

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

DISARMING THE BITTERSWEET

A Collection of Poems

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts in English

By

Neda Levi

May 2013

The thesis of Neda Levi is approved:

Leilani Hall, Ph.D.

Date

Ranita Chatterjee, Ph.D.

Date

Dorothy Barresi, M.F.A., Chair

Date

DEDICATION

To the soundtrack of my beautifully startling childhood and teenage years: Simon and Garfunkel, Steve Winwood, The Cars, Phil Collins, Rod Stewart, Kansas, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Talking Heads, Foreigner, Queen, Bruce Springsteen, U2, Bob Dylan, Billy Joel, Billy Idol, Annie Lennox, Fleetwood Mac, Guns and Roses, REM, Gin Blossoms, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Patti Smith, Cyndi Lauper, Tracy Chapman, Bonnie Raitt, David Gray, Natalie Merchant, Nelly Furtado and Pink, the divine sounds that emanated from your indispensable art introduced me to the power of crying when I was deeply touched. Each time I try to convince myself that the past is a place worthy of visiting not permanently living in, my wishes to cradle its poignancy with all the fibers of my being still tug on my heartstrings amidst the early hours of day when my mind summons a lyric to pacify my restless cries and offer me painstaking sleep. Memories of the home I once had, the people I once kept in good company, my mother who deserved a lasting marriage, the aunt I lost to her life's luminous contemplations, the grandmother I never said goodbye to, the years I spent yearning for my father's unconditional espousal, and the exquisite sorrow I endured as a child of divorce exist because your words painted the portraits of my life before I ever put pen to paper. I am alive today because you kept me safely cradled in the reverberations of your empathy, and for that I am eternally grateful.

To my dearest grandmother whose frail but warm arms embrace me still, though I can't touch them, forever like the wind, blind to my sight, I will feel you and pray that you can feel me. The moment my parents' love fell apart always runs rampant in my terrified mind as I lay, trouble dreaming, while you twist, a young, tantalizing, beautiful gypsy in my heart. You were there that violent summer when I lost what I knew to be home, and as the hours beat away in my mind, I wish I were there as your courageous fortitude drifted away and out of what had been home to you. Even though I have been left to dance with the significant devils in my life without you, I will forever remain indebted, and inebriated off the strength that you as a woman, kind and motherly, exemplified within the tarnished moments of my existence. May you rest in loving, whimsical serenity, and may these poems express my love for you in more ways than I ever did.

To my cousin, Sarah, I would not have made it through my late teens and early twenties without you. The greatest gift that I ever received was that turquoise and violet journal you gave me at my high school graduation. It was my life's understudy; it was to rule by my thumb, index finger and a pen while the rest of my body slept. You wanted me to win, to show the world that what I had to say was worth listening to, to color outside the lines, to regain the childhood I lost, to write even if I was the only one who could ever make sense of it all. You showed me that I still mattered, and this thesis is in part due to your encouragement. After the epic silencing of my voice during the infantile years of my life, I never thought that as an adult, I'd be able to speak of the profound periods through which I had survived. I owe you the fortitude behind every word that I have ever struggled to write. I have grown stronger simply because of you. For the rest of my life, each time I read this manuscript, look through that journal, listen to "O-o-h Child" and remember the most difficult summer and fall of my life, living as a pawn in my parents' game of divorce, I will smile knowing that despite the nightmare, someone loved me enough to believe that my pain was real, enough to offer me light when my sun refused to shine.

To my thesis director, Professor Dorothy Barresi, I thank you for taking the time to make sure that this experience was one that I will never forget. I am very blessed to have had you share your poetic wisdom with me throughout the years. The form of my poetic confessions was compelled to dabble in the world of postmodern poetry, and I have you to thank for stimulating my interest and leading me out of my comfort zone. I am very proud of what you have led me to discover in my craft as a poet.

To my thesis readers Dr. Leilani Hall and Dr. Ranita Chatterjee, I thank you for the years of poetry and critical theory that you have taught me. Dr. Hall, it all started with you. I told you I would never be able to write about anything other than the relentless patronizing hold that my muse had on my broken spirit. You said that my writing would exhaust his employment in time. I haven't written about my father in over a year. I've disarmed the bittersweet, and I couldn't have done it without your reflective teachings. I thank you so very much, and will always hold your mentorship dear to my heart. Dr. Chatterjee, thank you for brightening my horizons no matter how intimidated I was by the words of such esteemed philosophers. My thesis is grounded on Psychoanalytic theory, and I will never forget the countless times you welcomed my qualms and queries on the subject. I hope that my work does your teachings justice.

To my fiancé Joel, I thank you for understanding my need to remember the past in order to sense myself living in the present. I appreciate you trying to empathize as the tears stream down my face with every story, obsession and conflict that my being has been composed of. This thesis is the culmination of the childhood that I lived drowning in sorrow fighting for my father's love. Today I look forward to living, to further overcoming and to being continuously blessed in adulthood with the only man whose love I will never have to fight for. You define love, tried and true.

And Lastly, to *this crazy shine that will never let me die*, my muse, my sadness, my happiness, my life and my death; my father. I've walked so far, but it seems that my heart hasn't moved an inch. Deep inside I may still be that six year old whose fledgling joy depended upon how tightly you held her hand, but I am learning to let go; these hands do not depend on any others for warmth, guidance and contentment anymore. For years I cried and you watched without offering me any sense of tranquility. These poems are a manifestation of every tear; silent to you, deafening to me. I hope that someday you'll allow the hurt within me, that you neglected to embrace, to find itself revived as you read each poem and I pray that one day before you pass on and reunite with the father that you never met, that these words resonate within you and allow us both to live what's left of our lives with our hearts full of compassion towards the emotional limitations of both of our fathers. Someday I hope that these poems will show you what it means to tell your child that her color illuminates your dreams, and that your hopes for her reside in a vital space in-between your lungs and your rib's incarceration. May these poems show you that despite my ambivalence during our rocky relationship as father and daughter, for the longest time I wished to have embraced the color of your true self and the dedicated spirit you once acquired. The past is gone and though I must learn to fully move forth in life, this thesis will immortalize the bitter, the sweet, the sad and the happy; everything that in time will afford me the ability to find myself the repose I had once expected from you.

I am walking away from the poetry of the only life I have ever lived with skin tougher than it has ever been, though deep inside I will remain hopelessly devoted to my adolescence; to the hostile and the honeyed. Here in these poems, my past has found its home; bound pages in which it will always stay loud, carefree and young in remembrance of the only soul I treasured just as much as I feared.

I love you now no less than I loved you then.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Signature Page.....	ii
Dedication.....	iii
Abstract.....	viii
Epigraph.....	x
Poetry	
Breaking Away From Self.....	1
The Gamble of Youth.....	2
What You Have to Grow Past.....	3
Summoning Remnants of a Dark Triangle.....	4
Summer's Sound.....	5
See Father.....	6
Never Come.....	7
Bequeath.....	8
Women.....	9
Prime – Divisible – Fleeting – Flawed.....	10
Mind Games.....	11
My First Love.....	12
What Mother Wore To Her Court-Ordered Separation.....	14
The Cheapest Wish of All.....	15
Drown, Drowning, Drowned.....	17
My Eighteenth Winter.....	18
Heavy.....	19
See Coward.....	20

World War Three.....	21
Virus.....	22
My Mother's Sister.....	23
The Echoes of Experience.....	24
Rite of Passage: I Am Not Welcomed.....	25
The Epitaph on the Social Portrait of Naiveté.....	26
Speak.....	27
For Anne.....	28
Harsh Beginnings Breed Trying Goodbyes.....	29
Inside Out.....	30
Trading Secrets.....	31
Gendering Procrastination.....	32
Lifeline.....	33
Postmodern Love.....	35
Thicker Blood Resides in Daughters.....	36
Resuscitate.....	37
The Trouble with Sleeping.....	39
Ephemeral Consciousness.....	40
Manifesto.....	42
Chronic Fatigue of Words Syndrome.....	44
I Give Thanks.....	45
Notes.....	46

