front of her. The other me. The me laying in leaves dyed red from the night before. My dark curls had froze over night, capturing in it's hold a touch of frostbite. My lips no longer pink, but purple. The lips were pursed, stuck in the middle of saying something, something that died along with me. My arms were splayed out and extended with shards of glass protruding from the skin, my legs looked as if they were cemented, caught in a mid-run and covered in splotches of blue, purple, and black circles. My eyes were wide open. The brown in them gone. There was only a void of dark left behind, empty.

I couldn't stop staring at myself. I tried to shake Rachel, to show her that I was still here, but my hand went through her body like water. I felt her insides, but could not, no matter how much I attempted, feel her skin. I could not make my hand solid enough to hold her and give my roommate, my friend some comfort.

The cawwing didn't stop. I tried to speak, and the world vibrated instead.

Rachel never stopped sobbing, wouldn't even let go of my blood rusted hand until the paramedics and school counselors pulled her away. I couldn't move. I stayed rooted into the ground like the willow beside me, still as the birds as they mourned for me. It was as if I could see the loss of myself through thirty pairs of black beady eyes.

How did this happen? What happened last night?

I watched my body be taken away from me by the muted ambulance. I watched it all slowly, trying my hardest to get every single detail. As if I could stop time, and just pretend that I was not...physically gone.

I looked up at the birds again and their *cawwing* matched my sorrow.

For the Huggers

There is a feeling of warmth that is mostly saturated in the heart and chest region. The whole upper torso feels heated. Your hand and arms almost feels imprinted or connected like magnets to the other person's body. You stand there in a full embrace and if you are hugging correctly, then you feel toasty, not just on the skin, but your blood seeming to swelter. It feels cozy, like a human blanket was laid gracefully in front of you. For those brief seconds your body tries to release happy hormones and if you hold on for at least 20 seconds the Oxytocin will finally be released into your body, lifting up your mood. Then the hug comes to a close and as you break it, the warmth starts to dissipate. Yet the shadow of the hug clings on to your person as you walk away and try to remember what it feels like to matter.