



NO,
DEAR

No, Dear
Issue Twenty Nine
Chronic
2023, Brooklyn
Limited Edition: 74/200

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Covers printed by letterpress at The Arm in Williamsburg.

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PROUD MEMBER
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Body-ody

Kissing all of the ways my body-ody has betrayed me.
Agony I never asked for weighing on my shoulders.
never a comfortable for me to sit stand or lay in.

Every day my knees collapse onto themselves
Conniving crack in the foundation.
Kissing all of the ways my body-ody betrays me.

My ankle swells cheaply pillowing its own hairline fracture,
schooling me on the luxury of walk.
never a comfortable for me to sit stand or lay in.

My back—a rigid mountainside of sharp tenderness.
Upper middle lower all in dispute with how to feel.
Kissing all of the ways my body-ody betrays me.

Everyday my body-ody is in pain and
Why me? which eye did I pluck to deserve this?
never a comfortable for me to sit stand or lay in.

Hurt, quick moment of carelessness not my own
plagues me for the rest of my life. Hurt.
Kissing all of the ways my body-ody betrays me.
never a comfortable for me to sit stand or lay in.

[clmp]

Ghazal to My Body: Pregnant with Self

Mama tells me I was born with hair as clotted as a lie—
inky and tangled like ivy snaking through limestone, curls bowing in a pli .

At seven, the sun burnt my scalp into sticky shards of caramel, the kind rotting my gums
as Mama forced spearmint chains into my teeth, stitching tongue to palate, lie to lie.

Ulcerative colitis hurled me out of my childhood—vermillion cream oozing
out of intestines, the carnations blooming in my cheeks learning how to underlie

the ivory ash drifting over my skin like a veil cloaking a glistening pool of rainwater.
As clumps of raven feathers kissed follicles goodbye, I turned my vessel into a lie.

Curled against my pelvis is God—I am Mary, unwarned. No angels to bless the soft skin
of stomach, pulsing. Again and again, I give birth to myself—my body, broken by lies.

CHURNED UP

"A mine is a terrible thing to behold—" from Joy Williams' "Mine Field"

When they announced my device stuck
against my uterine wall, they wheeled a baby

seeking machine to my belly. They gestured
for me to lift up my shirt. Alone in another

room with another expert extractor. Something like
tongs go into me and I'm told the device is stuck.

So obvious, I think. The cramps and pain. Another woman
lost in a hospital maze. We just don't know why, we just don't know.

To take the land, they just took it. Sometimes with guns,
sometimes snuck in late night bills. Simple as a bomb

underground disguised as a day job. Simple as that.
When they gas me, I lock eyes with the former military

doctor and he counts me out. Something about now. Go,
now. Birth is also a violence, a date reminds me.

When I wake there's throat skin on my tongue. I chew
my flesh, my scoured self. I let me melt. I wash me down.

Woman

The doctor taught me how to inject myself with chemotherapy, but I could not slip the needle into my thigh. The silver point would not enter, could not puncture, my hand could not form the wound. So I asked you, a mother, my mother, to stab me, a daughter, your daughter, and it wasn't so much the injection itself as the preparation for it, sitting at the edge of the couch and watching you tug on gloves, draw yellow liquid, flick the bubbles, plunge the syringe. The chemo burned on impact. Like you were shooting me up with fire. Was this my mother? Who snatches me from school when I'm sick, lays me down in her bed, flings open the curtains in the morning? Now you were not that mother but a woman with a weapon aimed at me, and in my room I cried, with a bandage on my thigh and the lights off and my door shut, listening to the fireworks boom and sizzle. (It must have been the Fourth of July.) If you heard me you did not knock. You were good at hiding. Where was my mother? I had tried to find you in a pained look or careful swab of alcohol. Where is my mother? You could be near my door right now, needle in your hand, poised to stick me again, but you wouldn't do that, no, it hurts you as much as it hurts me. If not behind the door then maybe you're in the kitchen, storing the chemo in the fridge, nestling the needles beside the ketchup you'll slather on my sandwiches tomorrow. If not the kitchen, then maybe you are in your room, crying too. Are you? My mother, she is not here, no, not here.

Condolences

My father checked me into the mental hospital.
I'd been on the phone with my college girlfriend.
She was with her friends.
She had to go.

