

BASIL



Katharine Rauk



Black Lawrence Press

CONTENTS

- 7 Fuse
- 8 The Rapture
- 9 An Assembly of Lit Things
- 10 Self-Portrait with Monkey
- 11 Blood Orange
- 12 Heartbone (I)
- 13 Circumference of the Heartbone
- 14 Heartbone (II)
- 15 Basil
- 16 After Cooking with Turmeric
- 17 Wrecked
- 18 January
- 19 What She Knows
- 20 The Average Person Swallows Four Spiders Per Year
While Sleeping
- 21 An Incomplete Guide to North American Toads
- 22 The Ant
- 23 Vignette
- 24 In the End Won't Death Be an Endless Kitchen?
- 25 Suicide Rates Spike Near High-Voltage Power Lines
- 26 How Many Weeks Are in a Day and How Many Years in a Month?
- 27 The Threshing Floor
- 28 The First Goose
- 29 Fever
- 30 Untitled (Le Carte Géographique), 2009
- 31 She Was Born in a Cedar Box

Fuse

She would have an affair with a man named Ulf.
He would eat toasted cheese sandwiches.
He would have square hands.
He would keep a clock on his mantel
which he would wind every noon with a small bronze key.
His refrigerator would contain a compartment for hard-boiled eggs
which she would always keep full.
He would live on an island in the North Sea
which would be accessible by boat every two Thursdays,
so he would not get the newspaper, and she would not
have to read about the Democratic primaries
or Reem Riashi, mother-of-two, first female
suicide bomber for Hamas. She would not be bothered
by those days when the sun never set
but squat interminably on the horizon instead.
And when they would make love,
the ragged edges of the sea would be sealed from sight
by the four sides of the window frame
so she wouldn't hear the squalling
of seabirds that scrawled along the shore
and when Ulf, who would smell faintly of chamomile,
would come, she would come too
and she would be a seabird coasting the wind, no
she would be a jewel of salt, no
she would be a herring among a thousand herrings,
a gleam among a thousand silver shifts, no
she would be the sea, not
its heaves or its hurling but
she would be a shush of foam against the sand,
the sigh of froth and spume, no
she would be the hiss
of a fuse lit and burning, she would explode
like sparks, and would never need to look back
finally, like Reem Riashi would never look back.

The Rapture

*For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord
so cometh as a thief in the night.*

I Thessalonians 5:2

She was ripe
for the plot. Wrapped
in a silk robe, she pleaded
for capture, even a lick
of slim wrath. Roped
to her bedposts—her sleeves
ripped and her wrists
slightly scraped—she
pretended to wait
for the cops (or the one
in a cape). She sham
fainted. She feigned
corpse. Fed up but not
stuffed, she sacked
scripture on her knees
looking for hymns
of seizure. For him
she hummed, trimmed
lamps in the unmanned
mansion of her mind.
Where was the suitor
who would sate her,
who would break her
from this horizontal
life? Who would suture
this body that waited
for rupture?

An Assembly of Lit Things

My boyfriend worked the night shift. I got bored. One Thursday I reached up to change the burnt out light in the back of my classroom & a 60 watt Lumalux Double Life dropped into my palm like an overripe pear. That's when I decided to dedicate myself to light bulb collection. I roamed the hallways of Shortridge Middle School after hours, poking into empty rooms to scavenge for Bulbrite Standbys, Slimline Satin Spunlights, & any incandescent globe. The night janitor knew what I wanted. He'd save specimens for me in his back office, slipping me fluorescent torpedoes, instant starts, & once, a whole boxful of Neptune standard screws. *Why light bulbs?* you might ask. When I spread them over my sheets, I see a flock of soap bubbles fleeing south. Sometimes the wispy filaments become a fleet of miniature ships all sailing to countless horizons inside the same bright bottle of glass.

Self-Portrait with Monkey

My lover says my eyebrows trace
a hummingbird's outstretched wings. That's why
distance sits on my forehead, why
my eyes sail away. But

you're the one
with the wandering eye, baby. That's why
I keep my pet monkey on a string.
And you, my husband, my lover

of sisters, my loaner of hearts,
I can't hold you
nowhere and noways. That's why
my womb keeps

erasing itself. Why I
cherish my monkey's caress. That's why
I've learned to grow
my own moustache and learned

to eat those sugar skulls I make.
Learned you belong to yourself. That's why
you're my husband. My baby. My
necklace of bones.

for Frida Kahlo

Blood Orange

Slice: swollen flesh
brims red.

Is this a fruit,
a wound, a lover?

I ate. We never know
what we'll do

when the body
moves of its own

knowing: my lips
suddenly opening

sectioned windows
soaked in rubied light.

Heartbone (I)

“I’ve never met a pie I didn’t like,” he mused, scraping the jawed edge of his car key between his two front teeth to extract a raspberry seed that had lodged there. He fixed the seed on the tip of his index finger, turning it this way and that so it glistened in the afternoon light until he wiped it into the furrows of his corduroy pants. But the seed remained in the pocket behind Chloe’s eyes. She held it there, saw it sprout

noiseless furred legs,
saw it delve into moist soil
where it belonged. Yes,
she saw it, this pregnant clock,
this hearthstone lost
in the double-dark, a juice pouch,
a heartbone dreaming of night and red
patent leather shoes, the blood beat
of has-been and will-be and now—“You

know what I’m saying?” he repeated a third time, pushing himself back from the table.