



havoc kristy bowen



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## **ultramarine**

Sometimes we'd get lost  
in the shadows on the wall for days.  
You were the prince and I was like the girl  
in the book who choked on a stone and delivered  
up a toad. The fake, the fraud,  
the woman made of butter and cream  
but too bitter to eat. The first one's dress  
was very complicated, so you chose me. I was so  
easy. I could make shit happen, but my edges  
were sort of blurry. Sorrow was the smallest  
thing, tiny like a seahorse in your palm.  
I could make a mess over  
and over then wipe it away.  
God, that was a beautiful thing,  
the blinding white tinged by cerulean.  
It was a bluish sort of hunger,  
a sort of anger in my fillings.  
I kept sneaking through the house,  
eating everything I could find.  
In the kitchen there were swallows  
in the eaves and sometimes  
I'd frighten them with my crying.  
You kept tipping me upside down  
like a shell to see what would fall out.  
My mouth was a valve I could close and open at will.

## flail

The problem with the body is one of code.  
This unlocking beneath my skin, treble and quiet.  
Everyone has a hand beneath my dress these days,  
even the women made of singing. If this were a movie,  
it would be a tragedy. Too many people mouthing  
*cut* before the lights go out. Maybe a deer in a field  
and something awful In the woods. A tourniquet,  
a bloody smear on my wind shield. If this were a movie,  
I would be prettier and able to bake. Don't lie to me,  
I've seen you licking the backs of spoons  
like your life depended on it. Mine does.  
There's a line across my middle that's silty,  
like a bathtub where many children have been swimming.  
I've caught six of them this morning beneath my cup.  
Spreading them out like moths on the table. If this were a movie,  
It would taste like milk. Slightly turned.

## **past imperfect**

In the projection booth, everything was upside down.  
We figured if two trains were traveling in opposite directions  
at some point they would meet. I agreed to play the ingenue,  
while you fiddled with the machines. It's something I've  
been waiting to catch, the sky fastened at the corners  
like a big gray sheet. I had camellias in my hair and was  
pining for the impending disaster. It was horrible.  
Childhood, a large terrarium full of unruly creatures  
and over grown brush. All those years making out with  
the cotton pillow case, the damp circle of my mouth.  
Something that comes close but not quite. One man's  
greasy fingers or another's impossible zipper.  
By then, I was something eaten clean through,  
and eaten through again. The impossible, the *imparfait*.  
I was counting girl shaped things, dog shaped things, when you  
found me. A poem within a movie within a girl shaped world.

## bad touch

Oh mother, your daughters are spindled and wayward, littering the back porch with cigarettes and crying in the grocery store. When the clock says five, we line up, count our tiny pills on the basin. I'm a broken watch, a bridesmaid dress. There's no key to this car except the one I swallowed. I was singing in the backseat when I was stolen, twirled beneath the lanterns, the space beneath my back warm and grassy. The Ouija board said *wait*, so I waited bleeding in the bushes for a man in a suit. The Ouija board said *run*. He handled me like he was breaking kindling. Made me wear a dark red dress where the backyards were barbed wire and smoldering trees. I found a child and held onto her until the rain made it hard to see. Found a cricket in my pocket, a rusty wire in my milk. I closed the drapes and hid beneath the bed. Oh mother, the bedspreads were awful that year.



## movie of the week

Whatever it is you've done, Meredith Baxter-Burney is crying in the shower. Made off with the husband, stolen the child. Everybody loves a victim, especially the blonde, pretty kind. Even when she's stuffing chocolate donuts down her throat in the Safeway parking lot three at a time. Everybody loves a martyr in blue pajamas, throwing up in her white, white house. Your fault her cakes won't rise and birds find the windows violently. Her husband with a mean streak, a fake name and another wife in a sunny California suburb. Her mother wielding a hairbrush, her daughter the steak knife. Everyone loves a sob story. A cigarette burn in her flowered sundress. Her nightmares peopled with men with dark suitcases and women in dirty hotel bathtubs. Her closet full of stolen clothes, all the tags still attached.

## **thicket**

I am all buttercream and lace when  
we abandon this house for another  
with a picket fence and a tiny door.  
Clandestine, destined  
to have too many holes we can't fill.  
Despite the flurry of hands, we are drowsy,  
playing cards and fucking in the afternoon.  
Holding our nostalgia like a cake knife.