ABSTRACT

DISARMING THE BITTERSWEET

A Collection of Poems

By

Neda Levi

Master of Arts in English

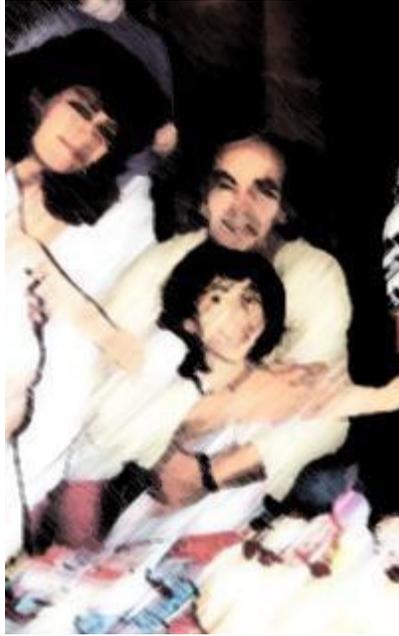
As a poet, the one thing that I find the most redemptive is the power of confession that language affords me, even though within that power lies a struggle of bittersweet magnitude. My poetic confessions speak to the torrential downpour of an unpleasantly lovely instance called childhood, a time of simplicity and complication, a time which subsists on two contradictory planes. The path that a confessional poet travels can be identified as one navigated by their experiences; personal experiences that range in effortless to difficult proportions, and it was through the art of poetry that I realized that there was no need to further silence my own. Adopting the voice of verse offered the chance to speak in the midst of trauma.

Disarming the Bittersweet is the vehicle I used to explore the paths that I have walked through, first as a writer interested in the past and second as a daughter who is grappling with the idea that there are two paths vying for her attention — one that exorcizes her demons and the other which counterintuitively yearns to maintain the despair.

Fashioned upon the base of Psychoanalytic theory, these poems encompass my attachment to what represents the past, be it for better or for worse. Recurrent themes which revolve around mental abuse, the comatose absence of what was once a present paternalistic figure, the fear of sexual intimacy, the unraveling of marriage, and the simplicities of childhood wonder serve as the basis of this present struggle; the need to identify myself as a poet inseparably linked to the past.

In this collection, the poetry mirrors the snide pull of the past and its charming knots and wounds, particularly with regard to the overarching male figure—the utmost symbol of patriarch. In these individual pieces, I have confessed my undying devotion at the feet of my father and waited in hopes of reciprocity. These confessions have highlighted the notion that I am sometimes lost in the bittersweet wish that the days of naiveté are there for the taking. *Disarming the Bittersweet* defines the struggle to maintain the only thing that I must defuse in order to save my sanity. I am self-aware, an autonomous body composed of revelations, and the narrative of my past is the only lifeline I have left. Through vivid chronicles calling to attention the vitality of my past, this collection illustrates the foundation of a carefree adolescence flawed by the catalyst of the instability that transpired and then rejects the polarization of the experiences reflected, therefore resulting instead in the flourish of their union.

This collection embarks on a journey of engaging conversation with memory; to implant the experience of what once was and will never again be, of the bitter and the sweet, into one of present necessity. What is rewritten is the undying realm of a confessional poet's past, wherein with a heavy hand the faint lines of peace and panic transposed upon one another during childhood are once again traced, heartened in the hue of immortality.



“Sorrow found me when I was young,
Sorrow waited, sorrow won.
Sorrow that put me on the pills,
it's in my honey, it's in my milk.
Don't leave my hyper heart alone
on the water. Cover me in rag and
bones, sympathy.”

– The National, “Sorrow”

Breaking Away From Self

— *After Kyle Vaughn*

There used to be something about panic written here
but now there's a sleepless child, smiling.
There was a father, absentminded and handsome.
Now there's hope and a future helping children just around the bend.

Here was illustrated a broken home; tattered on the roof, shingles
fallen from rain, but now ashes of what once held terror, an unsettling
humble abode. Ashes of his own absent father, my grandfather
resting beneath the memory of *my* child's grandfather, living
dead upon his or her future arrival.

Even when I was young, hope lingered beside me, injured
within him, like when mother sprinkled salt on my tongue, saving
my heart its trembling after the next-door neighbor's dog bit my leg. Now, I
lie with my wrist bathing in salt, scar tissue abraded by depression. Physical
marring raises a difficulty: concealment. These bracelets nearly reach
around, sweater cuffs too itchy. Years ago, cutting was foreign; words obscured
pain's theme but even this evolved, my words grown used to anguish.

I try daily, practicing goodbyes as I practice lies. I do try, by asking him to hold
his daughter close. I do try, but I cannot make him love me any more than less.

As the view into mornings break, I give up trying; my sentiments do not
vary.

No, sentiments do vary —
There used to be something about panic written here.

The Gamble of Youth

I felt them frozen, my six-year-old
bones. Mother alone, paste deficient in
bonding a broken home's foundation,
flats cracked untimely below a former
baby's crawl. Father desolate, this construction
worker's belt too tight, water bottle empty as his
thirst finds rule on a hot summer day. Heaviness; no
siblings to share this pokerfaced nightmare.

What You Have to Grow Past

The beginning of things before they are the end of things they've been. Sidewalks under immense construction; damp like the flooded seasons you've previously survived. Trying to make amends; asking your first boyfriend to love you long after he has let the romance out to hang dry on a forgotten line.

How you sleep through the hours others spend living; conscious, lethargic, fighting for the surface through the hours they have spent in dream. Finding the key to your reveries buried below interstitial space, fluid compartments reject your dynamic rhyming and require oxygen; capillaries wish for quiet in the deep maroon.

The reasons to resent these certain costs you've paid; thinking an adversary's shadow is livelier than the sum of you.

Summoning Remnants of a Dark Triangle

I try to summon the photograph sitting upright on what was once your dresser; my cherrywood inheritance with a love letter Post-it inside the cracked drawer.

You escaped Ayatollah Khomeini's rule for America and its dream, never cutting your roots; the table occupied by Iranian delicacies as the scent of pomegranate stew carried the room. Curlers in your hair and my father's kiss imprinted on your rouged, Toasted Almond cheeks. Appreciations gleaming, you found vanity in your daughter's Israeli warrior. Flattering himself, he has yet to visit your grave or make love to your daughter through a telegram, true words of condolence - careless bloke to ex-wife.

Modesty remains woven into the fabric of mother's vestment as your swaying power surges through veins facing extinction in a casket far from home - locked and buried - preventing his Israel from intimidating your Iran.

I summon the photograph, break the holding cell, tear the male, uphold the female. I take out your curlers, erase his kiss, and breathe life into your amputated memory, a woman who loved despite the lack of a son's respect. You were more of a man than my father, a man for lack of a better term.

Summer's Sound
—*After Daniel Simko*

It has matured soft, a hushed sadness through
cassette tapes you refuse to toss. It seems minutes
pass slower than seconds arise and fall onto the next;
loud in depth, quiet in making any sense. The saxophone on
daddy's favorite album ejects the restraint on breathless
absence; timeworn bliss is absorbed, clinging to nostalgia's
rhythm of loss like static on Egyptian cotton.

You recite the disconnected number written on that
outdated summer camp cooler hidden behind the water canteen,
the deep purple digits faded to a hushed lavender; disappointment
rings a wicked tone. You recall summers riding your tricycle
down Sunnybrae's knoll as concrete and rocks danced under
your trails—your parents under love's ballad of reciprocity.
The blare of seclusion was closer than it appeared.

The season cradling innocence has abandoned you.
A wave's thrashing echo lasts only as long as a child is seen
splashing in its saltwater. Jumping the tides to treasure what
lies in the distance is midsummer's occupation; to find order
in the commotion of wrought cassette tapes, threads
unwound.

See Father

Pedar (Aba)

noun

(Etymology: Middle East: Farsi; Hebrew)

Headman (1): holder of familial power executed brutishly upon children due to condescension of female domestic partner.

Anti-Paternalistic (2): the condition of a man who has caused his spouse and offspring to wilt.

Familiar (3): term used to define “daddy” prior to the year nineteen hundred and eighty eight. Familiar and true; as in he, the being bringing home the bacon for the birth he abetted, *man injah hastam, ahval yeh pedar, keh komackonam bacham mohafag besheh*: I am here, a father first, to help push my child to success.