My father came home.
I wanted his attention.
I'd had headaches for over a year.
I wanted the pain to stop.
He made a show.
He would not bring me to the closest hospital.
He would bring me to the best hospital.

I had to take pills.
If I did not,
I was punished.
Orderlies kept me in my room.

My father was a great man,
Another doctor told me,
In New Orleans
Over bananas foster.

One of my father's patients was my friend.
When he died,
My father said
My friend had more faith than I did.

I failed at
My father's calculus.

When I said
He was a bad father,
He said
He didn't want to be
My father
Anymore.

I should have died.

His brother was
A suicide.
Everyone in the family
Said I was just like
My uncle.

And my brother was
Just like my father.
At his desk
And the lectern,
Wearing a medal.

My brother wrote a poem
About wanting
A brother
Less like me.
The poem was published
In the school newspaper
When we both were students.

When I told my brother
To die,
He said
I was dangerous,
Locked his doors,
And set his alarm system
He bought with our father's money.

You don't get sick
In the rain,
Or in a crowded room.
Sickness is inherited.

Self-Portrait as Rain

Threat of blue strums nerves/capillaries
in a flurry of dissonance/triggering
nociceptor reactors/unnerving messages
to relay station/ready to play "hard pain

blues" on loop. Ice runs through arterial
planes as death/slowly emanates through
the mind/like the scent of dried lavender/
embedding itself within nasal cilia/nothing

but a rotting stench. Brain/like an OS glitch/
creates signals to boggle mind/dopa-
tonin blur random access memory/scrambling
cerebral code by turning/thoughts into

static shock. Stress constricts blood/vessels
as pins and needles spread like spilt ink/
endothelium malfunctions/causing red
spots to wane/like rose petals/devoid of

anthocyanins. Cortisol spikes/cause
defects/in vestibular system producing
visual/spatial imbalances/as photoreceptors
gyrate into a nightmare of technicolor/

Spoon Theory

You have three.
 One to eat.
 You need teeth
 so you brush
 them. Now one
 left. Sun bare-
 ly shines through
 windows. Will
 you eat or
 shower. Will
 you call a
 lover cry-
 ing for more
 of any-
 thing, please, just
 one more? Or
 maybe choice
 does not live
 here as you
 precari-
 ously do.
 Must work. You
 must work so
 there it is:
 eat, brush your
 teeth, go to
 work. No one
 owes you any-
 thing and
 somehow you
 always owe.
 You cannot
 save a spoon.
 No roll over.
 You must
 use three to
 get three more
 tomorrow.
 'Til there are
 no more spoons.
 Or no more
 tomorrows.

Note: This poem is written in syllabics, after Solmaz Sharif; each line contains the same number of syllables (in this case, 9).

Cdiff—A Pantoum

For up to five months on inanimate surfaces,
 we hold our breath to reinflect.
 We watch you from the bowl. We bathe in your gut,
 bare and thriving. To pass the time

we hold out our palms and reinflect
 you, our darling, our homestay.
 You need to learn the need to
 curl up into a ball and persist.

You! Our darling! Our homestay!
 Only you can save us from certain destruction!
 To curl up into a ball and persist
 is the smartest thing you can do right now.

To save us from certain destruction
 please help us continue the rot—
 The smartest thing you can do right now
 is stay inside and sleep. There is much to be done.

You have to continue the rot.
 you are building a niche market.
 Staying inside to sleep is doing so much—
 it is integral to our company's growth.

We are in a niche market— we need your help—
 we are building a city within—
 hear how it trickles out, how it multiplies.
 you will never be as needed again.

At Night the Ache
after Alice Notley

At night the ache
is a merry-go-round of sighs. Around
& under
sighs run amok. I chase after.
A gallop of gasps. Every thing of me
disembodied. Is this a
sign? Convince the
sighs.
Everything feels like cellular psy-op.

At night the ache
whimpers. Mom presses tiger balm,
says to rub
it quiet. Place the hurt within a cell. Numb the cells
new. Or cryogenically preserve them. Whatever
to subdue. My palm opens a desert
island. Tigers prowl the purpling
dunes. In wait of prey.
Not much can do but wait. Out the sighs.

At night the ache
drags cigarette smoke
on a leash.
Forgets the keys & smashes a bouquet of fists
against the door. I let him home, ice his fists,
smell the howl of outside. Play accidental
landlord & lover,
provide warm body
& bed. Can a body be a bed, a bed a body? What
ever. I lay in both with this lover. Who am I
unsure of but is
inside me always.

