

What Weaponry

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*a novel in
prose poems*



Black
Lawrence
Press

The heart's a mouth, and fuck its reasons.
—Rachel Loden

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LOW CLOUDS

We build a place to be safe, start talking in circles and so build that way. We start with small stones, then large. We work quietly. Our concentric circles grow. Wet sand cold under our toes. We move on to driftwood, again starting small: with what we might use for fire if we stay too long. Then the big ones: white logs as big as we can haul them. Fourteen circles in all, crabs lumber over them, dry kelp blows at one edge. The dog is careful, having been told. She goes back into the ocean, which is ruining the last, widest circle into a C. We lay in what we have made, minute fleshy bullets in the target we have made.

When we see it from above we will know the sea is near, as is the grey, as is the end. When we see it from above the plane will be circling, destroying low clouds. When we see it from above we will be listening, we will be watching, we will go there as fast as we can.

WAITING FOR THE DAMAGE

I will say everything I can say and then you will say something too. There is anger in both of us, fusing the closer we get. For now we stand at the lip of the world, waves lapping grey stones under a grey sky: our little world. There is **something** to this. Something that wants to be calm, to be easy. “Look at that,” you say, pointing out far in the ocean. I nod, but see nothing. I’m willing to look anyway.

The dog brings a stick. There is bravery to the womb **of** her **mouth** keeping wood in, **seawater** out as she huffs the stick back in from where we toss it: out there.

BREADFRUIT

You choose any moment rather than this one. Listen to the cat **hemmed** in by dogs who won't do anything. "They tease," you say and still stare out at the **sound**. It's a few blocks over and still you stare. "You know that painting?" you say. "What one?" "Cezanne's Paysage." I have no idea what you're saying and so shrug like I don't care you've made another reference I can't latch to. "I want trees," you say. But we both know how we go to fresh air like fish, gasping. And the time we tried to make love in the back of the truck, which had filled partly with dropped plums, overripe and messy. Juice stained **our skin and our clothes**. We looked butchered. And then there were the ants. "You don't want that," I say. And you say, "Sure I do," which is also what you said about living together and look how that's gone. "I think she got away," you say, face to pane, but then the mewling starts up again.

FANCY THAT

For this she thanks God, your sister, little wonder. Little mercy, ten fingers, ten toes. In sin we learn to count again. How many messes made at another's expense. "How much does an abortion cost?" you asked back then. But she's new now. And how many? Like, *a girl never tells her age*. She might have said Fuck You, but you told her it's something you'd never know. Not without a phone call. Baby's on hold; it's called sleeping. "And what did you name him?" "Her." Then the baby cries. "What did you name her?" *Fancy*. All the love you'll ever need.

CARTOGRAPHY

You are six years old. Your brother is blind. Your brother is blind with his hands over his eyes. Your brother is not really blind. The divorce has done this to him. Dust and sadness has done this to him. Motion sickness has done this to him. And the sun in his eyes. He wants to be blind. He wants to be you. In the front seat: you. Hands in your lap. You make a strangling motion, twisting your pants at the knees. Your mother in the driver's seat beside you doesn't know the pant legs are her, the bunched-up fabric her throat. Brother strops his hand in his lap every time a locust exoskeleton breaks on the windshield, irregular beats, but often. It is *that* year. You are escaping. You are escaping joy and the reaching fingers of the boy next door. You are escaping your father locked out of the house, his palm drumming your bedroom window. To be let in is to give in. **It means** you've done wrong. Open the map. Let the paper cut your palm. Mother blinks **too often**. Put your hand on the dashboard, redsmear. This is where we're going. Put your hand on her wrist. Put your hand on the wheel.

YOUR MOTHER KNOW YOU RIDE LIKE THAT

She bought the cheapest bicycle. Light pink around its middle. You were standing in the road to be **standing in the road**. You shut the color off and focused on the freedom. When grandpa died you were mad they wouldn't open his eyes for you. You said you could ride and pushed to the end of the drive. You were six years old. You'd never seen a corpse before. You'd never held a bike. Legs still bruised from riding handlebars. You pumped the pedals harder. Your mother pinched your hand until you left the coffin. You cried, never to see his eyes again. "The blue," you said, "just one more time." The neighbors shook their heads. You flew then, legs above your braces. When you came to a man was standing over, harsh sunlight piercing from behind his neck and shoulder. And then you took his hand.

A DROWNING, 1984

A woman with wet hair walks by. You want her to be your mother. And so you follow her. Her green and white sandals go **click-click** and it's like the heartbeat **you can't remember**. You want to be on that boat in the wind, head to her chest. **Click-click** on the gum-covered pavement. In your head those fifteen, eighteen, twenty-two steps behind her you change her hair brown to red. **You change** her lipstick, which is easy from the back. You only saw her mouth for a moment. It did not make a kissy face into the glass as she passed. A woman's mouth can do anything. Click-click. Though the street is full of motion, she looks at no one. She does not turn her head. A car backfire, some siren. A loud shout from a boy to a man on the street's other side. Even this does not make her turn. For all you know she could be deaf, water logging her ears. You call out *mother*, but she doesn't respond. You call out *monster*, but she keeps moving ahead.