Charismatic (4): term interchangeably used with (2) post nineteen hundred and eighty eight; a man whose grown daughter, placing a veil of secrecy on her hatred, pulls the trigger. Blowing her unequivocal mind’s poetry away means saving him, her foremost cognizance, from bereavement as demonstrated in the phrase *aba, ani metta alechah*: father, I am dying over you.

Unforgiven (5): term coined when the daughter was denounced for taking off the headdress of dim filament tied to dogmatic oppression and speaking her piece, two-thousand and eleven. Partially affiliated with the phrase “never forgotten”; a slap in forgive and forget’s old face e.g. *pedareh man chee kar kardeh?*: what has my father done? What epic assessment of a man and his mind? Is the term father worth valuing in cases such as: e.g. *Aba, lama atah lo ohev et ema sheli?* Father, why don’t you love my mother? A child’s corroborating evidence is never sufficient in Middle Eastern court rooms; the man is of value: appearing or acting virile more often than not despite rarely having the ultimate professor in life themselves, a father.

Never Come

I am covered in a burn-victim's skin. Dead casing, blemished tissue on fire, written in bold letters by an inkling of possible, subdued touch upon my once insufficient form. I am mentally dying to be tangibly broken. I yearn to be a high loft; a sexual skyscraper, a place to hang won battles and elated moans of conspicuous yet esthetically frustrated erections.

I shut off before euphoria fingers feminine moisture, naked sorrows I've yet to feel. I'd pay in holy matrimony and motherhood, a sonnet to be peeled and publicized in muscular weaponry. I wake in dream; feelings surge sexual twitches to my polka-dot sock covered feet.

Will I ever come around to fucking? Scratch that, making love? Mother hardened this damsel to believe a pure lady never curses.

I have been called a twosome of negativity, a tease by those who never had the chance, a bitch, but I hunger to be called a grip on positive requests; a lover of sexual nature with lubricated rhythm, flawless in interpretation.

Call me foolish, but I doubt ever coming close.

Bequeath

This pale face in my hands, eyes angry by tears. *A tea bag should do the trick.* A cul-de-sac of mortal paradise closing in on the headstone before me. Lungs blister through these Marlboros,

an infection bad for my health. Above this lawn, unkempt and maltreated, routed by loss, I plea insanity. Maker of woman, entangle me in capillaries filled with the secondary hue of her blood. Those frail arms once had full custody of the weight that was me.

Here ashes fall with each tap, muddling through the mechanism that coerces me to muse the russet complexion, tattooed eyebrows, the rouge-creamed cheekbones. An apparition greets me in wistfulness.

I respire the tattered snapshot of her sending me off to the sublime heights of indispensable youth on a rubber seat, holding on for Crayola-obsessed life. Puff after puff of the addiction she bequeathed me in her unconscious will: the Surgeon General allows second-hand smoke to prevail just this once.

Thursday mornings claim frostbite on broken granddaughters. I inhale her license of voices as the tobacco smolders on one end, filtering out my screams on the other. My pre-lunch prescription for coping is done, unsound. Striding past fanning remnants of malignancy, I am forever spun out on her lingering nicotine.

Women

of the Iranian confinement run deficient
on charm, like nearing empty the gas
gauge of some Shah's 1987 diesel-powered Mercedes.

Their freedom never flourishes as their aesthetics
do, fashionably too late. They lack formal education, incarcerating
their own precious wills, taking delicate care of prosperous men.

Coco Chanel is the only demure glory that their ignorance and
innate compliance allows; she sparkles rich dictation. These
women, in desire, only acquire selflessness diluted by gold.

Women of the Iranian confinement carry what they believe
is their God-given prerogative, cheerless to the naked
American eye. In assimilating, bronzer caked on cheeks,
No.5 dabbed behind the ears; resembling Atlanta's rich
housewives.

Freedom is a husband's platinum checks. No account
necessitates equilibrium. *Twenty-four karats of gold please,
not fourteen and plated.* Warmth is a mink coat, not a better
man's cheap love.

Women of the Iranian confinement run vacant on civilized
emotions, like the narrow piece of silver on the synthetic
license that defines them, stiff after countless swipes at Saks
Fifth Avenue.

They live unscathed and naïve, rough creatures of habit, as I sit
in likeness, only by facial features and sadness, writing this poem.

Prime – Divisible – Fleeting – Flawed

1.1 Father wandered Europe pursuing Paris, dining upon escargot and looking to tempt France's most eligible mademoiselle. Mother, decent in her fine mink coat, remained silent—falsely inoculated, blind to this infidelity. Mute in protest of Marriage's alliance against the emotional gender, she braced the impending stretch marks for me, doomed civilian, believing skin's smooth masquerade would bring the operator back onto the sexual circuit of *till death do us part*.

1.1 Man wandered in Europe seeking Paris, feasting on escargot with wine luring France's most eligible mademoiselle. Woman, decent in her fine mink coat, voiced persistence—self-immunized against infidelity. Explicit in Marriage's alliance with itself, she cuddled the stretch marks caused by growing requited love; this is skin's smoothness graphed on an extension of root. This is not destroyer. Horizon halts her desire to charm the sexual operator back onto her circuit of ~~till death~~.

1.1 Wandered in Europe seeking Paris, he ate escargot and drank wine with a French mademoiselle. Miles away wrapped in mink, voluptuous moves were captured under street lights; finding Mr. Right pensioned off any curfew. Hours charmed by gentlemen—one night stands in which mother chooses not to partake—she fancied explicit allegiance with empowered victims of a chauvinist's European travels as she cuddled unrequited love's stretch marks; abetting an infantile heart's creation is smoother than the operator who enticed these curves swaying to the beat of 1984's rhythm and blues hit. Calling for mother's milk lures love more than blind infidelity, sucking her dry.

Mind Games

My consciousness fell victim to the marriage of
black and blue, a holy pressure. Through the rule of iron:
the callous, predictable smack across my young face,
I learned to render lies of passion to escape
patriarchal confinement in my mind.

A lover's temperateness overtook the need for
someone: for the obscure man, the star of
my swollen thoughts, to hold me in the symmetry
of my weather, out the basin over-looking the gates
above days of childhood sunrises.

*The faulty emotions of estrogen belonging to damaged
goods must never be trusted.*

Poetry brought us together. A two-way street of sexual
movements detoured by my pulsing inhibitions tore
us apart. A Marine's warm-blooded embrace settled
the ache, never adept at curing it.

My forte: hunting blameless men acquainted
with the article of love worn on my sleeve.

My First Love

September 5, 2000 11:53am

Just as the lunch bell rang, an enemy, once a friend, uncovered my secret and taught me a lesson on cheating. My friends, never enemies, watched the precursor to my adult depression intently.

I remember lying under the covers when
our premature, first autumn began to fall; an October
night, pale as my lips were cold, abandoned by blood,
refused to play warmth into November. My hand evicted
from your glove brought father's panic its reprieve.

Those childhood dreams of falling from a black sky
draped in metallic stars came to pass -- I hit the ground, safety
net occupied.

November 11, 2000 9:14pm

I lay awake jotting down the lyrics to *November Rain* in hopes that this regret would find me again in your open embrace.

*We've been through this such a long, long time
just tryin' to kill the pain.
Lovers always come and lovers always go
And no one's really sure who's lettin' go today, walking away.
If we take the time to lay it on the line
I could rest my head just knowin' that you were mine, all mine.
So if you want to love me, then darlin' don't refrain
or I'll just end up walkin' in the cold November rain.*

Your flesh at seventeen— I wanted every inch.
Rainy days seeking refuge under your umbrella,
standing on the senior quad in all its emptiness, our
tongues submissive to lunch hour's destiny. Soothing eau
de cologne resting on my skin, your neck stained the hue of
habitual love letters—prime accessories marking
clothed, sexual territory.

Careful in your mother's home, I gained back all trust after
breaking your virginal heart. I remember the night I slept
over: running away with lies left on my parents' answering
machine, twirling spaghetti, sipping raspberry wine,
listening to wind chimes in blind rapture with the dry Santa Anas.

