

Scire

Kimberley-Blue Muncey

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of
English

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ABSTRACT

Scire

Kimberley-Blue Muncey

Scire is a collection of lyrical and narrative poems that explores and applies science into poetry. Various aspects of science work as the bones that structure and inform the poetry and the collection looks at the parallels that exist between human experiences such as sex, death, consciousness, family relationships and scientific laws that explain natural phenomena.

The poems are loosely divided into three sections. The first looks at the mythical side of science, and the poems attempt to retell these myths. The second section moves forward in time, focusing on ancient scientific understandings of the world, but applied to a contemporary setting. Finally, the third section uses current explanations of how the physical world works and the parallels that can be found in human behaviours and interactions with one another.

Scire finds its cohesion theoretically in various underlying scientific histories and ideas and how these explain the human world. These become the catalysts for the poems, which are an exploration of science as the subtle gridwork that underlies human experience.

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For P'an Ku

I want to write you
something beautiful, as you are

the world

a heartbeat, pacific waves and breath, air sighing
in, out of lungs, like sea sponges filling.

Your spine a volcanic range, rigid muscle mass,
steady churn of magma, blood through deltoid, scalene.

Scapula, ulna, tibia - your bones a grove of tree trunks
anchored to biceps. You taste like bay leaves, the sugarpine.

Curls of hair, tendrilling rattan palms, carry
lumps of berry, full fruit, woody brown stems.

Your eyes melted glacier pools, blue along borders,
the glimmer of the moon puddling silver, the sun's flecks of gold.

Sweat the trapped rain of a sultry sky, a dewdrop
quivering on your brow. Steam rises, humidity off dimpled rice paddies.

Speak thunder, your voice a bellow billowing lion's rumble,
baritone, then contralto, a loon's moonlit cry.

I fall in love with the fault lines of you, running
deep under flesh, vessels, a furrow beneath bone.

This thrust fault between your chest's plates -
fissures between ribs where I nestle in, next to the heart's murmur.

In this crevice, I can feel you, an earth-
quake.

The Reason for Night: Digueno Sky

We collide in the night, giant
ellipticals tumbling on top of each other,
under, over, into.

We are a starburst galaxy, fuming
sighs hot on muscle knots, inflamed.

A system of blazing stars
explodes from between us – scraping out
of the friction between our chests, sparking
where your chin grazes
my forehead, my mouth bursting
superclusters all along your jugular.

You gleam like melting iron inside
a blast furnace.

We flare, brightly, quickly
and ignite, a burst
that outshines the galaxy we have built
inside each other. Stars scatter
and a shockwave sweeps across the air
leaving remnants of bruises and flushed cheeks.

They cannot see

in the dark. It hurts.

Give them sleep.

The night, ink seeps through lashes,
your lids flicker against its weight.
I feel your stars spinning inside you
a gentle churn. Pressing myself into your cradle
of spine, I slow my breathing,
align my stars
with your sleep.

The Reason for Sun: Sól

What's this Sunday morning without
your fingertips, greasy
from Kenyan coffee beans
rubbing my lips awake

 dressing through mustard tints of cloudy dawn,
 you in corduroy, an orange turtleneck as dark
 as burnt pumpkin

 without your crate of records
 propping open the balcony door

 the slow smolder of a tangerine-flavoured
 cigarette and the smile you have, its tip bit
 between your teeth?

 You say, *I am running because I am afraid. This is the difference between
 running for and running from.*

It is just a day.

Creation Stories

I.

Hera: night sky

The day the clouds empty themselves,
matting your hair against your scalp, the cuckoo drops
from dripping cypress branches, feathers frozen,
onto your tunicked lap. You palm the small quake
of a bird, slip the mass of cold between your breasts.
He grows under your clothes, ripping the robes from your sides.

So your hips, once narrow, now fatten,
prepared for what he has filled you with: hair and skin,
translucent new tissue and cartilage, glowing.

Your pelvic bone grows holes, rutted and uneven,
a concave peach pit pocked as sea stones.
Your teeth feel loose in your jaw, and bowels loose in your gut.
This rounded belly becomes your beauty, its skin pulled tight,
veined, the tiny purple vessels exploding
like letters, a quill dipped in violet ink.
Placenta runs down your legs.

Breasts swollen, scabs dappled around nipples,
the sky shudders when you thrust your son away.
The droplets of milk and blood that spatter
against the nightline are stars,
each the story of your fear.

II.

