

# mother goose for the graveyard girl

a collection of poetry  
by beatrice degray

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## 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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