

# HUMAN-GHOST HYBRID PROJECT

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Black  
Lawrence  
Press

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## The Passenger Seat of Your Car, Barreling Down Lakeshore Drive

I am only half-participating in this conversation about the Renaissance Faire strike. Both my brains have been working overtime to make me look like someone you could fall, then stay, in love with. It's exhausting, always gluing glitter animal shapes to my face. Sorry my taste in music embarrasses you. I'll make up for it by trying to look lost like you like. You cut off an undercover law van, swerve against curves, cut corners into paper dolls: long string of high femme or holiday lights eyeing crosshatched lake. I keep pressing the brake like I'm driver-decider. When you screech to a winter halt, you stretch your arm across my chest, more makeshift air bag than making out. I take what I can get while you accelerate, racing late geese and underpaid Santas jostling for the Polar Bear Plunge.

# The Other Centralia

We packed Aquatic Invasive Species in suitcases and drove through the minor cities changing our safe word. You pasted stick figures to the back of the car:

girl-stick

girl-stick

fish

fish

water-moth

There's an absence of endings in a city of nightlights. Children shake cartoonishly large hands at bad drivers, eyes glazed from the dashboard telly. Two kinds of ashes fall from the sky:

fire-wag

grit-smolder

We end up in Oregon. How did we end up in Oregon again? Here's *A Book of Common Mistakes*:

untying the wrong man's shoe

putting seafeather pillows in the wash

eating snack foods with someone else's fins

tying purple seafeathers into your rough red braid

This road ends with a gift shop. We're out of cash, but they're willing to take a personal check. So many names we might forge:

Hairspray Jones

Eileen Myles

Onward Christian Soldier

Tom Waits V

Immigrant Trout

Susan

Swimming Thru a Rough Patch

If there's a motel in the back of the gift shop, we'll stay there 'til morning. Not sleeping off the miles, just filling the tub with ice from the machine down the hall.

## Hypochondriac Ex-Nurse

This room smells very elderflower and hospice-afternoon. My forehead freckles. Every time I sass the thermometer, basement mice scurry away the special blue cheese I was saving for all of our miraculous recoveries. My tote bag's inscribed with the old Hippocratic oath: *Life is for the loving. First, do no less.* In school, I was the worst at finding veins. No one volunteered to be my partner. I punctured lovers, red running from heart to syringe. *Be My Valentine* had special meaning. My cartoon cards were popular with boys and girls alike. You haven't seen hunger until you've seen an arm swollen with want in the nick of goodnight. I lost license to practice due to licentiousness. My secret's safe in hazardous waste.

## Vinyl-Scented Nostalgia Candle

Glass broke up the punk scene living in my hair, barrettes and bird's nest tangles a tattletale display. Tambourines and coffee mugs and whirligigs: these are all birthday-related. Romance is tidying up my extensive music collection, while boomeranging between Birmingham, Alabama and Birmingham, England. Something in that vinyl tree house growls with its mammal-throat. Tonight, we'll dance until the downstairs neighbors whack the ceiling with their ceiling-whacking cane. *Me* is pretty, but *We* is getting stuff done: dogs sniffing the manicured lawn of the safe house. I want to tie you up so no one abducts you and, subsequently, ties you down. It's a myth that vampires need an invitation. Actually, humans have the need to invite. Whoever invented cereal had a thing about mornings. If I were a typewriter, I'd probably misplace my keys, too.

## Your Bedroom, Which Used To Be A Utility Closet

I woke up with that doe-dead feeling about you. You reminded me too much. Don't mention nostalgia to a woman holding three different kinds of flowers in her gut. You love ballerinas again. This means you will only ever like one type of rejection at a time. Outside, a January-ish whistle. Ask about how I'll get home again now that I'm too angry to blink. Ask about when you can see where we're at in a month. Don't ask about beach glass in my galoshes. I found a text message in a bottle, sand and broken glass everywhere, okay? I woke up and went missing. You reminded your alarm to chime. Don't mention pirouettes to a pole dancer; jealousy's just reckless nostalgia. You love when the mop falls in love with the broom. Your bedroom blossoms with buckets and gloves.

# Human-Ghost Hybrid Project

Bipeds cruise the Embarcadero, smart phones mimicking blackbird catcalls. Wilderness libraries loan leaflets. Don't bother the girlghost ruminating under a freestanding helmet. Weather's so yesterday. We carry DIY atmosphere in sequined totes: evensong streaked thornbruise and batblur. Wednesdays are Forest's Night Out: swag bags with bread bag lanyards for naming animals. How else to puzzle foxes from sloths, water moccasins from tawny owls? We're half-human, half-disappeared. Wind blows out our candles before we've even baked cake. There's a man I need to see about a fourth horse skull. Flexed my spooky triceps in the nature preserve behind the mortuary. The sheriff suspects, but since when does anybody listen? Autumnal in post-Ophelia dress, here's my bug-repelling spray paint spraying out of pierced nostrils. How pagan, how circa 1994. Lovely, it's okay if you're artistic and/or aphrastic. We can publish under your faux-heritage name: Wildflower Something. Your handwriting is nearly as legible as genius. Hope those horn bumps you're sporting will stay put for a month or two.