Sky Woman: earth

Summoned to the pit, it gapes at you,
charred and larger than an eclipse. Breath gagging
in your throat, your toes all soot,
curling – no – clutching the brittle edge before it flakes
away like slate rock. Layers shifting out
and down, you tumble. Your shoulder blades bloom
with bruises where he pushed;
you wish for wings instead.

Your shins splinter in the crash, the solidity of water's surface tension
drive your ankles up. Inhale the shock, lungs expand like balloons
pumped with helium. You float beside a waterlogged beaver,
drowned loon, their eyes the same black hole.

When you pry earth from muskrat's rigor mortised clench,
it grows into a mound, a mountain range, flatlands. Your womb
contracts around twins, still for a moment, and splits open, spilling
you into the new clay, fresh dirt, sea pebbles.

One son has towering hemlock, pine, flowering apple
to sprout from your blood, washes a mountain stream through your ribs.
The other gnarls their trunks, plants nightshade
between your teeth, moves boulders and a current sweeps across
your bones. Each one, sculpted smooth by river water, gathers
in a pile, the shade of moonseed and sumac.

III.

Pele: fire

Caped in burlap, he approaches. The grin melts off your face
for the first time, your heart pumps magma.
Under your hands, his hemp rough,
your body rubs away red in the embrace.

You pick his bristles out of your mouth, boar hair choking your throat,
spiny daggers buried in palms, soles, the soft pale of inner thigh
where his snout dug in. You cauterize your holes,
watch him storm out your fire.

He returns, a wet beast stinking, climbs on your back, hooves
your head down, your nose filled with sulphur, eyes swimming in cinder.
Squirming pink inside, you're stuffed with a pig farm:
grunting, one eats out of the slop and roots out the cradle of your arm.

Spend your days with your arm cocked, crooked smile
flitting across your lips. The splash of fire quivering orange,
the rolls of lava toppling over themselves quicker, swallowing
men who dare to look at you.

IV.

Coatlque: life

Birth flows from between your legs, wrapped
in the hiss of a thousand serpents. Your heart
beats within the draped garland of a hundred
atria and ventricles, baby fingers and arthritic knuckles.

An obsidian knife blade scalpels along
the length of your sternum and down, its surface
reflecting one last look of your skin, once
a polished enamel without chip or scissure. Inside
you roil with stars and the moon. A ball of feathers,
coiled grey down to staunch the blood, blooms wide
between your breasts; the universe aches, scatters
out of you

and into you, as you devour emerald rocks and milky jade,
drain currents from riverbeds. Your children
chain your ankles, crack your wrists, shoulders dislodged
from their sockets. Ligaments snap with firecracker pops,
bursa bursting, each tendon yanked from muscle as they pull;
each child, north, south, east and west.

Your hair grows into grass, flowers from your mouth,
your eyes, caverns, green valleys, your nose. Your tears create riptides
that children throw themselves in, your heart a volcano for virgins.
You fill the world with savannas, saltwater, mountain springs,
the orchid and armadillos, asking life in return.

Earth and Sky

The slick sidewalk hazes up
my yellow steam, still
in the sticky summer air – droplets,
hovering in a balmy lull, collect
on dandelion bracts.

My body, ochre and wet,
arches its back, a hill rising,
sighs for your touch -
rain - your summer storm,
a smattering of drops
delicate and unsteady tears.

Dandelions droop their heads,
rain and mist trickle off the leaves,

simmer away in a glare of sunset
as the city closes its eyes, a child
crying for sleep.

The Phoenix

These bonfires Rybnik, Beirut, Iran

chased the pigeons from their streets
a hush settled in dust.

But the pigeon sheens gold with red wingtips,
and with a proud bundle of chest,
his cinnamon twig nest ignites
his breast.

He returns new

Cities stories
all from bonfire ashes, rebuilt and retold.

The pigeons have returned,
skip across cobblestone, ruffle aged grey feathers
gape their beaks beg to eat.

I Have Found It

To decipher silver from gold
Archimedes bathed a laurel wreath crown

to discover my worth

I once floated in the bathtub
the water shallow, the sides close
my legs slid down, arms snug against ribs

slid into the brimming tub
water rose gently, fragrant
with Florida Water, flushed
warmly into the pits of my collarbone
my head, toes, dry
my back pressed against warm ceramic

because silver carries no weight

but after the funeral,

I turn heavy gold

and in this slough
of heavy lily, incense
to cleanse the body, I bathe

fill the tub, settle in
water spilling over
into the crevices between tiles
the pipes clunk
from somewhere
in the ceiling, reverberating
in my ears
now sunken

On Floating Bodies

Swimming in the ocean,
you reel under its mass
lopsided, a syrupy flail
of legs and arms.