Soon, we abandon this car for another  
with a blue lush interior that smells like Salems.  
I make a flip book out our indiscretions,  
our misspellings. Finger the upholstery  
while we play roulette with beer bottles.  
*Kiss me, kiss me not.*  
My hope all parade floats and dancing bears  
until I split the infinitives,  
spilt the milk, slit the window screens.  
Went for the jugular.

My sleep is still white, all paper and milk.  
Counting the cracks in the ceiling and  
dividing three and three and three.  
Outside the amaryllis was ridiculous,  
all lewdly red and unruly.  
I was counting spiders in the eves when you left.  
One and one and one.

## worse case scenario

Tuesday, and I can't stop fidgeting.  
Can't stop the boy in the blue shirt  
from opening and opening the cupboards  
until his body is a blue, blue, sliver.  
When I said *shiver*, I meant it.  
Meant that the meadows were  
an awful, grass scented mess.  
Unruly, ruled by the trigger happy  
and the trite. You were always diligent.  
The cuts on your hands  
always tributes, tributaries.  
You looked at me like a magician  
passing a sword through a woman  
when I put my hand in your pants.  
Put apples, cookies in my pocket.  
A little licorice to stop the clicking.  
Everything was mine and mine  
and yours and yours.  
I lost a finger. Lost my wits.  
Was possessed by bareback riders  
and children caught in the trees.  
*Heredity*, they say, my mother carving  
stars in the kitchen table. *Heretical*.  
*Hysterical*. But I was so good at it.  
So good I stole you these matches.  
So good I can get you more.

## havoc

For months, I couldn't write. It was the loveliest vertigo, sort of like drinking tequila but without the hysterical blindness. My blackbirds were wingless, legless. They sputtered on the ground like firecrackers while you played *flare gun, fire engine*. I smelled like grass and rabbits, waited in the field for days for lightning. Wanted that spark, the mailbox sticky with wasps. I could say I wanted order, all my ducks lined up like a carnival, playing hide and seek, patty cake, with the wedding rings. Shiny, sharp toothed and singing. But I meant I wanted us strung together like lanterns. A sort of morse code in my molars. Once for *no*, twice for *yes*. Meant I wanted turbulence, trouble, to be sawed in half by wanting it.

**no girls were harmed in the making of this poem**

No broken girl, blond girl, bloodied girl by the side of the tracks. No girl who won't do the dishes, won't write, won't come unless she's in love. Can't even hear the rain most times, can't breath. No kitchen knife, no back room. No dirt fisted with a broken bottle inside her. Can't even watch the news without some dead girl, red headed girl mucking up the works. Breaking open jars of cherries in the parking lot.. Won't swim, won't put her hands in the water. Can't even go outside without swagger fastened to her hip. Won't eat lunch. Won't set the bone because the hurt is too pretty. Won't write a word, a poem, a book report on all this falling. A letter to her congressman in deepest pink.

## on the picturesque

On Wednesday, I start writing things down.  
They are something like a poem, something  
like a house fire. We have enough food

for a week and the pets all make it out.  
The trees are sumptuous and dramatic  
and rarely on fire. My hands are bone

white and only sometimes on fire.  
Every dream has a dollhouse and every  
dollhouse, a dream of moss, creeping

across the floor like carpet. Still, my ghosts  
wear heavy shoes and rattle the bed at night.  
All of them have other lovers. I can smell

the violets on their hands and the sweet  
ache of their molars. I circle each one  
with a red pen, then start again.

Map the distance, the weight  
between desire and necessity.  
Dear, it's not so good.

Sometimes I can trick myself into something  
like writing by moving words across the page  
like peculiar, but overly extravagant, insects.

Sometimes, more the idea of words, like horses  
or bricks in the houses we do not own.  
Mostly I just burn.

## **adultery for beginners**

At the very bottom, I'll be your sing-a-long.  
The hung neck fixed above the disco floor.

Grips in all the right places. All the right  
verbs falling like coins from my lips.  
Sing me. Sweet me. Your pizza and beer.

All sandboxes. All *x*'s and *o*'s where the eyes should be.