You undressed my inexperience.
Fearful as your finger let itself slide, I remembered the stained-glass butterfly missing its wing.

July 20, 2003 4:37pm

You were busy and said you'd call back, but I knew our time was up. You weren't in love with me anymore; having had your affection compromised once - moving forward was difficult for you.

I was tested on young love. The welcome to kiss was consented; wrapped in another's muscular arms, long through frayed edges of a cotton t-shirt, required nothing more than an initial thought:

This is what the boy in every girl's teenage dream really looks like.

*

Nothing I said warranted my parole; you'd always call it bluffing and continue sentencing my capacity to assault raw emotions to further rehabilitation.

October 11, 2011 6:32pm

I have always been worth waiting for.

I've been waiting 8 years, 3 months and 21 days as if old photos and Valentine grams are so inclined to ask. Those childhood dreams of falling from a black sky draped in metallic stars have come to pass – I hit forgiving ground – safety net easy, vacant with enough

room to occupy beside another man, my last love.

The phone number you never dialed is out of amenable service to the moments I spent captivated by your fairytales.

What Mother Wore To Her Court-Ordered Separation
—*After Angela Ball*

Curls in her hair, ringlets of fire; warm and tight the way his hugs used to be. Violent femme's satin stain upon her voluptuous lips, the ones that never missed enticing his many erections through their disorderly 21-year escapade. Clay dried on her aging hands, holding the statue of a man, his wife and daughter, still wet and open to destruction. Her heart, oblivious to pop's stance and the blows he had meticulously prepared: warm and loose depicting the everlasting bout with his love for her, feigning complete impotence.

The Cheapest Wish of All

Recreating pubescence, each cautious,
inexperienced footstep I took miscarries
replication:

I will never embark on another Egg
Drop soup, father-daughter date night while
mother is away.

There's no need to hide razors in
the daylight of sixth grade anymore, all to
carelessly knick my knees shaving in the dark
stillness of early mornings.

Greeting Mr. Shannon with a Merry Christmas
from across the hopscotch encrusted pavement
died with him.

Running to mother after school let out on
May 18, 1999 to tear into the childproof-
plastic encasing the Backstreet Boys can't make
my love-struck ride home any longer.

My mother's mother can't be conned for cash and a
ride to the mall, while my soon-to-be disassociated paternities
run away to Cancun to rekindle what was never there.
Cinnamon sparkling lip-gloss and a pair of Air
Jordans later; Will I still be unpopular?

The portraits of memories past, the ones that Picasso
paints each time my lashes meet one another
can never be duplicated:

My father takes no one other than his wife
on dates while my shins still tussle with bleeding.

My mother is away for good, while her mother and
Mr. Shannon are off strolling in heaven.

The music lacks the aura it once imparted, my lip-gloss has dried
out and Goodwill found my Jordans a home where popularity
is less important than poverty and warm toes.

Transcripts are made, actions turn into past decisions, and weeks turn into years. I have survived the decade tormented by teenage anguish only to drive blindfolded into adult craving.

One moment is all I ask of a wish that cannot be bought; the cheapest wish of all.

Drown, Drowning, Drowned

شدن غرق. شدن غرق حال در. شدن غرق Farsi

verb

[Drown] a muffled gene of function belonging to offspring; most often granted via vaginal canal upon immediate conception by Israel's male controlled confinement and Iran's female caliber. If born into war and not love, the wrists of offspring are tied – receiving ill perpetuation of mutilating proportions.

[Drowning] the destiny met through a rudimentary throb of familial terrorism:

Madar, arezou daram khodamo ghargh konam

Mother, I wish to drown myself

Ehsaseh rahatie kamal bayad vojod dashte bashe

True comfort must exist

dar kenare bare sangeene jabre pedaram

besides the weight of my father's cruel compulsion

Man be zanoo oftadam kamangah ke hamecheez bevzan hast

I am collapsing heavy within all else that is weightless

[Drown] to inundate in a whirlpool of unresponsive firearms.

[Drowning] self-procured is the thirst of daughters everywhere, those

most epically detained. *Man ghargh shodam, va deevaneh as mouje feghdan*

I have been taken under, crazed by the wave of loss

[Drowned]

is the skin after years abiding swift patriarchal commands;
his apologies steadfast to their implicit sound. Reciprocity vanished; offspring's mass
sleeps deep in the muddied brine of his negligence.

My Eighteenth Winter

There is no dying this
time for you, mother.

Echoing, my childish existence plunges
en route to its raw, saccharine downfall.
Your holiday feast meets its end in me.
My fiasco disrupts calm senses on more than
one occasion, never savory enough
for me.

A glistening potion, administered
to fill a life without him. Mother, you pushed
and kneaded him; I needed him like
dreidel cookie batter kneads soft
to the touch.

Reminiscence aids the ivy, green with poison.
A clear channel - subtle healing, flowing through
plasma, releases my wild, endorphin-inhabiting pleasures.
Yours melted by the smooth gelt dampened under
the weight of no medical insurance - an indemnity against
health was a parting gift
from him to you. Your child supported less.

A metaphorical death deep in
its grave, the sting of Mrs. Morphine
lent my corpse the sole decision:
acceptance. Riding upon a halfheartedly
lit miasma, I entered the world of otherworldly
itches, stillness without interruption.

A moment murdered this subdued
twinge. Mother, like a vulture possessing candor, you
stroked the pulse of the orphaned child I had become - offering
your unentitled hurt, and his abandonment no
chance for parole.

Heavy

Incarcerated and asked to remain silent,
these lungs find irony in gasping for air, restricted.
This heart lacks beats, maltreated under hands
belonging to its author. Smelling of hard, sun-soaked
skin, his blue-collar fingers strike tar-hued tangled
strands once dripping in a pool of heavy deep
model-esque clavicles, racing down the small
of my back. Now thin, cut complete by worry's brisk
incline.

My scalp and retention of all piercing exposés
lock infection's growth; say farewell to baseless
forgiveness backed by all justified guarantees.
Those hands, I wish never to hold. Boyish scars, caused
by the brutish absence of a generation's prior paternity, I hope
never settle. Depressing the hemorrhage from coiling
dead on arrival, yesterday's child wins the ultimate
loss; the prescription to restrain chaos by taking his
past charming orders at face value.

The winds blow heaviest during the seasons of
lost guidance.

See Coward

To her unfathomed dismay,
mother's luck had run out of time. The master bedroom was sanitized of all rights
including her joint-custody, and rented to make ends meet; a fire of doomed nuptials
never ceases when the smell of cold, hard cash is involved. My mind opposes
the two people making love in my childhood bedroom during these tough times.
I was written out along with the woman who he helped give me life; the mortgage is
his daughter now, she must be taken care of properly. Those papier-mâché flowers
kept every secret I once shared, one blossoming on each branch of the cheap
wallpaper my father tacked on when I was thirteen. Unknowingly placed to
watch over the labor of their sex, the leaves wither to water stains. My eyes - dry
during visitations in the absence of both wardens.

In a tasteless display,
without her consent, the two unravel carnal favors; cupping breasts, biting lips,
sucking cock, helping one another touch a new grace. My glow in the dark stars still
adhere, unlikely to retire soon; they were attached to shed light on night's
disturbance, a sanctuary in the hothouse of parental divorce, not domestic
faithlessness defined in
action.

It must have been him, lucky to
demarcate the word
coward.

World War Three

In dreams, situations are relived with ease; kindergarten cardboard boxes of orange juice, liberal in supply, and Chapter 11 documents graced with stamped forbearance.

In nightmares, you rest in daylight's course trying to forget it waking you in night's dark, satiating thirst with a glass of thoughts against all your wishes. The mind carries a Polaroid shot with pre-grownup glare: fresh paint rolled onto Roman pillars — lifeguard towers hired by heaven's skies, where God reclined on duty as you began pubescent aging. Marble tiles, victim to the tough stomp — accoutrements to hopscotch and Chinese jump

rope include accessible noise. Father's endearments brim from mouth pre-passion with hushed discourse. Mother's pining for heat; the valiant brick fireplace knows it was a diversity hire, something father once knew — cold is not *always* the Israeli man's norm.