I spread starfish, arch my back
away from water.

With a careless flip, I float facedown,
watching your underwater struggle
to stay afloat,
the determined drawback of your foot
as it glances a strand of seaweed.

I ride this riptide in
under you.

The Loculus¹

I play this game
very carefully.

Ivory tiles click
as we rearrange them

and each triangle becomes
a piece of a new figure.

They tell our stories
as we live them,

the collision of shapes
our three lives drawn out in tusk:

¹ The 'Loculus of Archimedes' is a fourteen-piece dissection puzzle where all pieces must be used to create as many new shapes as possible; it is described as the problem that drives one mad.

Figure I is an elephant

You, my lover, tell me, the sun, when it sets, looks different
depending where you are. I stayed at home with him

when you planned a trip to the coast of Africa,
where the sun sets furthest of all and still burns through palms.

You pushpinned maps, marking islands, inlets,
traced paths lined with lianas curling into ground.

You show me the rash between your legs,
where they chafed against an elephant's hide;

wanting to feel the elephant, I run my hand over your skin,
brush my lips across your thighs' bumps, coarse hairs.

Figure II is a snowflake

Pointing out in six directions, trails where the city
has paced. I forged a fresh path in snow drifts,

each step shuffled, head bowed,
concentrating on not slipping

on the layer of ice hidden beneath.
My husband reaches behind

his hand waiting for me to find it
with the expectation that I will.

Figure III is a pot

He brought me home
this clump of lantana root

to water to life, patiently
await its bloom.

I buried it in a Japanese teapot;
the root didn't take hold

but shriveled away
in its new dirt.

Figure IV is a dancing girl

I lean against you, push
with throbs of drum and bass,

pressing hips to belly,
pulsing sweat out of pores.

I plant your hands
on the small of my back,

eager for fingers
to bear weight

into topsoil flesh,
humid, ready to receive

the slip between girdling
and the effort of breathing.

Figure V is a six-pointed star

Visible through the curtains, blowing slightly apart.
my bedroom freezes in the January night:

every winter, the cracked window frame pops the glass
out of its hold, inhales November, exhales April.

He studies my bruises, the purpled junction where my thigh joins torso,
and reaches to touch; I pull a sheet over and breathe as though I am asleep.

Figure VI is a dog

You bite my neck.
I press my thumb against

the bruise, like an apple's
pulpy soft,

blue purling
ringing around pink.

At home, he watches me knit
a scarf longer than me

already cinched, strangling –
The ache of turning right.

Figure VII is a flying goose

Its wings weaken, struggle to gain hold in the vee formation,
bones, hollow, skin and feather light, still slowly sloping out of the flock.

Alive, I've been able to feel rigor mortis; muscles, sinew
become stiff if a hand is opened and closed quickly, repeatedly.

I hear the geese in the afternoon, when the ground turns loose and wet,
when ice's hold between the earth's grains melts,

slipping between the cracks, sand shifting. I can no longer count out the days
since I grew tired of the gold light sun spreads through your window,

my shadow stretching russet as it bends, collecting clothes, fleeing
to the shower to wash your scent off my skin before going home, musty and sticking.

Figure VIII is a gladiator

Vicious and virile, you both attack at the same time,
your nets so binding that my skin puckers through their holes.

My centre of gravity sits low in my belly, spreads
across my hips. I am weighted by this new child inside. Strung along

by this thread hugged tightly in the hollows
of my pelvic bone. It knots itself around you, then twines itself between

my husband's thighs. Ties me, guides me, pulls my gravity
in two, this sloppy bisection between two men. The game is lost.

When You Ignore the Lighthouse

I watch you in the morning
when you stand by the bathroom sink

rooted in, stark winter birch
parchment bark peeling, growth rings thick
from heavy rains and yellow summers,
a lighthouse beaming out to sea

that tilt of the mirror when you shave
bounces a light across the shower curtain, the bathtub's beacon

I squint, dispersing the mirror's light through eyelashes,
weakening the beam

so the warning cry of light, mirror, glass remains
unheeded and a ship's weight heaves forward, its bulk
of wood and steel bending, cracking
splintering against stone

the rasp of razor scraping skin and hair

the birch tremble offshore

Music of the Spheres

*Pythagoreas believed that in the spacing of the spheres, there is music,
you say, eyes closed, straining to hear an inaudible harmony,
where crystal rotates against stars, the planets.*

You practice your touch across the tabletop. The overtones
vibrate straight through. *My reach, the envy
of even Rachmaninoff*, sticking your hands out, spreading fingers.

