

Madison Stewart



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## **Shackles and Scissors**

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## **Cemetery in September**

One day I will joke  
About how we broke  
Up in a cemetery,  
Love dying with the dead.

I can't remember what was said,  
Only how you stared at me,  
Shark-eyed stranger's eyes  
Sucking warmth from the air.  
I was meeting who you  
Always were and yet to me  
Had never been.

No one will laugh as I say  
Something in me shifted that day.  
You did not follow  
When I walked away.

**Finding the words**

Do you miss him?  
He asks, the words trembling,  
The air thin.  
How can I explain  
That missing you feels  
Like the undercurrent  
Of a wave  
Effortlessly, ruthlessly  
Pulling me down  
Until my knees hit sand  
And there is only  
The roar of blood in my ears, an echo  
Without limits?

**A wet knot**

I thought letting you go  
Would be swift like the pop  
Of corks off those many  
Bottles we drained  
To seal and sway our desires,  
Or smooth like rain washing  
Dust from steaming leaves.  
Instead, letting you go  
Has made me the shore  
At the mercy of the movements  
Of the tide:  
You tenderly steal away more of me  
And I can only watch, knowing,  
As the rock pools  
Fill and the mist  
Creeps in.

**Walking to the supermarket in October**

Leaves crinkle underfoot in step

To Kashmir

Playing in my ear.

The air is crisp,

Spiced with fire,

And I feel it there,

Below my navel,

Small, almost painful,

But with that certainty

Of gaining power.

This is how it feels to be happy without you,

Sensing the lightness, and the weight.

**Grasping at embers**

In the distance, spots of orange  
Stark against the broken ground,  
Pumpkins glittering with frost,  
Full with magic, evensong,  
Heartland and hearth,  
The last life of their mother.

What if our union too bore fruit,  
If I swelled with the seasons,  
Twisted our roots together  
With tansy and twine,  
Would you stay then,  
Would you stay?

**Bonfire**

Ashes mix with the falling snow,  
Carry your laughter upwards  
Towards the stars  
I once imagined as lights  
Let through holes in a blanket  
Covering the daytime sky.

But they are balls of  
Gas and fire,  
Gilt and fume  
And the beauty of your laugh,  
The way its crystal ring fills  
The night, does not change  
The fact that the gleam in your eyes  
Is not for me.

**Threshold**

You come back again  
And again like the frost  
On my window in November,

No matter how high  
I turn the heat,  
How I curse your winter,

I make you feel  
Something you cannot find  
In her,

An ache that shifts  
The crystalised rivers of your veins,  
Thaws the ice in your eyes

Even for a little while,  
Even if like the frost  
You always leave with the sunrise

And I keep turning the latch  
As you go,  
Wiping dew from my thighs.

**What I cannot say**

I speak to you all the time  
In my head,  
On paper,  
Under my breath  
In the bookstore  
As I touch the spines  
Of your favourite writers,

Trying to find the words,  
Reshape the past into a story  
I can put back on the shelf.  
But you are ink that never dries,  
Staining my fingers and lips.

Sometimes I scream,  
Sometimes I plead,  
Sometimes I say nothing,  
Most often I whisper of mystical islands  
And snow weathered peaks in your single  
Bed as you press close to me and smile  
Into my neck, and I think  
If only it had ended  
Here or faded into nothing.

But paradises are swallowed by the sea,

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Mountains become dust.

My tea is cold,

And we still don't speak anymore.

## **Timbre**

The lilt of your voice was electric  
Record crackling with  
The first croon of the guitar.  
In its place

The hum of your absence  
Never goes away,  
The air vibrating with a frequency  
I couldn't hear before.

I wish I could pinpoint  
The moment our song  
Reached its final crescendo,  
Discordant harmonies  
Plucked and left trembling,

The second the last string  
Went silent.

**Socks**

Silence

Except for the hum

Of rain on the roof

And the creaking of old springs

As you move in the bed

Next to me, my cold

Feet inching close to catch

Your warmth.

You radiate and I press

My cheek into the space

Between your shoulder blades,

Listen to you breathe, taste everything

I never thought was meant for me.

I dwell here

Long after the clouds part.

Your side of the bed

Doesn't hold your shape

And I can't remember what your

Voice sounded like.

One pillow,

Two socks,

Cold.

## Confession

You always lied better than I did,  
Always felt that bit less.  
You were practiced in my suffering,  
Knew how to get what you wanted.

I needed you to feel it:  
Pain radiating from your spine,  
Needles under your skin,  
Know what is yours is mine,  
Tell me why.

My letter  
Still slips into her mind  
As she waits for you to come home  
Each night, wondering whether  
It's true, knowing but still wonders  
Because if she stops pretending there's a question  
she reaches the answer.

At least I can sleep  
Without your demons clutching  
My throat, their blood hers to keep.

## **Kinship**

I stand naked,  
Hear the shingles on the roof shiver.  
You are coming out of the woods,  
You've been waiting.

I sense you,  
The rot frozen beneath the frost  
Now steams, little rivers  
Shining veins on the ground.

I sewed myself a face,  
Laid the raw skin  
Over my features  
Like you wanted.

I smile with new lips,  
Dig my teeth into my arm,  
Crimson like I've never experienced before  
And so warm.

## Hunger

He tastes better than you did,  
Smoke burning down my throat  
Leaving me gasping.

He's ripped paper  
And teeth  
And poetry.

I don't apologise to him  
For my moonlit eyes,  
My anger.

He drinks the darkness  
that trickles from my mouth,  
tastes the honey.

He moves in  
Sweeps and sharp angles,  
his eyes never stop looking,

Digging,  
Hands in my hair,  
Nails down my vertebrae.

**Winter sun**

I step across pine needles  
Strewn on the ground,  
Copper shavings  
In the waning sunlight.

If these past few years  
Were forgotten  
Would the musk  
In the air land softer

On my tongue, would  
I linger here longer  
As the last rays  
Warm my eyelids?

Or would I have  
Shielded my eyes  
From the glare  
And kept going,

Because I couldn't  
Understand how much  
A moment can hold,  
When it is not cast in  
Your shadow, dulled gold?

**Found in the thaw**

A robin's egg:

Azul calcium iris,

Warm speckled orb,

Oval gelatine nursery,

Obelisk of soft slate, lace and gossamer.

Unopened promise, internal swell,

Little one, still becoming,

Mute overture, encased ochre, crackless oven,

Humming ode to beak and bristle.

These unordered beginnings.