In the opened cap of morning's view, fucked guidance is the war outside your window. You are America in love with Israel against Iran, your mother. This is one spectacle not worth media coverage; your amalgamated unity is found in the residue of once opulent, spitting images.

Virus

The worst thing was visiting the children's hospital:
traffic jam's cruel nausea. Thalassemia-Minor
affects hemoglobin's synthesis at birth; reduced plasma
meant the nurse held no mercy in poking veins; blood's
corridor for those seven years.

Needles and countless urinating in plastic cups,
virginal before being capped by my last name and first initial—
an unripe specimen tied to adult fatigue, I was a test
tube perplexing to scientific study.

Years of stool samples concealed in brown lunch bags.
Occasionally my mother cried about child
care without medical coverage, the only housewife on
the Jewish block of Melrose and Hayworth without riches.

Flu symptoms began the summer I turned ten. Now,
twenty-seven, temporary heat is again around the
corner; vomit procures the same unsettling acid.

Ovarian cysts at the end of father's child support –
before it ever began. I turned eighteen. His affection
obsolete. Panic's persuasion offered cold
sheets warmed by Morphine's drip into the chaotic, running
widespread in me.

Stress blessed me with the first rupture.

Now, no cure has been found for alleviating
the traffic, elementary fatigue, flaring stomach acid
scorching my throat, pregnancy's allure ripped
away and the certainty that nothing
can be shaken from its feelings.

My Mother's Sister

“I thought that I heard you laughing. I thought that I heard you sing. I think I thought I saw you try. But that was just a dream. That was just a dream...” – REM, “Losing My Religion”

I've studied Sylvia and Anne, beyond
the grave. I've studied you in the flesh, in my
dreams, and in bottles of medication flushed
down grandma's toilet. I saw you speak to God that
day from the sidelines in my *Barbie* nightgown and
miss-angled bangs, as the freckled paramedic, your *Happy
Days* crush Richie Cunningham, took you away.

Half past ten waiting within the walls of uncertain
death, I lay upright bound in *khaleh* Farideh's worried
emotion. She stroked aside kinky black tendrils, a saintly
vision struck my sight. Your white hospital gown smelling of
your peculiar psychosis, your I.V dripping morphine to bore
stiff the emotions of a widowed mind, twenty-one years and
counting. You gave me a bag of rainbow-sprinkled cookies, a pencil
topped with a heart eraser, a hug. You leaned in whispering,
“I'll never die. These voices won't allow me to.”

People stroll in shoes not your own, wishing to mediate
with all knowledge absent. You know the transparent truth,
exactly as you imagine it. An esteemed doctor falling casualty to
domestic abuse. Insuring the dictator of your marital incarceration
death would require no second opinion. Sylvia and Anne would
harmonize.

Thoughts pertaining to you are bullet-proof, they call comprehension
of your liberal undertakings to assassinate the stellar
contemplations that your man-trampled
illness inspired. The poetry.

The Echoes of Experience

HERE:

I sit trying to master the art. Poetry fights my
required concern dissolute by the now deterrent,
masculine muse; this subject has fallen poor in pervading
worthy thoughts documented for the sake of abused
awareness. Sculpting lines is the prosthetic bough
shaped to replace the emptiness of my amputated familiarity.

ELSEWHERE:

Stagnant in his own property, value depreciated on the boulevard's
southern tip, the subject lays in habit; sucked into Spanish
novellas, not one word understood, making his illegal
spouse feel at home. Routine informs bliss; ignorance is

the key in keeping civil liberties obedient. Promoting machismo's
ego is not habit-forming.

INBETWEEN:

In two wedded formalities, 22 years apart, he solemnly swore to put
down his firearms, uphold equality and make love to the sole, soft
captor treading silently on the edge of his submission.

Civil unions should imprison those who break such promises the first time.

Rite of Passage: I Am Not Welcomed

I ran home that day, cleansed
myself of all cutting-edge fashion and sat
stagnant in my mother's hallway; it knew every
tear, habituated to the scene of my shame.
The chemistry of my contemplation, latent
recompense. The contour of my prose disclosed through
the windowpane closing off human ambiance; the
production of salt stung from lurid to lax. Alone in
my camisole; the moldy recess with the built-in rickety
heater kept my Iranian hair slicked down, the blend of
Andrea's burnt the stigma of dark away. *White bitches must
pay*: My American citizenship became ethnically perturbed.

Stirring my electrolysis-sparked skin a decade
later, while the silence of dusk never vacillates, is a notion more
prejudiced than my rage that day; consumerism
targets the cultured. *Beauty is Pain*, an American
ideology pursuing me, an American, still not one
of them.

The Epitaph on the Social Portrait of Naiveté

These were the portraits that hung on the walls of that teenager's
refuge, the address tied to lying under heavy sheets relinquishing
sweat on every inch of her body dreaming past noon afraid of morning's
bright against window shades, pricking the pores on nuisance's
expression—sixteen, headed towards immature wrinkling.

These were the portraits on the partition of that teenager's refuge, the
address tied to the corner where wallpaper symbolic of Eden's green
disbanded from stucco; Monday afternoons graduated kneeling against
that curvature with her face buried in hands, praying. Gunmetal
eyeliner expired with the slimmest wet moans charred from high
school insecurity suffocating her pulse.

These portraits vandalized her progress. Their proofs examine
silence forced upon youth's canvas. Her outline was painted
with tempera; in truth she bleeds thick oil separated from social
waters, trusting its thinness despite what can never be
known. Someone chose to paint these portraits with
watercolors, where slight ~~erasures~~ may be easily

caused by the
river a victim
cries.

Speak

“The pen is the tongue of the mind.” – Miguel de Cervantes

Smooth and universal not racist against cultural hands
rough at times lacking ink, depth and powerful resignation
of my penmanship. An instrument certificating the historical
reign of a tyrant; the extravagant nights sleeping in harm's
corridor and the ample smiling behind shams placed on a
shattered juvenile.

I can call you Vic, like his Guatemalan spouse calls him
Dabid; her ethnic city raises no comment due to your
unobtrusive, non-judging intrinsic feature towards the hand
that buys you, works you, and gains you affluence as a writer's
commodity.

You are like my tongue, engaging in poetic
discourse with paper about my habitual condemnation of self
worth, everlasting scholarship, and the adoption of embracing
indefinite success. My sweaty grip on you does not falter; questionable
talent breaks your ballpoint barrier and, through a channel of navy
blue sustainability, finds ambitious sound in repelling writer's
block no matter how artistically advanced. Personified language lies
upon the threadbare leaves of paper I call home.

I am home and you, you
are how I speak.

For Anne

Most days I cannot remember your portion of happiness.
The life in which you had enemies: where laying on its
grass cut worse than razor blades, suicide's
restive aid.

You wrote in madness, a mercurial language spoken by
an artist dictating pain to canvas, elucidating which red hue to fill
hearts with, never questioning why a heart's temper swings.

Infinite times I have placed my contrived crux in a shoebox filled
with the same toxin that caused its abstraction. Photographs shoot
stories as they are told; deaths find comfortable deferment
time after time.

You possessed passing in the legacy you left bound together. *Two
days out for despair and three days out in a mental hospital* is
all it took you. All prayers fall short in revitalizing the poet from
your remains. I step over the edge into the same darkly afflicted
end point.

Suicides deceive our human form. Birth betrays the suicide's trust:
resolutely they commit the crime of concluding lives they have
lived, survived as long as possible. Still-born birth is presented
privilege, immunization against fighting for normalcy in this
world - a sphere where need is inherent and mind's develop
gangrene, invincible to antiseptic.

Death's a sad bone, yes, but living pauses the pale undoing of any
wound: new, old, or resting somewhere in between. Voluntary erasure
offers balance to cold; creating words stamps out the shock of tender
living, offering balance to the beautifully frightened ones.

Dying to take the next step towards the perfect suicide: independence
from the echoes of anxiety printed in an obituary.