I press my palms against yours. There is a piano inside me,
ribs, plates, strings of nerves and tendon. Think of all the pieces
you could play along my spine:

allegro, along coccyx to sacrum in one quick sweep,
cadenza spreading across the cervical curve,
your hands the hammer, striking each vertebra string.

But my bones are bundled beneath blood, plasma, muscle, skin,
thick layers muting the chords.
There is music all around us that we cannot hear.

A Mother's Hippocratic Oath

Peeling beets, a thin strip of rimpled skin
into coils in the kitchen sink.

Leach and surge, a stain
lurches from blade into your mother's
fingertips.

Your palms roll out pastry dough.
She pares smooth stones from cherry flesh,
cragged ones from the plums. Your flat belly
rounds out with fruit pie
sweet and nauseous.

When you tell her you're pregnant,
fiddling the edge of a mottled enamel mixing bowl,
your mother tosses brown-bruised bananas away,
sighs. You learn
about a baby brother with brown
hair and blue lips.

She teaches you that fresh pineapple carry spikes that scratch
away skin inside, alive. Your mother bakes upside down cake,
angel cake.

Years later, you wrap yourself in beet skin bindings
taking care of the things you touch.

There Is a Fifth Direction: Center

I am told, travel
towards colour. Cardinal
directions are more
than faint lines on old maps:
the print my foot leaves behind.

Walk green, Jiaozhou Bay
on paths narrow as bamboo,
sloping down to shore.
This ocean in spring, colour
of tortoise shell, sticky moss.

Yuan River, sunset.
Auburn pools sift silt, remnants
of rice fields, the salt
water reeds. Heat settles in
to the heart's pulse, pushing blood.

Pause. Rest in the Sea
of Marmara, stride knee deep,
saline bright, stinging.
An island, all rough marble,
reflecting this evening star.

The Amur Basin,
too frigid to approach with
skin. Iron and oil
fields silent, stopped in the hush.
Winter, water under slush.

The Yellow Mountain,
earth's center shifting up, out.
Rock pillars sprouting
fern and tea leaves. These stones are
sentinels, The Sea of Clouds.

Waiting to Hear From Iceland

You are very good
at putting continents between us.

I smell these postcards,
the trace of you
invisible as fingerprints.

Ariel, January

*Her hand, a tremor deep through the marrow,
quakes out her name, one thousand
shimmering gold coins. Her wince as soft glass
explodes, coiled-coil filament by her heeled foot,
a splash of confetti,
sifting paper quieter than snowflakes.*

You write me these stories,
marriages you are studying.

I send you a piece of crystal
to bring
you home.

Kusadasi, February

*Morning, sunrise catching on plum, ochre, dark green
bottles, sun surging the colours onto rooftops,
through olive trees into neighbours' windows,
a rainbow village in suspense.
She awaits the tinkle of shattered glass
falling from chimneys.
Knocking on the door.*

Look through it
even when fog muddies the sky.

It will show you the sun,
and the direction to go

Shanghai, March

*Long sliver of jade, hung from a red string,
a bubble of purpled fingertip tracing circles in the air*

*over her distended belly: motionless.
She sings lightly, washes socks, pulls a third bowl
from the mahogany cupboard.*

Turn until the sunstone turns yellow.
Dance in circles until the sun beams
point straight here.

Masulé, April

*Broken red glass, the bangle slipped from her arm,
her wrist, pink imprint of cloth
shriveled at the corners, rose petals weighted against the wind
by rice grains, white stubs in a mess of slivers and coins.
Glints of jeweled glass against green
and cool clean cream.*

I keep busy, slicing straight, crisp lines
through the curls of your words.

Christ Church, May

*This shaded grove, miles away from shoreline
earth still packed and black, moistened
banana palms, coconut husks pressed into dirt, her shell and nut necklace
browns, creamy pinks, half-buried.
She sleeps still under thatched roof, a sheet,
beaten and bleached over an ocean stone.*

I snip cherry blossoms,
the veins careful in their delicacy,
the long tailed boat, Chao Phraya skyline,
pasting them under glass.