At night the ache
a vision in white insomnia. Children playing
catch with drive-by thoughts.
They chase after. A stray howl
hums. Not tiger nor wolf, not mine
many sighs. From whose cells?
I wonder. If the howl
is declaration or defeat.
The how in it. Purple & desperate.
I wonder. Women endure
so much
for what.

LATE NITE CHECK IN
for Ana

On the subway a guy
who is super high
pours some little buds
into my hand
and fights his brother
he ends up
changing cars
I'm wearing a work lanyard
no one pays any attention to me,
autumn evening,
all of my devices are failing
and the leaves are falling
on the wet streets
a spear-tip of geese
advances on the traitors
to the south

Two Days in the Same Room with Different Men

1. Here, I will hold him—blade-angled,
cutting to the butter of the moment.
Beyond the window, late-capital's great cathedrals
claw through the bottom of the sky. We claim nothing
but the silken lift, the fine barrier of forearm hair,
eyelash, iris, lattice of dark creases
where skin and sweat gather
our most human bouquet.
We find each other in maps
of freckle, scar, and mole,
sow furrows of flesh with breath,
widen as the horizon must
for anything in flight, suddenly above
the buildings, clad in azure, making our way
to this oasis made beyond the touch
of asphalt and steel: Waterfalls. Chirping birds.
Date palms. The moat of our moaning.

2. Here, I will hold him in my mouth.
The moment soaked sour with sweat.
In the window, streets leak psalms
to small gods of fortune and finance.
We dance around what we want:
to make a naked man's spine a staircase,
to ascend in absence of transcendence.
Oh, the moan only momentary.
The buttocks, bare but barren.
Somewhere inside him, I'm hiding
from all this concrete and steel.
*Why, we might ask, is flesh its most relentless
when the spirit lies down among its gutters?*
Instead, he says, *Close the door behind you,
quietly. I do.*

same wound, new meat suit

you slam the door at the top of the stairs
a giant.

there is no key that could possibly
let me in.
you didn't invent one.

a room without
walls.
windows.
a person who thinks
that love is a lock box,
when I know love
is the code to the cryptex.

and here I stand at the foot
of the staircase,
the child in me waiting
for an opening.

every time I fall in love with a new human,
I realize I am so unhealed
still
that it is the very same
human
as before
in a new
meat suit—

old wounds winding their way into my heart
because they like to live here so much.

are you a question to an answer I received
long ago,
or are you an answer to a question
I should have been asking all along?
I cannot tell if you are a lesson
or a chance to love
with new hands
that have no need for closed doors
or keys
at all.

How To Tie a Jeweler's Knot

To mend an ending is not to have
A final fantasy or
A marred tongue
Or a scab flaking into irreversible flood

I'll listen to advice of those
In love with the porous nerves
My girl gifted to me

Hold jealous in the hips so
Your shorty may grasp your love handles
To wring your lungs so dry
You wheeze
Even before the pull of a hookah pen
Minted in battery acid

Tie a loophole from memory
For a crop we can't stop fucking over and over
For excellence
For looking so deep underwater
Clean
Drink
Close-lipped smile
Dribbling
Like you mean it

I mean all that I say
I am still practicing being
A good liar
A good man
An orifice for your wishes to
Drop in

every time I love someone
who thinks me nightmare
when I am daydream
I curl around them into a mark unlike
my usual exclamation,
degrade myself into something you
can wrap yourself around more easily.

am I looking at you
a puzzle
when you
are a dictionary?

should I be paying attention to myself instead?

Biome Degrado

I can't really explain why I like him.
It just never gets me off to do it.
Blues and demi blades slicing my back,
pouring streams of blood and swamp tears.
A nose neighbor dancing in the rain
pretending her name is Drew Barrymore.
Watching him chew through my spacial cavities.

My eyes glaze to black in disgust,
and I realize the rain is a sprinkler in a garden of their insanity.
They'd rather watch than ask if I'm ok,
Or even check to see if my pulse is still pulsing.
They're more concerned with my pain im sexy that way.
I'm scorned and blazing flames
at a customer service rep who won't answer my claim.
Just forwarding me into a constant queue of divinity
because only the resentful get platinum service.