## Dandy. Lion. O Dandy. (Fur)

O Lion of us, around us, haloed in sparkler-riot: flicker-bud, fat wad of gunning gum bat bound into a hat for stem. Seeds spraying *loves me/loves me not*. Hot-headed pop uncorked, umbilical for greeny growers, mute and mother-loded. Blown glass blown out. O Dandy animal/vegetable/mineral plucked from manicured grass, scheduled for chemical removal bimonthly: bye. Pollination system runs a change of pace on us. Shadow of a fur ball is lovely la la la, my grandparents are gardeners, my grand ego has an old age problem. Life weeds the pretty off their faces. The previous residents were allergic. They buried their exotic dead seeds shallowly; now the ghosts won't leave anything greened.

## Parking Garage Pastoral

Leaves fall onto train wrecks and triage. We're jumpy these days, squandering our middle names on bad mortgages. Don't say they didn't warn us, although we don't know who "they" are. Warnings come with a trumpet and metallic cologne: summons rolled pre-baton and handed over post-sex, post-house painting. We should be scared, but we're eating cake from the last gay wedding we crashed in a golf cart. We've learned to wear helmets and crochet our own seat belts. We've learned a lot of things, like terms for sharpening or co-sharing a toothbrush.

## I'd Forgotten How Much I Hate The Taste of Most Foods I Haven't Tried Before

You are orange and molecular and eccentrically proportioned against the slow motions of the Baltimore airport. I am Protestant-worn, waiting in an expensive restaurant, pretending to enjoy this Bloody Mary-flavored fishcake.

My stomach twists itself unconscious. You will get here eventually to report that the plane was filled with lovely and interesting people. Pat-downs go best in latex-free gloves.

Through the tear in my suitcase, my clothes look estranged. My body no longer wears that kind of waistband. I'm still dressing bite wounds. My bad for kissing a drug-sniffing dog.

In the post-9/11 waiting corral, you offer me pretzels, gnashing the foil. It's like we're in a band again, that noise, I say, but we were never those kind of girls.

# Inconsequential Laboratory

What's a vice versa? The very first owl in existence probably had low self-esteem. When the universe ends, something will come along and make another universe. I left the beaker full of funeral fumes on our lovely assistant's table. A closed-circuit television shows me what effects electrodes have on these robotic strawberries. Our brains were washed, but now they're drying. Our hands misplace hand-me-down syringes, unhinged diseases hooked on kitsch. Activists smash glass and unlatch cages: stuffed animals vajazzled with crystals. Here's a herd of plush ponies running amok in our one-horse town. We need an angel investor to fund Round Six, the round where we win lollipops and faxed copies of Darwin's autograph. We're drowning in data, clowns packed into a Yellow Cab circling one-way streets, all bulbous feats and misplaced memos from the FDA.

# Hot Yoga Studio

We flick slick hair from steamy glasses, give good mirror with purloined glances. Nobody remembers which animal we're on: Buttered Camel or Seasick Turtle? The instructor's perfecting Microbial Mule. Upside down and out the window, Bible software techs sport badges on the clock, off-campus.

SEAN's eating ice cream with a plastic spoon. MARSHA asks for extra mayo.

The sky sends an alarm when lunch hour's up.

SEAN hasn't failed to notice that SARA never asks him what he's thinking in their motel bed. There's a reason someone will only meet you during regular business hours and that reason might well explain the popularity of vampires.

MARSHA says don't stress so much about that extra fat rolled up your sleeve. It's winter: everyone's kindly gone a little bit blind. Just keep up with your flexibilities, SARA thinks. Often, I have the opposite problem.

# Travelogue Accoutrements

One of us gapes funhouse glass.

One of us is lined with silk.

One of us snaps shut as sleep.

We battle over what to tote: who carries shoes, who carries slips.  
Lipstick and bourbon stain moth-bitten mouths. Coal crashes as  
our train chugs out.

Are we yours? Our memory for faces fades with meadowlarks and  
lakes.

We're wary of your gloved grasp. You might belong to us, or pose  
strangertheftabduction danger, unsnapping us all wrong and rough.

Begone: we bite, lock zigzag jaws.

Don't pretend you're not trying to get us manhandled, we can make  
hitchhiking uncomfortable in this weather.

Tiny mirror in one of our middles for beauty mole check.

Nice girls go nowhere. Actually, most girls go nowhere, but our  
luggage tag is cut continental, and we have most of an atlas  
memorized like it's still school in session.

This July zips and zaps, most of your pricier unmentionables melted  
down travel-size.

No airport hysterics, please!

Lady, you have no idea how slow a slow boat to Show Time!  
actually goes.