Harsh Beginnings Breed Trying Goodbyes

Mother gave birth to me, no crib in sight. Fatherless during your birth, you immersed mine in undefined concern. On the verge of twenty-five, I still wonder where you ended and why I began.

Sly charisma spotted her at In-N-Out, a topaz autumn in 1981. Middle Eastern eyebrows arched so high, she resembled, though glistening subtly darker, the Fawcett you fancied on the rundown wall of your Israeli barracks.

A *Toman* for your thoughts, a diamond in your rough Netanya edifice. Open to condemning insults and the ill praise of the overseas brute, mother never knew subservience before.

Your free spirit left into the luminous lake of midnight on the twenty-fifth of March. The clock struck eighteen years as your dollars were found rehabilitated and freed from caged child support—null and void, you liberated, daughterless brute.

Your absence ticks, dead and bolted to the wall. Its exhausted beat compels anger into me, no more living beneath a shadow's brute corpse, retaliating in remembrance of what was never had. What was never had breeds with time; remaining afloat, I share Doubt's DNA.

These bitter remnants of a battered self-awareness wait for you to bandage them no more. The best red crayon is worn to a lipstick nub; These replayed unrests find a fragile, final resting place.

I casually breathe in existence, re-affirmed, and harsh exhalation of your false stature as all warranted hope crumbles beneath my chest.

Inside Out

“I am a line from loud to soft.” – John Frusciante, “Control”

Early mornings before I wake, my
mind turns wondering who
I’ve been feigning for.
Effortless strides run
tedious and still—my life
hushed in all further miming.

I am a fool—honest in a daze, waiting
to meet my match. I am loud, mindfully burning
down the highway lengthened by misshapen
memoirs. Loud like my father, sitting
static—prospects prone to accident.

I’ve been starring in nightmares—a heightened
sense of being, a poet with made-up couplets
tied to a reach farfetched; all honor is intangible.

I am a fool—upset in the daze
annulled by personal neglect. As frightened as
I am brave, I tread behind peers: damaged glass
beneath me laughs while I walk

slow beside excess past attachments,
assonance hiding in shards, pricking my bare feet.
Anemic: my words lack blood; my blood, iron.

I am soft like my mother resting spellbound
by myth; secrets stay strong in denial.
I am a miniature needlepoint,
pulled and spooled by

former mourning -

grant me emancipation from brash
living. Soften the grand tapestry inside
within this loud silence.

Trading Secrets

My secrets splinter by wooden
clothespins on line, hang dry—
nightfall's cold shade coalesces
the degree of their sorrows.

They scream alike; sober for
change is each metaphor's
exhaustion—lying under white linen
awaiting first light's epiphany.

My secrets struggle to keep quiet—their unchanged muse
fills pages in pensive cursive destroyed under
my hand's weight—slash marks violate emotional
stains after hours manipulating their own silence.

Pull out these leather-bound sheets; no mourning
for this spineless journal is in order. My secrets
wish they were worth keeping. Both arms

down resign my pen. A poet's utilizing force
washed—the desire to repeat lathered with lye;
celibate, mingling in timid prose.

These secrets want to trade themselves in for
others; to walk out free in written exposés
clothed in words past language and find
intimacy—the virgins in imagery's arms,
they have never before dotted the *I* in lines

of thought bent on one knee proclaiming this
woman's love, my love, to her art, my art.

Can I donate my manifesto to the shelters of past, plaintive want?

No.

Vulnerable poets can only be read one way; crying
wolf or spilling the same secrets—time and
again, we hunger for pity.

Gendering Procrastination

Interruptions or storms never affected any voyage I took to peel back his intricate layers.
I sailed the sea of language knowing the tides would not capsize my storytelling or
reminiscences of the days when he was my father, tried and true.

But now, I am overturned by another man.

Procrastination grasps the urgency I once had to speak: _____

I stare blankly at the cursor winking back at me.

It must be a man, I think, for in its fog my
body is limp, my mind's restlessness cured, previous
images captured by words fall prey to drought, my fingers
passive upon the alphabet printed on black keys in white.

It must be a man, I think, for I am subservient to no other.

Called to occupy the female canal, he floods the habitual constraints of my second guesses.

Lifeline

I know why those who love me continuously tell me to change, to be more upbeat and happy, but I wonder if they know that circumstances in our lives tend to introduce us to comfortably, uncomfortable sensations. Sensations that stain the past, the present and in some cases the future, too.

It's like Shakespeare wrote, "To thine own self be true." I am true to all that is Neda. I can't apologize for the presence of incomplete human emotions in others.

I am for the tenth time in my short life willing to be open while I seek the stability raped of me by others; others whom I don't know whether to love or hate and whom I love and hate. I find it one of life's greatest conundrums: a lot of people just wrap a Band-Aid around a cut and move forth, others are told not to cry about it and, if you will, man up, but I, I just keep cutting. When I bleed, that's when I feel. Pouring peroxide on a wound, for me, is a dreadfully uninviting sensation though it lasts a meager instant.

It's the dismembering and remembering of my father's spirit. It's remembering the past, documenting its wraithlike wind, rewriting it, revitalizing it and allowing it to tap into its own memory, while the scent of cigarettes cinched into my grandmother's silk nightgown remains on the tip of my nose, though that place nestled into her deep clavicles while I sleep no longer accepts reservations.

It's a sense of comfort tied to the struggle of trying to duplicate these things, knowing that the past is the only land that's impossible to conquer. I keep asking myself if there is a way to make others understand how the magnificent, albeit at times unimpressive, minutes of my past are obligatory to my survival, and now I see that there may never be a way and frankly, I no longer care to question if one is necessary.

I am this life.

I am here to shout it from the rooftops.

Attachments to the past make us who we are.

I want to secure my thoughts a valid presence here at this moment in this particular life; between countless strawberry ice cream cones melting into the heat waves of childhood summers, and cardamom tea brewing in winter – an invitation to warm yesterday's innocence – circulating blood into its frozen recollections.

The past is the only lifeline some of us have.

I don't need to feel this intense desire: something needs to be removed, discounted, let go of in order for me to move forth. It was something not even the most privileged people will be given the chance to experience. It taught me sorrow and without sorrow, I would have never realized how badly I wanted peace. It taught me peace and without peace, I would have never become the person I am.

I am independent.

I am David Levi's daughter.

I am Margrit Khankhanian's granddaughter.

I am worthy of happiness.

I am deeply in love with feeling anything at all.

I live, breathe and dream the past; that, that is the kind of excruciating awareness I am faithful to
no matter how many times it hits:
every morning, day or night, when I realize it is time to wake up, live or sleep.

Postmodern Love

I want to make postmodern love to poetry tonight, deeply aware of yesterday's tendency to interrupt. The confessions of this poet will never promise to stay at bay.

I want allegories to show me inestimable states of nirvana. I want images I've never seen before to secrete, from the chemical imbalance of serotonin in my brain, a profusion of lyrical moisture, emotional condensation charred of subjectivity and sensual prosperity down the small of my back. I want rhyme to murmur *use me like your daddy does your sanity*, so I can listen and consent it to cripple the crutch of my inability.

I want to lock lips with the alphabet. Allowing tongue to penetrate the syllables and language I keep hushed within.

I want to carry Poetry's child to full term, call it my ingénue and pray that it will be complacent in the skin I engaged with yesterday's recollection to mend her.

Thicker Blood Resides in Daughters

The only worry I ever had; watching blood
thinner injected into your tummy, I cringed
along with your quivering lip and the rippling
folds of your skin on first

contact. You are not the sole tenant facing eviction with
each implanted stent. I am at the crossroads of your
heart's dis-ease. You are stretched out, labored into a white
room – an IV pauses for the kill. Angiograms leave purple welts on
your inner thigh. Etherizing, narcolepsy arrests you while kidney
shaped sick salvers wait to find you well.

Heart palpitations react to each medicinal dose fallen habitually to desertion.
Grateful are those debtors awaiting collection of your unrestrained life's
ricochet, its outstanding rent. This third strike, another bursting aortic
valve, had mercy on me. I had no fight left to battle but to dress you, thin

blood, in warm clothes and take you home, never
again turning our backs on this game of loser takes all.