Your hi-jinks. Your desert tent.  
Coffee with just a little sugar, just a little salt.  
In the morning all cat and purr.  
Pen in my fist like a spike.

My writing rubs right off. See?  
No hazard. No broken home life.

Just a box full of records in your filthy hatchback.  
All scratched.

## satellite

Say what you want, but the moon makes a nice disaster. A window to climb into or out of. I steal peaches from the neighbors. Pearl earrings. Dream of dark fish swimming the interior. Repeat my name in the mirror seven times and wait to disappear. This door inside me drawn with a stick of chalk opening to a catwalk, a murder. I wait to bleed in the woods where the girls sing my name from the trees, ruined by romance novels and the swell beneath their dresses. Upstairs, my mother rips the stitches from everything she's ever sewn. There's nothing you can say to me that doesn't sound like *no*.



## the kissing disease

Sometimes, I am too suggestible. Both exquisite and satin-hipped, moving through December like a doll within a doll. I am always too exciteable, this contagion sweet on a boy's tongue. I pretend that we are moving further and further apart, like halving an orange and then halving it again. Or a curtain unfolding and unfolding to reveal a ballerina, ice lipped in a white dress. You wouldn't believe the things I want sometimes. Like now, the fever blooming inside me, scented like milkweed and snow. The enormous tangle of branches that give way to a tiny kitten heart. This river looks fake, all singing children and dirndls. But then, so do your hands, pulling me toward you in the truck. I braid my hair and pretend it comes natural to me as breathing. This little disease caught in my throat. It might be a butterfly. It might be a knife. All night, my ribs are a sleepy furnace, where small colonies make scrimshaw drawings of strange beasts. You wouldn't believe the things they want.

In dreams I stumble through the parking lot,  
am shoved like a suitcase into a trunk  
where I gag on gas fumes and ash.

I search my stomach looking for a mark.  
No one likes to drive alone at night.

## **what monster**

In the end, I told one lie, then another.  
It was easy, the babies kept hatching  
but the surface resisted.  
In the backyard, in the breakfront.  
I chewed the hearts from paper dolls one by one.  
Took one, then another by their slender throats,  
rendered them useless, their pretty napes sodden in my mouth.  
All that sugar beneath skin. We spent hours watching women  
draped over midcentury chairs like sweaters. It was my ailment,  
my misgiving. Counting rabbits and ranunculus.  
I took a lot of baths to stop the blood.  
I read one magazine then another.  
My heart was a burnt out movie theatre, a darkened drugstore  
or some other poetic thing, ridiculous and aimless as wings.  
I forgot about the war while rearranging the plates.  
We wanted to understand what science was, that big blue  
hope bursting through our door.  
I begged you to stop, but you never did.  
I took one train, then another.

## **meteorological facts about the midwest**

You can never be too careful. When it storms, we hide in the tub beneath a mattress. Place the keys in the azalea bush. The knife beneath the sink. Everything has a beginning and an endpoint. Everything , a pulse and disaster. One mathematical miscalculation and the whole thing goes to hell. Nightly, I knot the sheets to the bedpost and climb down. Everything has a purpose and a sadness. I pretend to be a stranger, a chair, a story. I hide the baby beneath my sweater. Then more babies in the bureau. Everything has a name. Due to a mathematical miscalculation, I can't find the papers. I mouth syllables while the clouds move in. Afterwards, we emerge bruised and beautiful and ruined. Due to a miscalculation you are missing an arm. We can't find the front door. Everything has a place and a sequence, and an open window. I suffer from headaches and too many consonants. In a dream, the sky takes a girl and swallows her.

## midwest gothic

Say *mathematics* and everything comes loose.  
It's written all over me in sequence,  
the tire ruts, the trees fussy and ornate.

My voice sugars when I say his name,  
fuck him beneath the arbor in his parents back yard,  
all paper mache and chinese lanterns.

Today, it's someone's birthday. Today, it's someone's funeral.  
I take away 7 eggs and still they seem to multiply daily.  
Take lemon juice to my hair, lipstick when no one's looking.

It's a birthday. It's a beheading.  
My name is four letters and a lisp.  
A leaf in your palm that catches the wind.

Outside town, a woman once lay days beside  
the road near the tracks, flies covering her like bandages.  
She survived but I may not.

It's my birthday. It's a tragedy with cake.  
There are five theories of blueness  
and I proved every one wrong.