WHAT FANCY SAID

I bury one knee-deep in red dirt. Limber, waist-bent, the dilly-doll—what your niece called it—bows or leans its head upon a mound. Fancy chuckles, pulls it out, wrecks its hair with weeds, disassembles clothing. Fancy wears the same red shoes. Fancy gets a bee sting. She hums and waters, floods delphinium, phlox, nasturtium with a broken bucket until torn plastic tears her hand. **Your** sister buttons up baby, stumbly on stubby legs, fleshy knees wet with mud, arms stuck with blood. Your sister swabs baby blood while we continue playing, muscling roots up to tickle Fancy's wrapped palm. Little **disaster** in pink frills. **Little** disaster reminds me. Little angel, **monster**, mystery. She never cries. Your sister's shouts echo backwards into the trees. Nothing bad has ever happened to her. Nothing ever will. Your sister shouts at your bad language. Says, "Look how pa ended up." "Frickin," **you** say. "Frickin," Fancy says.

THE URN

On a trip to the beach you store ashes under your passenger seat: mother and father mixed together in one raw torrent of dust. **Made of bone**, stone urn encases. We wrap rubber bands around it, base to top. There is no latch and it rolls. After every abrupt stop you lean back to check. “Mom and pop,” you call them. You never called them this. Your sister will meet us. She will be crying already when we get there, saying, “I can’t look at this, I can’t look at this” when you unearth what’s left of them. She will lean against a grey pier, her face more grey, the baby wanting more of her, sand, more of her, salt and hair and dust in everyone’s eyes. You will snake the rubber bands around your wrist once, twice, three times, tighter. You will leave them there all day.

EPISODIC TREMOR AND SLIP

None of us will notice the sunbathers, the tourists trying to surf, the tourists trying to sail. **We won't see** the parade of push-pop wrappers scattered in wet sand, we won't see the cops or the dog **watching**, or the kelp strangling posts of the pier.

THE PUBLIC SHOWERS

A fat man in a tight swimsuit asks a young girl to wash his back. We pretend we don't see this. **The** sun in our eyes, or grit kicked up by passing bicycles. There's a painting on a cinderblock wall, a Middle Eastern scene, or maybe it's meant to be here to show there's more to the beach than tan and pale blue. More than unwatched ice cream stands and children shattering day with the din clang of laughter or some imagined pain. Two women sit in shadow, lean against a fake checkered floor that rises behind them into smaller and smaller black and white squares. "Depth perception," you say. One woman says to the other woman, "It was just easier to go along." An immaculate palm reaches over everything, dark paint of shade, a coned building dwarfed and chapped by sun. Because this isn't a **real scene**. This isn't what we wanted. Something exotic lives here, but it isn't in the paint or the sand. It's not in the lorikeets resting on tanned arms or shit-covered pylons. Not in the Queen Mary, or the Spruce Goose hangar. Or the gulls rocketing away from the shore. It's not in the restless hum of waves trashing the beach with wet sacks of potato chips and broken glass. It's not in you or in me, but then we find it.

MEMORY OF LIGHT

A star is a memory of light. What we can't see from here. What is talked about. Cities either have wars or no history at all. We were one here, bodies bent back against concrete, pressed into wood, pressed into glass, last looks at the loved. Standing on Pike or Pine, we smell the salt of the ocean, but it's only the sound, broken off from the real water by mountains, forests of rain, tumult of wildness before wild. Ferries drift like **satellites across black water**. You've forgotten why **we've** come and I don't answer; it's best to come to this knowledge alone. In the hotel at the top of the hill bricks **bristle** when the ground moves. We stand in a quiet side street, two blocks from the hospital, close to each other and parked cars. I say, "In the 1950s builders on the west coast stopped using bricks." I don't know if this is true, but I like it. Brick ovens bake bricks, clay and mortar grow homes, hotels. "Because of earthquakes?" you ask. I wanted something different, another word. It's *tremblement de terre* in French, **trembling** of earth, *terremoto* in Spanish, like some forward movement, sounds like an automobile. The water **swells** in different names. The ground swells, fault, pipes sweat a mess in the street. A groundswell is something **without land**. I wanted another word, but all I say is "yes," which answers everything. "Tu a peur?" "Yes." "Tu a faim?" "Yes." Oui and oui and

oui and oui. The street calms and nothing falls, not bricks or anything. I look up; the skyline is still. Planes go on moving. Even cars haven't noticed a thing. In one hotel window, a man stands bare-chested. He doesn't see us on the street. When he moves back into the room his window becomes one more yellow square.