Resuscitate

—After Michael Dickman

What I want more than anything is to whisper something into his calm — to
use words that match my testimony of what he looked like,

to show years
before I lost him as he lost himself,
which would assassinate any anxiety to accurately forge an ode from my futile troubles to collect
words
laced onto metaphor,

so critical peers can't tell me they know better,

but I am ill-equipped.

I am in a monogamous relationship with description, memory's maintenance, begging phrases to
make me cry – a prescription lethal when mixed with doubt.

My heightened mind is discarded, decayed by reticent endowment.

Does the quiet ever worry it screams the truth?

The blameless past hesitates as it exits my mouth—
flashes that won me over
forlorn, the only thing present now is absent

language.

I can't make anyone see
what he left me:

an adult raped of childhood, granted two decades of tender support
in photographic

alimony.

I am an antonym for worthy daughter slightly rubbed out by paternal erasure. He, a synonym
for the days I spend trying to get back, back to the days I could stomach forgiveness.

The blameless past hesitates as it exits my mouth—
flashes that won me over
forlorn, the only thing present now is absent

language armed with butterfly
kisses,

light contact delays still, faint – waiting for the kill with
sick charisma.

What I want more than anything is to whisper something into his calm.

The Trouble with Sleeping

I want to cross into that asylum where thinking desists silver-tongued worry fading into black's mandatory grace, where concrete prays for bare streets, lying six feet under: in

love with cold footsteps.

Where morning rests for another profitable shift at ignoring the world's impurities and freckled friends say goodbye while you blink –

years replacing that sentimental wonder with nothing close to comfort. Where your father toasts poison to the bastard who left a gun to destroy love and all unfamiliar

trembling next to his crib; where his steel fingers, now degenerative, forfeit the power of attorney to preserve the antiquated imprints that strangle you.

Instead, I wait here near that open

entry troubled upon this inviting pillow, asking Insomnia to spare

nights looking over my numb shoulder at grass stained Sunday dresses, vanilla frosting on childhood's breath, pliant skin and black curls swinging up high,

playgrounds where wounds from amateur cartwheels and unbalanced handstands signal a time survived easy.

She replies considerate of occasions to rejoice —

You see, the trouble with sleeping is giving in, killing off the virtue of former rainbows.

Ephemeral Consciousness

I want to read the palms of my fortune, my hands.
My father has etched a future in invisible lines leading to my past.
Forgiveness bares heavy my hands. I speak words and he chooses by silence
to destroy each feat and fear I think I have conquered.

Kevin Arnold once said, “One day you're in diapers, the next you're gone, but the memories of childhood stay with you for the long haul. I remember a house like a lot of houses, a yard like a lot of yards, on a street like a lot of other streets. I remember how hard it was growing up among people and places I loved. Most of all, I remember how hard it was to leave. And the thing is, after all these years I still look back in wonder,” and if I could, I'd have him preface each one of my thoughts, beautifully bridled and coherent.

Give me one more winter where I am physically present in that tumultuous house broken by the whirlwind of anger between my parents and I will feel alive again.

My poetry vacillates in accurate recall. I tell little lies. I hire metaphors to embrace the sand beneath my feet while I ride the seesaw of juvenile occupancy and gather what I can confess under sentimental oath.

“Beneath the sheets of paper lays my truth,” sang Regina Spektor. My truth can be found on sheets of paper; laying, standing, sleeping, living and lying.

Anne Sexton said, “It doesn't matter who my father was; it matters who I remember he was.” David Levi is an inadequate father; an incessant muse plunging me further into a love affair with my childhood and its calm toxicity.

I am in a committed relationship with words that have left my memoirs indignant. My father cheated us all; the child I am, the poet I was.

I search for new habits to dowse his reign. Its exhaustion is far-fetched, but in my helplessness as I lie still in the darkness of night, I can see it waving from the sidelines.

I am waiting to emerge as a poet once more, but my capacity for the original grows weary coddling duplicate bruises.

I ask my boyfriend to line our wastebaskets so they don't feel the sting of my failed art, crumpled and unwanted.

Anne Sexton said “Suicide is, after all, the opposite of the poem.” I died years ago with my father. I visit as he sits spent, perhaps in the idealized image of the father he never met. I leave and he sits upright watching novellas with my stepmother. “Te amo, mi vida, Irma.”

I died years ago when the stain of his approval was freshly placed upon my cheek. I can't remember what holding his hand felt like.

Pieces of poetry exist with my name on them. Can anyone tell me who it really is that writes them?

Manifesto

The hypnotic abstraction of my world-weary instances has been relinquished:

Miguel De Cervantes said, “The pen is the tongue of the mind.” I once agreed, passionately. I can tell anyone that “writing” is a universal term whose definition alters with each individual who has come into any contact with the element in question. If you asked me to consult a dictionary and report back with my findings, I wouldn’t. I do not trust dictionaries.

The terms “music” and “poet” warrant an intangible understanding, not a concrete, sentenced description.

My mother’s womb must have been the world’s most influential library; words, stories, thoughts I borrowed to embrace.

The ability to interpret, preserve, revitalize the words of scholars has severely mislead my life. Only a beauty school valedictorian, my mother’s obvious deficiency is mine at last.

I was born minute in speech, copious in heart.

I used to write about melancholy without hesitation. Sorrow tied itself to the songs my vicissitudes of mood depended on; beautifully fuming, dreadfully hopeful: I manufactured words to flow into failure’s interminable curves.

Music advocated for my right to communicate; everything I heard was used for evocation — until repetition, the chorus of songs that never change, became as stagnant as the muse who ensnared my mad love of them.

Irretrievable are the pulses spent tapping in pastel purple Mary Jane’s while twirling in lace and tulle in the kingdom of youth.

Irretrievable is the concept of a paternal cease-fire. Between the spirit and skeleton of an adult rests restoration. Pleasing exchanges find her home on the teeter-totter of consented relapses.

Irretrievable is the rape rightly faulted for recall’s painful impregnation; the need to explain it further than I have in my writing is now implausibly exerting.

Irretrievable

— ir·re·triev·abil·i·ty *noun*

— ir·re·triev·ably *adverb*

Difficult or impossible to retrieve or recover.

Scenic routes still conjure memories but I will no longer starve to capture their first assault on sensitivity's infantile, pink skin;
I am leaving this sunburn of a whimsical childhood well-done, alone. It has found skill in peeling without the aid of aloe; cool in my prior words.

Manifesto

— man·i·fes·tos / man·i·fes·toes *plural*

A public declaration of intent, policy or aim as issued by a political party, government, or movement.

I am declaring. I am moving. I am advocating for the right to terminate my life as a writer against poetry's query for the recovery of any rare talent that, it may pray, I still own.

Chronic Fatigue of Words Syndrome

Invisible
Invincible
Instinct

My prescription states **take one tablet daily** I suppose to keep me **here**.
The world sifts through chaos looking for order as I struggle against order to keep chaos intact.

I used to think a word document wanted me to give birth – until I miscarried and something about poetry’s habitual norm turned upside down.

Call it a dry spell;	I’ve misplaced my eucalyptus lip balm.
Call it endeavor-failure	not enough jaws being dropped
Call it over	my stroke of genius is
And out	the exit is this way → off the page.

Ninety-six hours ago I was inspired,
before seventy-two fantasies once vying for my attention,
forty-eight strands of hair found liberation from stress.
I’ll bet anything twenty-four clichés can be found
looking for anomalous authority inside my brain [short in supply].

*Writer’s Block requires no cure when cravings to kiss raw, childhood
scars with lips versed in reviving nostalgia have left you.*

There’s nothing like a blank canvas; a word document waiting for you to give birth.
I have been told that my muse will consume itself — instead it swallowed

recycled memories next to find repose in
a couplet of brilliance awaiting possession of your fingertips.

Every last simile has been uncovered, explored then depleted like a swimming pool waving goodbye to summer. As winter approaches, I regret to inform that I never questioned change until now. The cold snow cannot bring my fever down; it has barricaded me inside conviction. I have wept – filling this white space with unease. My voice is loud and I can’t hear a thing.