Chiang Mai, February

*That red dress, that long row of tiny buttons
each slipped out of its hole
his thick fingers tugging, fumbling
over their pearled finish.
Her impatience to finally
breathe; live
in one set of bones.*

Polarize.

Find the sun. Find me
sitting on the bed, waiting.

*The anticipation to draw a breath;
that's marriage for you.*

Massage Abortion

Never let your hands leave

her body

isn't an archipelago
of nape, bare feet, calves
but landscape to be traveled
all at once.

Massage the soft
mound of abdomen
pushing down from sternum to pubic bone
like forcing aloe from a leaf,
a viscous salve.

A tiny curl of fetus,
delicately responsive.

Motion:

I.

one deer

snow flecks clinging
to bristled pelt,
paces among
yellowed tufts of grass, long
left behind from summer,
probing their tips through
crisp layers of ice,

ducks his head under
spindly stray branches;
heaves his weight against
the trunk of an elm
bark scratching flesh

one deer
carcass
bloodied
on a cement garage floor
waiting
to be divided
frozen

II.

one wife

stitches a colour coded quilt
loses the needle between the baseboard
and curled linoleum
squints for sight
of it through dusk light

under the linoleum
peeling away from floor and wall

hides fiorenal and an overdrawn
bankbook, blue and white
bills, stagnant water,
stretching winters, a
dog licking castration scars,
damp firewood,
a sagging mattress and

a wife
sleeping through insomnia
drugged, a dry throat, a rash
across her breasts
from his unshaven cheeks

and blood from
a prick

the needle finding her finger
when she bends to pick it out

III.

one husband

his arm crooked
a plaid V formation of forearm and upper arm
weighted butt of a rifle
nestled in the flannel hollow of his shoulder
whorls of stubble bristling against the stock
eyes peering through a curtain of fir
trees and up into a gray sky
at a mallard silhouette

the shot scatters
a murder
of crows

behind the house, a shed
and behind the shed, right of the maple
in front of the cattails,
frozen still in swamp water, frogs'
bulging eyes visible through brown ice,

her figure, surrounded
by pink splashed snow
bare legs stuck
straight, blue toes
cramped
on the trigger
of a hunting rifle
she had propped up against her face

and with the flapping brushes of oily feathers
he lowers his arm,
no shot fired

Animal Altruism

Wolves will surround
a carcass,
steaming at its split fur-lined seams,
shove their nuzzles in
three inches deep.

This circle
of intestines, strung between them
like Christmas garland

is no different from the musk oxen
who, against a pack of circling wolves,
growling from deep in their bellies, barricade
their young. The oxen stand
stoic, chests beating
temptation cries for the wolves' ears.

A woman, who fled
her burning house with a daughter
crying inside,
hears this music travel,
cooks her meals to its rhythm
now that she's eating again.
Sometimes a steak chars
when she watches her glass of wine
too long, and the howling
siren moves her out
of the rhythm of oxen hearts,

into the dance

one ox does
as he makes a weighted chug
to the trees, hooves spitting soil
into the eyes of his calf
close behind –
erratic and unsure
how to handle this flight
of oxygen and blood.

She listens to her daughter
cry over and over, remembers her own dash
to the front door with its iron hot knob.

She vomits into an empty space
beside the bed.

Wolves carry a lump of heart
to their sick,
a thigh of the calf,
half the length
of their bodies.

We are better
without these children.

To Charles

I'll admire you
on the diving board six feet above,

when I can still see droplets of pool water
delicately caught on the hair of your thighs,
each one refracting a rainbow.
You glow with violet, indigo, ocean green.

I will contemplate the electric blue
bathing suit that cups your groin
so precisely.

Call out,
a chirped hello, or look out below.
Make the dive count, the splash
big, like a turquoise feather fan of chlorinated water.

I will admire how straight you lock your knees
– strike and slip through the pool –
the tousle and shake
of your hair when you surface.

We carry our sex with us,
loud and gleaming,
like a baboon's inflamed buttocks,
we wave our heat
to entire baseball fields and street corners.

Wave, I'll smile back.

Cadence

Other men's hearts have beat to the changing of the seasons,
blood trembling through our bodies in tempo:

shuddering with blue frost of winter twilight,
collapsing in as the autumn leaves, twitching open in spring.

I've heard them all. I have fallen into
cadence with them, my life a pattern regular as the years.

But they have been nowhere near me.
You have surrounded me, however quietly.

I know you bleed; I take your pulse while you sleep.
But when I press my head to your chest, to listen through muscle and bone

– silence.

