

mother goose for the graveyard girl

a collection of poetry
by beatrice degray

Table of Contents

madame grendel - 2
briar rose and thorns - 3
be nimble, be quick - 4
rorrim rorrim - 6
the girl who did not know herself - 7
mirror mirror - 8
les fées - 9
mother goose for the graveyard girl - 10
Acknowledgements - 12

madame grendel

had you been a man, you would have been revered.
but strength and power and love in a woman
is never that.
they took your body
before you were dead they took you
and

killed your heart
waterlogged with the grief us women know
too well

i have lost my heart too
staring at the reflection
in the fountainwater
of the face i have been told is mine
i see only you

rubbermarks on pavement
and a sense that this body
is not my own
is that how you felt?

with no one left to cry for you
was silence welcome?
i cry for you.
often i feel more you
than me
your hips are the ones that
will not shrink
your hair is the untamed crown
and i,

and i drift in my cave
dripping limewater forms
peaks and peaks
i see only graygreen,
siltfilled throat

briar rose and thorns

my room is hot in summer
burned skin hisses in the heat
bright red and you call me abeja and worry
over me with aloe and cool hands
across my rosy and blistered skin
even now, I wonder how much is left

my room is cool in fall
leaves swirl outside in umber and orange as i press snooze

on my alarm again. and again. and again-
being awake makes me tired
today makes me tired
the thought of you makes me tired
laughter in the hallway makes me tired
my skin is pale, ashy, wax work from sleep and cold and other things
i blend in with the painted walls, off-white and chipped.

my room is cold in winter
icy air numbing my extremities
creeping under blankets and up pant legs
i cannot touch the heating from my bed
just curl tighter hoping it passes
watch the frost gather
on chapped red hands with bitten nails.

my room is warm in spring
hands still sting, going purple
as they do when the temperature shifts like so
the birds are loud yet my silence is louder
tongue necrotic
nails curled and brittle
the queen of england is england incarnate
her body the body of the green and gray world she reigns
my body is this room
fingers creep like ivy and hair clumps like mistletoe
sinking slowly into the softness of my carpet
bleeding into the red flecks against the navy
crocus and violet spring from skin no longer skin but flora
alive alive alive

be nimble, be quick

watching the hand of your father
go through the yelloworange of the candle flame
opened up the world to a place
where magic seemed to exist at the dining room table
enchancing was the way your fingers danced
through heat without burning
the only trace of fire a lingering warmth
and the glow of your smile
heat and you were old friends -
every fever

every dab of molten plastic from the ancient hot glue gun of my mother
every sip of tea scalding the paper of your lips
and the soft pink of your tongue
- memories that were not unpleasant-
like the way lighters flicker at concerts during moving songs
when the music makes all of the
bottled up
pushed down
stamped out feelings burst out
this being your siren song
calling out it was

(stolen from the kitchen counter and hidden in the drawer next to your bed the metal was warm
against your fingers the very tips sore from the biting teeth you don't remember what you felt
when the hot metal met the soft white skin on the inside of your arm - the color your mother
always called lily white and chided you about remembering to apply sunscreen - nails too short to
bite, too picked over again and again to rip, and the feeling was everything and made you feel)

nothing
and you think you thought the feeling
of nothing was
better than
anything
it wasn't

sadness in all of its violeburgundy shades is better cold than blistering so slowly you feel things:

sunshine on bare shoulders
cool water washing over feet
the soft velvet of a baby's cheek pressed against your heart

and the way her lips feel on yours your hand on the curve of her waist and you spent too many
nights holding your hand too close to the flame to see the rest of the world wasn't burning and too
many days staring at the medicine cabinet and trying to calculate how much and how many but
you were always terrible at math but now it's not behind you but it's a part of who you are now as
you chop onions and water plants and play with your dog and smile and blink and sing offkey and
flick drops of water at your dad in the kitchen and kiss her softly to say goodnight and argue with
your mom about who loves who more & the world turns & the world turns & the world turns & -

you are here
all of you

lovely and imperfect in all of your kaleido-sterescope hues and tints

every mark
each blemish
countless.

rorrim rorrim

at last
the ink dark ribbon
falls to the floor
mirror uncovered, clocks unstopped
falling 'tween parted lips:
fern and orchid and tulip and honeysuckle and thyme,
fingers tapping moonlight chamomile songs to the
bumblebee staccato of the heart
cheeks dappled strawberries and cream
each scar shining grapefruit and spun sugar
tears drip dropping onto breasts pale velvet slope
whole body quaking, shaking laughter
nails dragged, scratching across the meadows of shoulders

and sunshine drinking the way lungs expand and chest rises
dimples and rolls smiling in daffodil
hands glide over hips and dips, the half moon's belly softness
constellations traced with lazy fingers across buttercream skin
and marked with gentle lips in shades of cherry blossom and violet
each curve padded in soft teal and coral and
spritzed with quail egg speckled polka dots
stomach crissed and crossed lilac silvery ribbons
the peach roundness of my thighs is a dream I thought
I would never remember to love.