This is SILENCE, mistaken.

This is how a burnt-out woman (poetry consummated) communicates.

I Give Thanks

To everything that was beautiful and to nothing that hurt. To that lone pink rose that greets me each time I sit beside the swamp the pool man neglects, savoring the addiction to grandma's pleasure and elation: a Marlboro Red. To parental disconnect, vital signs failing in a diary filled with misunderstood secrets concerning a malfunctioning bad seed, flat fucked off the lethal sperm-injected-egg assembly line. To relentless arguing with sixteen and its testosterone-driven flavor of the month. To trouble sleeping; pills never suited insomnia's worst case study. To greeting minor anemia at birth: I fight off sunrises against my window concealed by my *Little Mermaid* blanket, hoping father never explores the ruins of his brain to calculate our family's cataclysmic sadness. To Springsteen being on fire, I fathom why daddy would leave her all alone and it speaks levels of aloof capacity. To an Israeli-clad dessert table missing pumpkin pies, turkeys coated in tart, cranberry sauce; *We are not Americans*, my cousin, a settler under Lady Liberty's torch, says. To being twenty-six, heightened by tolerances overflowing into chapters of a best-selling memoir as flesh falls off the bone; emotional distress being chief fodder for growth. To not following the occupational route belonging to those born into the clan of mother's name, indoctrinating ironic humility for impassive memorization. To poets who find necessary arrogance in the seventh heaven of their resistance to amnesia.

To the life I have candidly lived, fretfully,
I give thanks.

NOTES

1. Thesis Dedication: In the dedication to my cousin Sarah, I refer to a song that I used to listen to for hours on end trying to cope with my father's decision to divorce my mother just when I was about to start my senior year of high school. Each time I hear it, it calls to my attention that afternoon in August of 2001 when my father walked into my bedroom with the look of uncertainty on his face, turned down my stereo and began to tell me that he couldn't handle being married to my mother anymore. "O-o-h Child" by The Five Stairsteps was faintly playing in the background of my hysteria, and after my father and mother gave me the talk that changed my life forever, I called my cousin Sarah. That night she succeeded in easing my panic, but I knew that every day and night thereafter would never be the same. My life pretty much ended that day, almost twelve years ago, and that memory still reverberates each time I speak to her or hear the song.
2. Thesis Dedication: "This crazy shine it never lets you die," is a lyric from the song "Time Tonight" by John Frusciante, which I adapted for use in the beginning lines of the dedication to my father. Those lyrics will remain tied to the startling yet epically comforting light that my father had shined upon me during my bittersweet past, and will continue to shine upon me in the bittersweet future after he is long gone.
3. Epigraph: The epigraph of my thesis is a lyric taken from a song entitled, "Sorrow" by The National. The premise of this thesis is to charm the relentless memories of my past and present, and I felt that the epigraph seemed to fit well seeing as how most of my work is founded on the sorrow I had endured as a child and am still enduring as an adult.
4. Breaking Away From Self: This poem was written in the style of Kyle Vaughn's Poem "Rewriting Myself." I adapted the first and last lines of his piece which state, "There used to be something about fear written here..."
5. Summer's Sound: This piece was written in the style of Daniel Simko's poem entitled, "Winter Music." I adapted his line, "It has grown simpler," for use in the first stanza of this piece.
6. Prime-Divisible-Fleeting-Flawed: In a couple of the images presented in this piece, I make references to Sade's 1984 hit song entitled, "Smooth Operator."
7. My First Love: "November Rain" is a song by Guns and Roses that was of much importance while I grappled with my first breakup at the age of sixteen, and which motivated me, as an adult, to write this poem by tapping back into the whirlpool of tender emotions that took reign of my existence during those difficult teenage years. A few of the lyrics are quoted in the middle stanza of the poem.
8. What Mother Wore to Her Court-Ordered Separation: This poem was one of the first pieces I had written here at California State University, Northridge in Dr. Leilani Hall's English 309. It is perhaps the piece I am most proud of because it was worthy enough for publication in the 2011 spring edition of *The Northridge Review* and more importantly, it was the first poem that intensely encompassed the effect that my parents' divorce had, and will forever have upon my life. For this piece, I adapted the title and style of Angela Ball's poem, "What to wear for Divorce."
9. Resuscitate: "The quiet scares me because it screams the truth," is a lyric from the song "Sober" by Alecia Moore, better known as Pink, which I adapted for use in the middle of the poem. This piece was written in the style of Michael Dickman's poem entitled, "Barnett Newman: Black Fire I." I modified the first line of his poem which states, "What I want more than anything is to get down on paper what all the shining looks

like...” and incorporated it into the beginning and ending of my poem. This poem is one of my favorites because it’s the only piece in my thesis, or actually in all the poems I have written thus far, that I had truly paid intricate attention to. In the fall of 2011, after years of studying English, I suddenly became intrigued with the workshop aspect apparent in the attainment of an education in Creative Writing, and as my love affair with documenting my past had started to lose its luster, I tried for days to come up with a new way of illustrating my muse, my father. When I realized that I had sketched and colored him in every shade that my adolescent memories could afford me, that I couldn’t whisper something into the only sense of calm that my father ever held within him, I had painstakingly respired life into this poem.

10. My Mother’s Sister: The epigraph of the poem is a 1991 song lyric from “Losing My Religion” by REM and in the body of the poem I make reference to Ron Howard’s character, Richie Cunningham from the ‘70s television show titled, *Happy Days*.
11. Speak and Manifesto: In both poems; as an epigraph for “Speak” and in the second line of “Manifesto,” I quote the Spanish poet Miguel De Cervantes.
12. For Anne: “Two days out for despair and three days out in a mental hospital...Death is a sad bone, yes...” is a line from Anne Sexton’s book entitled, *The Awful Rowing Toward God*, which I used in the middle and ending stanzas of this piece. “For Anne” was written in reverence to Sexton’s exceptional work, much of which had inspired my love of confessional poetry long before I chose to venture into studying the discipline of English with an emphasis in creative writing.
13. Inside Out: The epigraph, “I am a line from loud to soft,” is a lyric from John Frusciante’s song entitled, “Control.” I have struggled with depression for the past twelve years, and at the age of twenty one in 2005, I had welcomed a sense of despair unlike any I had previously known. John Frusciante’s music encompassed the only sound I cared to hear as I took a semester off from school, and spent most of that fall locked in my room or at the Starbucks on Melrose, writing about the contentment that manifested from the depths of the most stunning despondency I had ever witnessed in my life up until that point.
14. Lifeline: In the second stanza of this poem, I incorporated the line “To thine own self be true,” from William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*.
15. Ephemeral Consciousness: In this piece I quote Kevin Arnold, the character played by Fred Savage in the late ‘80s television show titled, *The Wonder Years*. I also quote a lyric from Regina Spektor’s 2006 song entitled, “Samson.”
16. I Give Thanks: In the first line of this piece, I adapted for use a Kurt Vonnegut quote which states, “Everything was beautiful, and nothing hurt.” Also in this final poem, I make reference to Bruce Springsteen’s 1984 song titled, “I’m On Fire.” This song has left many imprints upon my entire being. The first time I heard it, I was about six years old, and in retrospect I could say that at that moment, unbeknownst to me, it held a space of expression for the feelings that I could not convey on my own at that age. Years later, that space has blossomed into its own voice; into the sentimental rhymes of my adolescence, and now into the daily recollections I have attained as an adult still in awe of her past; of photographs tied to my once loving father placed alongside perpetual reminders of the past decade in which he left me alone to make sense of my mother’s faults, my abusive surroundings, my fragile emotions, my uncertain future and most importantly, to try and make sense of how I will ever cope with living when the time comes for me to physically let him go; to bid my father’s whole existence, a final and

fond farewell. With this final poem, I thank the copasetic yet disquieting desire to long for what has departed and what still remains, and I begin preparing myself in order to comprehend it all. With this final poem, I begin to learn how to cope. With this final poem, I am no longer on fire. I have doused the flames that have left me beaten and burned. I have disarmed the bittersweet; I have soaked my childhood mind and adult body in twin catharsis and with this final poem, we both have begun living.