So during a storm, when thunder rolls, I will make you
catch lightning in your hands, your heart a sudden leap year.

What You Should Expect

My hair smells of garlic. When I cough,
lemony sumac, cinnamon
slips over my tongue, a spicy residue
clinging to my stomach's walls.
But when you kiss me hello, I am certain
you will taste fresh figs.

There are aquamarine glints
sparkling from under my fingernails.
Last night, swimming between the distant rocky cliffs of Rhodes
and the greened mountains of Antalya, swelling into the clouds,
my fingertips shot trails of phosphorescence
through the water as I skimmed them
over the surface.

I remind myself of a peacock,
gleaming blue and green.

A Sunday morning spent at the flea market,
palming smooth Nazar Bonjuks,
chewing on colorful cubes of delight, whiffs of linden tea.

The ezan, called from stone minarets, buries my head in a hijab
blue linen shot through with pink. The Blue Mosque domed
from the horizon, you will forget the colour of my hair.

I carry matted camel hair in my pocket.
Hitched up outside a grocery store, a camel,
shifting his weight from side to side.
The driver offered to trade him for one night with me, my blue eyes.
I gave him a kiss,
he snipped a clump of sable hair, directly off the hump.

I smoke clove cigarettes now, the scent dry. It will make you think
of pumpkin pie, spiced cookies baking. They are the closest taste
to the nargeelah, apple tartness and heavy molasses.

My skin has grown freckles:
Light browns, tiny spots of tan flecked all over
my shoulders, chest, nose. But this isn't skin you have touched before:

I have peeled out of myself
twice already,

scrubbed the withered wisps away
with sea sponges plucked from the water.

Like fruit flies, these months spin
around my body, in orbit with a new sun, my own moon.
You will hardly recognize me.

Ripening

Her mother allowed herself one ripe mango
every grocery trip, arms spread out as a scale,
judging juice by heft. Nestled between
white bread and bags of milk,
this orange flush, blazing.

She's been dead seven years
and still

from the coast of Quepos, her daughter sends home
postcards of banana groves, strips hair from coconut husks,
pockets ginger pods, palms wrinkled passion fruit.
But when cradling a mango
in her cupped hand, the pinked fruit
barely clinging to its bough, flesh full, she feels
she cannot afford its weight.

Braille

This bed. It is silent – hearts
that furrowed a fosse down the center
are fossilized still,
basins where our bones rubbed.

Phantom

Her old house is a ghost limb.

She visits it often, pale, wavering,
its brick, flagstone, and shingles rippling.
Her toes sink in the seams
of warmed asphalt,
she's barefoot at the end of the road,
pressing her heel in baked tar.
From down the street,
it shimmers.

She carries it with her

in the new house, she feels for disappearing lights,
lies awake in a room with curtains open, eyes squinted
for a moon, stars, a celestial
body that isn't there.

Now, with the slow careful recline
of a patio rocker, the deliberate
arching of spine,
palms spread in the stretch,
her fingers brush rough brick.
She startles, sits upright, spills
lemonade and mint leaves.
With the rasp of callus against cement
her periwinkle vines, root garden, the musk of potato dirt,
all creep away.
It's the vines she misses the most,
glossy leaves, cold and waxy
on her fingertips.

Her hands, forgetful and fast,
turn the bath faucet left
from habit,
face uplifted, lips parted.
Summer's been hot this year,
the nights steamy, her skin sticky,
desperate for water, that cold trickle
down her arms, the shock of a shiver.
She stops showering after this burn.

She learns to glide her skin lightly
over these walls,
and even then, only in the evenings.

She undresses
in the dark.

She knows her body, the jut of hips and ribs, the ridges of collarbone.

Her body doesn't know this house.

What Animals Do

Shattered alongside a fallen log,
a single scrape of a brown beer bottle shard,
along this muskrat's softened underbelly:

she avoids her cattailed marsh, chewing through milkweed pods,
lichen on rock face, far from water.

When clouds pass over the sun,
shadows are a slim smudge on the dirt,
like the gull's, who snapped her
tail tip quick in its beak:

a field mouse slips into grassblade caves
losing sight of her litter, even for a moment.

Two shirts left hanging in the closet,
one sock under the dryer, crumpled and grey.
Coffee rings. A voice on the machine that isn't me.
A key in the mailbox, an electric bill:

Sparkling wine from Germany flumes
wide open in my mouth.
Scratch, scratch, sniff – flicking
from nose to brain, to dopamine.