I can't keep dead girls out of these poems.  
They knock on my door at 3am with a hangover,  
looking for a match. One summer, my mother

locked us in the house and bathed us in milk  
to stop it all from happening again and again.  
Hoarded mattresses in the basement in case of disaster.

## widow's peak

By morning, there's a continent lost in my hair. A tinge of grenadine, of tobacco. An entire narrative loosening its buttons, falling in with thieves. We are neither less so nor more so afraid than anyone else, carving our names with fish bones in the sand, the hulls of sunken ships. You've never seen so many changelings given over to river, to the dogs that wander the banks downstream. You extract the bones from my ears. Build a cupola. A reliquary where I stumble, am misled by curvature. By cotton. I empty all the rooms to stop them from reeling. Burn the carpets to kill the rot. Something about the shape of my face disquiets you. My anxiety has a house and a fence and a deer in the yard. A zip code. A plague of starlings.

## reality show

The weather determined the light,  
the moving car, the open window.  
I dreamed a room and a key  
in a box. I carried a carnation  
between my teeth.

No one could tell me all the openings  
weren't a sign, an invitation,  
because I wore it out, wore  
a red dress for three days.  
Wore my nails to the quick.

There was a woman on a balcony  
and a commotion I was given a  
small book and I swallowed it.  
Gave up my name when you asked  
and oiled every hinge.

I was a good little despot til the horses  
came with their endless plodding  
Your hand on my back was disastrous.  
I kept opening the medicine cabinet,  
looking for poppies. I was worse,  
but no worse than you with your fake  
name and your little machines.  
Now you see it, now you don't.  
Luminous, I dreamed a camera  
in the wall where me made it up  
as we went along.

I was blurred, determined.

## **swarm**

Because I'm a bad daughter, they burn the trees all night to kill the wasps. Bleach the sheets and cut off my hair. I empty my stomach against the garage, make lewd advances toward the rosebush. Faking it, fucking farm boys on piles of coats. Breathing fast, my fingers against the joists of the floor, whispering *faster, harder* while the nests blacken against the moon. By September, I rip my mother from inside out, feeding on saucepans and eyelet bedspreads. Break open her ribs to find a milk bottle, a deck of cards that flutter from my hands. My dreams calamitous, erratic. A man with a gas can and a box of matches.



## **coyotes of lakeshore drive.**

It was the worst sort of enchantment--  
spring, and all the cherry trees on fire  
in the park across the street. I had a bruised arm,  
a polka-dot dress, and you, a canoe  
in your garage we couldn't carry.  
The morning was disguised  
as a toothache and there was no getting over it.  
We were the worst sort of accomplices.  
replacing the arbor with tin cans  
and tissue paper. The picket fence with chicken wire  
until the evening spindled to an argument.  
That night, I pulled enough hair from the shower drain  
to make a doll, rode the bus home imagining feral shadows  
moving in the grass along the shoulder. Really, I was out  
for blood. Biting your lip and moving over you  
in the orange glow of the streetlight,  
something soft and fur-lined in my mouth when I kissed you.  
We imagined horrible things were happening in the suburbs  
full of key parties and discontented husbands.  
Broken fences and children crouched in closets.  
The boats in the harbor knocking sides in twilight.  
The prairie stretching around us black and flat.

## **blackmail fantasy**

On Thursday, I take a train to a town with a gas station and one stoplight. Wear a black coat and dream all night about wolves skirting the parking lots. My hope is a single bright balloon caught in January trees, a fakery, a delightful amnesia. Needless to say, you'll do what I want because of the lingerie and possibly because I can fit an entire apple in my mouth without gagging. Still, I cry a lot, on buses, on airplanes. It takes so little energy it's almost like Stockholm syndrome. All the houses are full of daughters, all the daughters full of milk and tissue paper, of 7<sup>th</sup> grade slumber parties. I fall in love with them too easily, with your wife in her tiny box. I am so dangerous, even the wallpaper hates me. The gas station attendant eyes my pockets suspiciously. Everything I say sounds like candy hearts, all sugar and pink pastels. This is the worst part of the game where I want and want and want. I play this part so sweetly you practically forget my teeth. Something keeps moving around my ankles like a cat, or possibly a small fox.