the girl and her imp

the way the claws of the monster
dig into the hunch of my shoulders
drawing head down towards concrete and shoes
has made the curve of my neck a
deep swish
smooth
clawmarks dragged down the spine
the monster whispers aspartame
and slides saccharine across my tongue like the bubblegum
medicine that gave
me hives
it's safe in bed
alone
afraid is what the world looks like
after dark
flooded with people

our room is a mess
you want people to see us like this?
why bother? we have each other
my monster thrives on spoonfuls of
peanut butter washed down with tap water
on stale popcorn and tepid coffee
luxuriates in the too hot bath
the too cold room
our fingertips and lips go
from pink to red to purpleblue
the monster hides pencils and chargers
blocks out book pages with smeary
white kisses
the monster takes my phone and we cry
because there are footsteps
because the footsteps stop
because we exist on breadcrumbs and hard candy
and the world spins too fast
and we seem to be nothing without the other

les fées

when she smiles pearls and agates fall onto the pink carpet
filling her pockets and lockets and drawers
she is a moonrise girl
glowing and soft, her edges rounded seaglass
and eyes reflect the sky and mists of spring

the lovely treasure that spills from her lips
is a contrast to the salty brine tide pool
settling somewhere between her heart and throat
this is where the memories are stored

of men whose mouths makes snakes
bullfrogs, roaches, and thorns
tangle themselves across the tongues of the waiting
congregation and make the moonrise girl
fill her tidepool with snapping fish
and sharp rocks and murk

the pearls that fall into my hands as she tells me
feel wrong, blood stained and tarnished
and i string them onto gold wire
keep the strand wound around my wrists
agates pinned into the curls of my temples

i cannot take the memory of snakes
and roaches and bullfrogs and piercing thorns
but i can keep my moonrise girl's
words near me, warmed by heartbeats and seashine
here.

mirror, mirror

at the age of fourteen
the clocks ceased
the mirrors all warped around me
until covered
with crepe and burlap
bisacodyl and castor oil and tissue and air
stuffed haphazard into pockets
with matchsticks and too small clothes kept as goals
snipping and clipping and rearranging
black ink circles on sallow cheeks
chapped lips and fingernails bitten too low ripped to shreds
flushed cheeks, too red, raw, angry, wasp venom skin
always too big too much not enough where it counts
broken glass slips through fingers in the garden pond and
the rippled reflection distorted murky gray and twisted
celery and fat free cottage cheese with pepper
cucumber and romaine and denial and no sugar no fat no no no
matryoshka hiding too much work to find the true center
nails scratching scraping angry lines on wax skin
green tea and chewing ice and sewing needles and counting
tracking pinching poking prodding two fingers that's it

no one is perfect but i'm too far past flawed to notice anything but the cracks and stains
movement an illusion in mythless reality without an anchor
floating forgetting the flotsam and leaving any fight behind
hair still in pigtails when told to tear down the body that built me
too curvy or not enough too much ass but enough to be grabbed
behind closed doors too numb to cry out
against the 'go out with me' that endless joke on
loop despite the punctured eardrums endless ringing ruby red silence
the wicked witch always has whiskers
so maybe the bath will melt me down to base
parts hailstones and halibut bones and snails slugs mice tails
no body nobody not my body
wake up get up the clock strikes -
breathe.

mother goose for the graveyard girl

rosemary remember me
how could i forget
the way you grow and stretch and creep
your charcoal silhouette
a tisket a tasket
flowers fall across the casket
buttercup and marigold
button up your jacket
one two one two
who I am and who are you
three four three four
don't forget to lock the door
five six five six
please ignore my nervous tics
seven eight seven eight
please sir you are too late
rosemary remember me
your longing to forget
with scissors sharp and snipping snick
am i owed a debt?
spittle foam and honeycomb drip
down the corner of your lips
sharp tooth sharp teeth blooming red rosette

my mother told me to pick the best one
lickety split lickety split
jack be nimble jack be quick
to cover up the candlestick
pull the car away

once more once more
upon a
twined twined twined
pair of
hands hands hands
ink and blood and marrow bone
lips stick think quick
who you are to see

rosemary remember me
i wish i could forget
ghostly hands and dull white paint
how considerate
to say to pick to pick to say
not enough not enough
still drove away

rosemary remember me
i cannot forget
for graveyards grow
betwixt my bones
trapped in short vignette

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