I wanted to know you before

because this is what animals do

Measuring

I. Summer

He fills his days
with work outside:

water tomato vines, smoke out
a hornet's nest. Stain the deck mahogany.

A timer on the barbeque keeps his time
temporary, staccato.

Shades drawn, it is cool, quiet
inside, different from what he remembers.
Unoccupied.

Grey fuzz on whole wheat bread,
crystals on the salt box,
oranges shrivel, green rocks
with mummified membranes.

His mother's body upstairs eats itself
from the inside out.

Weigh what goes in, what comes out.

White rice, cottage cheese, skinless turkey.

II.

Autumn

It smells
old, the house is damp.

Empty the dehumidifier
once a day, gallons of water siphoned from the air.

The ounces of glue pasting her lungs' walls
keep him awake at night, this rattle of breath.

Every two hours, bring her soggy cereal, soft
on gum tissue.

Yogurt. Creamed wheat.

He hears it wherever he is,
the timer beeping his hourly schedule:

Liquefy sugarless Jell-O, puree
carrots, mush over boiled
potatoes, mash bananas.

Mouth sores.

One tablespoon salt, one cup
warm water.

Apricots only last so long,
skin loose and wrinkled, barely clinging to what's left.

Consider time and quantity
at the grocery store.
Eat what is about to go bad at home.

III.

Winter

He shovels the driveway
after every storm.
There's nowhere to go

the car must have a clear path.

Every centimetre of snow promises
guiltless minutes outside. Numb
fingertips, the windy torture
of breathing.

He lets the wind slam the front door shut,
makes noise when he walks,
shifts his weight on creaky floorboards outside
his mother's room.
The vacuum cleaner can't make a loud enough noise.

Nausea is weight loss, demanding calories.

Whisk knifeloads of butter
into scrambled egg whites.
Sprinkle milk on toast.

Five meals a day:

Heat baby food, avoid prunes.
Mix milk with honey, boil cabbage.

Bran flakes, almonds, dried apples. This will last
forever.

IV.
Spring

He's always hated garlic.
On the day of her funeral.
his car is filled with it

steering wheel, seats, the radio buttons.

He looks at his bandaged thumb,
where the knife slipped and ground into the knuckle.

Even my bones stink now.

Oxytocin

I
Before

In this body, the heartbeat
minor, then major
thump
alternating pulses that push our blood through
my veins, until my whole belly
convulses around you,
billows and tightens.

During the night,
the furnace kicks on and you kick
off, the fluttering fury
finished.
This quell of quiet aches.

A purplish plum impended still,
your crescent spine prone against my tailbone.
Breathe!
Inhale, exhale, and labour
to hear a hint of you.

Suddenly stirring stalwart
inside, a steamroller
rundling around,
you are here now.

I relish the churn of bodies,
the closet keyhole channeled through me.
I remember my body relinquished.

II

After

Take this house.

The basement's floorboards
are mildewed.

The attic's ceiling rust-stained,
an intricate interlace of iron oxide
fingering outwards,
from the rafter beams, inside.

The furnace fills the kitchen
with soot,
piling onto window sills,
morning frost sticking
black. Pipes travel inside walls,
the house's veins now frozen. Not enough

sun gets in
through the drawn bedroom curtains.
Relish the clunks of this house, my lungs
incarcerated by ribs, rafter beams.

The room down the hall:
window open, a flurry of snowflakes
drifts up these walls. This quell
of quiet aches.

You are like the rolling distance
between meals, a rumble
in the belly for the sustenance to
complete and carry myself.

The Science of Making Candy

Syrup – caramel, chocolate – is the thread.
Low temperature yields sweet liquid. A higher boil
gives fudge, soft and easily spread, fondant
on a wedding cake. Turn the heat a little higher
for creamy caramels, only flattened when squeezed.
A gummi bear will always uncurl after being mauled
between fingertips, nougat will break apart.
Hotter still and saltwater taffy wedges in molars,
lodges in your throat. Finally, peanut brittle, unrelenting,
peels enamel, shatters dentin, your nerve exposed.
Just breathing will make you cry.

The science of making candy
is not like raising children:

we do not boil away
a baby's blood to create a crunchy
heart of sugar.

Sea Jelly

We do not die
like spiders,
with muscle
constricting,
legs wreathing in.
We die
like jellyfish
live:

her skin,
translucent and silken,
doesn't cry
for water; we breathe it
into her
when we talk,
blow words
across her body.