I get it I never wanted anything anyway.
A busy signal disconnects us.
I look for other things to chew.

It's not enough to try to help myself.
I have to ask for help, and they laugh at me
I'm a swollen open wound. I'm crispy here,
blistered by the residue from a plasma storm.

He holds my hand and drags me out of the fog.
I decide to eat peaches in bed bc I need the leaves for tea.
My eyes bulge again.
Glazing back and forth from my head to mind.

They throw water in my face.
I mean the one that was outside dancing in the sprinklers.
This time with an apron that sports eucalyptus and flowers.
I can smell it a little, and it's all bizarre.
They signal me into the kitchen, this time only with a robe.

I look away in embarrassment.
My face all flustered
because, at that time, I was too young—
I can't fall for those tricks.
I know the right things to do. And I chant with a religious clan.
The last time I was there, I lost nine lives.
And this time, a cold breeze chills my spine
and reminds me to stay alive and well,
cause this is not a dream.
I ate two peach pits until my hands melted away.
A fragrant display of nothingness that I've always tried to enjoy.

I'm happy now bc all the blood's run dry.
And my head sits high above the scars.
I'm left, but not alone.

And I can finally drift into a dream.
In the clouds where I can see her sitting there
across from me at that familiar coffee shop.
The one that isn't real but always there where I left it.
I signal a wave to take a seat in the empty chair
adjacent to the leather sofa she's slouching on.
She wears glasses and tilts her head down to glare at me
as she pulls the frames to her nose.
Curious and annoyed at this creation she made.

"Why don't you tell me you love me," I ask her.
The flimsy old chair wobbles
and I realize we're balancing on one of its frail legs.

"Because I don't have to," she replied.
I put a roof over your head and fed you from my own breasts."
Because that was enough.
And like that, my wounds seep with puss.
Shamed, I adjust from the balancing chair to my own tree pose—
rooting my anger into the ground.

I never wanted platinum status.
If It feels me, I might bust

Ravel

Sometimes I forget to listen
for your meaning, arrested
in time just before
each bell disappears.

My presence, a shell
of a thing, shot through with voices
that cut the air. The air fills

with ringing weft,
gathers the daylight
ghosts who linger woolen
and silent. They've unwound
summer's clock.

I don't know how long
you've been waiting with a book
in the garden, pressing the cosmos
blossom's neck between your finger
and thumb. Dew moistens
my grasp on seasons. July

has a way of thickening clarity,
compelling us to ravel and ready
our longings which belong
strewn all over—

You could tell me anything
in the whirling dead
of noon and I'd tumble—
the ground here muddies
under our cursive *yes*—see

the pollen-gold letters swell
in the hot air, obscure the road
ahead, swirl new versions
of ourselves—spring
and recede. A world both
page and palimpsest.

Am I coming along, where—
into the cavernous margin,
that silence? Tell me—is it—
translucent or opaque—and
will we spill

behind a bar for the first time in two years, I learn control as proximity to that which will kill
 me
 i've seen nothing but miracles / how horrible i'm awake / shake my belief in this room / seconds
 stop / climbing into new minutes / 61 62 63 64 65 66 where nightmares / or night shifts need only
 a year or two / to unfold / all these prayers my hands can make / a cigarette dissolving in a crystal
 ashtray / doors locking where they used to not / to call the wolf mine / but not its appetite to adopt
 its fangs / but not the blood / swirling in the sand what came first / the moment you are just able to
 make out objects in a dark room / or the dark room the black cross / in the window is a crow /
 blooming now into a windswept shopping bag / from way down here they look / so small from way
 up here they look / so small the piano above my head / dangles from a rope / dwindling like an
 hour / glass the water in my body / is just passing through / last week a storm / next week the
 ocean / my arms in between / ready to churn to turn / to silt against the waves / the wind so fierce
 it dulls the reaper's blade / i thank god / for the work / thousands of tentacles beneath me / roll out
 like dollar bills / flashing like sirens / i'm merely here / to slake a sin less thirst than sunder / to
 cough up milkweed & the liver of blowfish / deadly enough to kill me ten times / i'm not a survivor
 / just full of breath still

I AM / AM I

i love
 to select an outfit
 & find simple glory
 through an exacting look.

to know what it is like
 to be read as me
 on first glance,
 it's a privilege
 not often afforded.

the weather,
 patience,
 and laundry complete;
 damned to know
 how many sirs
 and how many shes
 i wear.

it is fleeting like
 the thought of having
 emotional security
 i guess i,
 no, wish, that i didn't question
 the different selves
 i am
 every day.

