

Gog

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Black
Lawrence
Press

for Michael

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I. PRETTY BANSHEE

TO OVID, MICHIGAN

Cow-mother, I counted all the one-eyed cats
in town. Grandma said I'd go blind.
Did you see me on the graves? I was born dead,
took my fifth of vodka to the cemetery.
Did you hear me praying? I said
there was no god, so who was I talking to?
I've seen ghosts with no teeth, and I want
to escape inside their mouths.
Ovid, I'm naked almost all the time now
inside my boxy apartment. Remember
I pressed my breasts to your dirt?

CRONE-BALLAD

When my great-grandma's husband drove by with another woman,
she punched him in the face.

When her daughter married a rapist,
she punched him in the face.

When her son slept with her other son's wife, then slid
his motorcycle under a semi truck,
she wore a red dress to his wake.

*There were blue birds, red birds, gray birds whose tails salt
wouldn't bind. There were great-great-grandmas, aunts, uncles,
peering through glass.*

When her husband kicked her pregnant belly,
she earthed the stillborn in a shoebox.

When the bruises spread like violets,
she earthed the stillborn in a shoebox.

After she named her Sharon Rose and dug an unmarked grave,
she washed the livings' socks.

A loosed canary flies into the glass.

When her husband left his first family in Hungary, the woman
cursed his children to die young.

The woman he left in Hungary
cursed his children to die young.

In a tiny town in Michigan,
her boys dropped one by one.

Birds line up on the sill to peck the glass.

*

Great-grandma said:
*Forty years of pot roasts, hams—
my lingerie hangs
in the closet, still tagged.*

*Each time we saw their stitched faces,
we passed the opiates,
flicked cigarettes into a vase.*

In her dream, she told me:
*It was red.
It was the red scarf.
It was the red scarf around the neck of
the pregnant girl
he left in Hungary.*

*

Great-grandma spits into her garden,
complains about a treaty her Blackfoot mother signed.
She hates crops. She hates farmers.
I stomp a colony of ants.

We practice
shooting cans. I shave my legs
with her purple razor. The wildflowers
bloom all at once.

Even in winter, I pump my legs
on the swing set, cold turning my chest
to a porcelain egg
where my great-grandma's stillborn
scratches and turns.

There is one way to escape the dream: break your neck against the glass.

*

The last words of Mary Warren Toth Seibert Prochaska:

Lousy cocksuckers.

She approaches death
like a wounded bear. Her red-tinted
hair heralds her combustion; her
heart is packed with gunpowder, and she'll drag
us down with her. Goddamn.

Every breath is a supernova, a blue
membrane sparking around her shadow's
husk. She's a triple-shift, three-husbands-
before-1960, tarot-reading, play-any-instrument-by-ear,
ham-fisted, ammonia-in-the-bathwater,
pick-your-teeth-up-off-the-floor bitch.

MOTHER IS A WOLF

She says *Yes* is a woman's word—
a rubber ball that doesn't fit
between her teeth—the baddest wolves
wear masks. I pass the time attaching flies
to strings and stringing pupils into wreaths
of irises. O lightning, fangs! Old crones
wear shoes worth more than us,

and I am wild. Mother strikes “chicken”
from the dwindling grocery list.
Her fists and feet scrape bone
into whole pies. I fetch
empty chip bags from the unmowed
perimeter of our trailer. Spam bursts
from my abdomen. I demand
car alarms. I force
bug zappers to outshine stars. I will collapse
the brick house. I will loose
myself far and wide as pink light
on a field, and emerge—Mother—
my own child, For Whom
Branches Bend to Touch.

Mother, emaciated by another miscarriage,
limps the hospital halls, convinced
the rape that scarred her
was earned; she growls
weak into my ear. I roll myself in clouds,
six, seven, eight. I have been

the shadow and light of each year,
each star folding itself into a nipple
 caked with blood, but that is how we feed
 the ones we love, without a sound and when we can.

Danielle, Penelope, Joshua, Sharon: sleep.
I'll paint you grown and in every
 color, write you songs in A minor, sad
and easy for your mouths
like string-less lyres outside my window.

HOMUNCULUS

I couldn't stand silent while my father cocked his rifle
at each thing small enough for him to own. I was a boy

who turned into a girl who was called a liar
by everyone I loved. My spirit in that angular, wiry form

was winged and bloody like a fang. A sparrow,
cardinal, and starling lined up on my father's windowsill

and pecked the glass together: snare, timpani, bass.
I've become the wolf, the bastard son who dove

off a cliff into shallow water. O tiny changeling embryo,
self-sculpting clay, you are a pecking mass in the shadow

of a bolt-gashed tree, a dreamonym for dust.

MEADOWS TRAILER PARK, 1995

We scribbled fake police reports,
asking Jenny to circle in red
the places where her father touched her,
then dialed 911 from payphones, snickering
at the cops while we hid behind bushes,
collecting rocks to hurl at people
too weak to chase after us. Then
your little brother died,
his lips and eyes glued shut in the coffin because
he ate rat poison, and we should have
watched him better. You breathed
from that milk jug bong until
the universe was the sparrow
you had tattooed on your shoulder blade.
When our mothers were crushed
by their father's desire for them, we lit
our hair on fire. I want to tell your mom, I
spilled the chocolate milk, give you back
the honey blonde ponytail she hacked off,
let you taste my magic egg soup, admit
that I was afraid of the deer's eyes, too.
And when you washed the horse manure
from my shoes, I would keep quiet.
I would keep quiet when the other Brandy
from school said her mom had sex
for money, that one day
while she was watching cartoons,
her mom and some guy fell
naked through the second story floorboards.

HER MOUTH, A STRING-LESS LYRE

At East Street Cemetery, I find a grave that fits
the recent curve of my chest, wait for the cosmos
to line up with my spine, worms struggling
toward the newly created universe
of my thighs, my body still giving birth
to more cells than it loses. I call her
my sister, my love,

make my ribs a cradle
for her to sleep in, her umbilical cord hooked to the earth.

I tear her free, and we play hide and seek
in the pillared mausoleum. Danielle, born dead,
draws her name in cursive loops,
beholds the lowest frequency
of a rainbow, cuts off my fingers, takes them
as her sacrifice, each second
my body creating more blood, more cells,
so we can begin again. Snakes spin the world

in reverse, and I see Mother hanging clothes
on the line, her canned tomatoes, tan skin, uncut
abdomen, two shining fallopian tubes, and the tiny
zygote, cells dividing. Pretty banshee—unbinding.

MOTHER'S RED WEDDING DRESS

Wouldn't fit me. *Big boned*, she said,
Grandma could knock a man out.

That year, I put a kid's head through a window.
Blackout rage, damaged film

in my retina. I'd been in another's mouth
who kissed, ate ice cream, then spit

on my cheek. *Don't talk about my mother.*
My spine split and healed jagged

as a saw blade, mouth grew to a snout.
Get that dress away. I'll lick the meat

from your ribs like that dog
we threw food—gone wild from chains.

DANIEL STANDS AT THE GATE OF THE KING

the WWII vet at my grandmother's nursing home
dreams of the German girl he raped the king
of an idol's iron feet Daniel predicts
my mother's at fifteen Daniel name dragged
through history soldier's name unborn son
she would miscarry the radius of a circle
to the brother who was aborted before me four
great beasts originating from the uterus
four future kings Daniel dreams the dead
sea scrolls I used to think engraved
on his spine I was a boy all my life
old vet pouring milk for cats suet for finches
I dreamt minutes seconds was a soldier
cutting his wrists in a hotel sink