She floats gently
in our conversations,
out, as passive
as driftwood
on pacific beaches.

With a kiss on her cheek
or the stroke
of thumb
down her arm,
a quiver –
nerve rings
in her skin
ripple in.

The last breath,
exhale.

The body
doesn't shutter
in on itself.
She blooms
open, enormously;
pushes the room's air
currents, a wind

floods
our mouths.

Sustenance
(a series of fibs²)

Count.
Seeds
Plucked from
green apples
black with arsenic
woody, biting them to slivers.

Choke.
Hold.
An arced
hollow, soft
yellowed quills, prickling
upwards, cupping smooth, pulpy hearts.

Yew.
Red
berry
sweet sugar
coats one aril, this
plump, ripe marble, ribbons poison.

² The typical fib is a poem of six lines that contain twenty syllables, the number of syllables per line corresponding to the Fibonacci number sequence

Hydroponics

Pine trees, cedar bushes, their oils rich
and poignant, stop growing in the winter;
that November, I planted a garden.
Eight thimblefuls worth, like a line
of tiny toy helmets turned upside down.
Inside each thimble, a moist tuft of moss.
A squish of green matting, lush emerald-black,
my window sill like a coastal forest.

With snow pellets to rain: walls slickly damp,
under the only light of dark yellow
splashes of headlights through the front window,
the smug hiss of warmth from a floor heater –
each wooden pot, heavy, wet, flushed myrtle.

Bowerbirds

The house is a clutter of collections, my mother nesting
in the middle of the piles she picks through
from day to day: mornings
for the cherry pits, threads of their maroon flesh
petrified. She rolls them between her fingers like wooden marbles.
Seashells from the beach, a crab claw inside
oil slicked abalone, a rattling sand dollar
that sounds like her baby teeth
in a pill bottle, all scratched, filmed over
with yellowed calcium. They click together,
the sound of her backgammon and Parcheesi and Yahtzee dice.
There's a box of used tea bags, one still damp at its centre.
Strips of orange peel, shriveled to the size of a postage stamp,
roses and pressed daisies, a looming basin
of homemade potpourri from weddings and funerals.
Her wrist dangles a charm bracelet, tinkling silver locket
with curls of blonde hair inside, a tuft of gray, a crescent of eye lash,
the little bulb of pulp still attached at one end. I am not

that different in my collections: I bake my lovers bread in the afternoon,
pressing the heel of my hand into the dough, kneading
a swelling loaf of cinnamon bread, dotted with raisins
with neatly collected piles of skin, cuticles, a strand of hair.

It Is Useless to Define Colour

sugar bowl filled with lumps,
milk droplets left behind in a teaspoon
key lime pie laden with foamy meringue
voluminous clouds, puffing horizon length
snow without paw prints or cross-country skis
the cotton lining in an old parka
sand stuck to a girl's curved buttocks,
salt on her lips from drying seawater
abandoned home, a seashell and a mile of Bajan beach

a giggling limo reflecting flashbulbs
tuxedo freshly pressed, a boy, all legs and arms
tears at night, a shroud of sky
with umbrellas in the rain,
missing the moments without him

blood from a robin's breast, clamped between the jaws of a fox
his chest heaving with heat, hunger
a woman under a stoplight in Amsterdam, skirt
hitched up her thigh, the soft skin
of rose petals on a honeymoon bed, a Beijing bride
in silk and sashes

Bondi beach, or Turkish palace floors,
denim jeans and a cowboy shirt,
crushed anil leaves
running barefoot through cornflowers,

weaving between stalks of sunflowers
spatter of egg yolk on the floor, lemon curd
a school bus on the first day of school

olives in a bowl four-leaf clover fern spotted with spores

Messages from Water³

The first frozen rain of autumn touches the aster,
its sap blooming out of the stem, spiderwebbed tendrils
of delicate ice-hair. Antarctica blows diamond dust sixty feet high,
a spiral of rainbow through crystal. Fast ice catches arcs,
attached to winter beaches. Drift ice radiates emerald
from its base below the sea, mountain caps dome themselves
at the top of the world.

Ice from messages. We pray for, sing to
water, and its frozen crystals reflect our faces
back to us.

³ Messages from Water, Volume 1 and Volume 2, by Masaru Emoto, make the claim that if humans direct their thoughts at water before freezing, the resulting ice will be beautiful if the thoughts are positive and ugly if the thoughts are negative.