Under the Aquifer

Indigestion is an apt metaphor. Gesticulation is a dirty word. I wanted to be like cement at the moment of solidification. I wanted to swim through the moan of a saxophone. I am looking for sound, setting my camera on tuning forks and cello strings. I make films of Polaroids developing. I make love to women in extravagant hotel suites, in the gastronomic capitals of the world. I am the capital of Australia. I wear pinstripes to look thinner. I am thinking of trumpets. I am the tree swallow's white underside. I am lounging on the other side of the museum glass, with the prehistoric men. That's me: the era of pace and space, the tennis ball waiting to be served. I am *haricots verts* cooked in butter and wine and topped with sliced almonds. I am also the almonds. I am the moment between thunder and lightning. The sun winks when I look up. Time is waxing. The moon always lies. I control the tides and I am beholden to special interests. It might look like I am sleeping. I am feeling fluvial. I am a subterranean stream with high base flow and a gentle gradient. I am the headwaters and the mouth. My cheeks are the color of squash blossoms. You cannot step into me more than once. I am the same but you have changed. I am reading your pulse. I am still here.

ON FORGIVENESS

1.

The best gift you can give
is a broken chain. All the guilty links resolved.
Take it off of you.
Take it off of me.

2.

Don't be afraid
when there is no privacy with God
or with marriage. I am amazed
that my mom still asks about my father.

3.

Let's say we are at church - it's ok - come as you are
I bring adolescence - A year of new self - a coming of age - I am guilty
and no one is watching - You - come as you are and we'll worry
the rest later - This church has a live latin band like the one outside
of heaven's barbed wire fence - Where you forgot all the loans you didn't pay
But just come anyway - A member of the youth group is coming down the aisle
in a dark hood and scythe and in a roar of drums - another young man
two homecomings older - is in an all-white robe - carrying a sword of light
Not a lightsaber - More like He-man - An angel - not a savior
Theater requires great seriousness - Anyway - the sky opens
where there was once a roof and the two are battling - striking down the isles
all for the souls of those who have sinned - Lightning on top of a hill - Moving upstage
The pastor scorns - *This was forgiveness before the death of Jesus.*

4.

Union of dueling swords.
Maybe true love is just who you've decided to forgive
for the rest of your life.

5.

One time
I let
my daughter
I haven't
had yet
run into
the street
and all
I did
was yell
and hope
the road
didn't swallow
her. One
time you
will marry
me despite
all of
me. Two
grapes moshing
into wine.
I am
already sorry.

But, Virginia is for Lovers

Storefronts are presents wrapped in Confederate flags.
As if giving a grudging apology, a store sign reads: *Civil War Relics Sold Here.*
But, we can't just go around digging up the past, and all those monuments—
They are heavy and expensive, and we have other shit to do.
Besides, whites can't just shed skin like Northern Cottonmouths.

The farms of Virginia roll endlessly into the horizon.
My rental car rises and falls like waves into seafoam.
That's when it grips me—first water then vomit rolling slowly down my tongue.
For Christ's sake! We can't just excavate every black neck-bone that once hung from a tree,
Like some Jurassic ornament, a spoil for the vanquished.

(In the third grade, I could never cool the heat rising from the back of my neck
Whenever Ms. Sidell read about the suffocating stench under the slave ships.)
What is the point of dredging up sunken bodies—
Just so the mosquitos can swarm and gawk, eat and regurgitate?

American Pride is needlepoint stitched in fear for me.
I hesitate to ask the bearded man for directions to the Interstate.
His eyes are squinting, perhaps from rage or from the sun and sweat.
Virginia is lathered all over his daddy's, daddy's bones,
It's the sweat gluing his skin to an American flag tank top,
But I'm not sure if his flag means:
This Land is Your Land.
Or *All Lives Matter?*
Or it's just what was good enough at the Goodwill.

So, my eyes avoid the squint of his gaze,
I pretend like I know my way around these parts
Because my paranoia is chronic.
(I mean... Maybe my daddy's daddy knew his daddy's daddy
and things did not end well one humid Virginia Monday.)
Yes, that's probably exactly how it happened.

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