

girl show

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BLACK LAWRENCE PRESS

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ballyhoo



still-life with broken door

Before the part with the mercury,
the fences dark as nails, you could
see all the way to Wyoming. Could
see all the way into girls gone soft

and round about the hips. A man
could lose an arm like that, to lightning,
to machines. Mile after mile of busted
lunchboxes glinting in the sun.

Before the bad water, before the burning,
we opened our windows each night,
wandered milky and loose
as hinges. Misplaced watches

and old shoes, mile after mile
of rusted Fords. Every woman
gone blue round the mouth,
gone black round the edges.

god and circus

It's all in the wrist, the dumb luck.
The dark room with its fidgeting
women. They make a noise like
a slipping. A noise like a sway.
Milk goes thick on the counter
while the preacher takes my mother's hands
and places them against his chest.
A rapture of barrettes and clothespins,
all that fastening, two and two
together. She sews herself into
god like a button, names her daughters
obscure, reservoir, bitterweed.
Keeps them hidden beneath the porch,
feeling out the dark as if it
were an object. It's my second language,
this underwater moaning. Hands sewn
tight together and the dresser plumb
with the window where, nightly, we all
escape, silver scars tracing our forearms.
Where we drown in yards and yards of blue tulle,
fall in and out of focus, my tongue
a trinket. A ring in a plastic bubble.
I travel under the guise of *refraction.*
No one is the wiser.

laurel, nebraska

It's a soft kind of falling. With mattresses stacked against the baseboards and buttered toast cooling on the table. There is only one ghost in your house, but sometimes there's a woman inside a wooden horse awkwardly knocking and counting the stripes on your blouse. The towns all have names like girls, and the girls almost always named after flowers. You can't swing a stick without hitting a Rose or a Violet. Yesterday, a Lily spilling a bucket of rainwater into a trough the size of a Chevy. She hangs nylons on the shower rail and leans provocatively over an ironing board.

Sometimes, there is lightning.

the levitations

1.

You can't see it til it's already too late.
Already the bucket let down the well,
the piano behind your teeth plinking.
The hunger for it, gnawing the corners
of the bed. Aspirin in the oatmeal,
hidden in the milk. Your hands so cold
the birds won't land, won't lend
themselves to story.

2.

Pain is beautiful, like lavender.
They said they loved you for it, for your freckled
wrist and the gears beneath your ribs.
Something burning through the floor
that smelled like creosote, gasoline.
All those pins in your hair you couldn't count.
All those shoes dropped in the river.

3.

Three days they boil the meat. Unfold the fields
outside the window. The emptied dovecote.
You smell gunpowder and break your teeth
on the windowsill. Scream *higher,*
higher, until your mother cries.
Can't see her face for all the shining.
How she creases and folds the sheets
into perfect squares.

4.

A row of nightgowns pushes
you from sleep. The light twitching
against the wall like wings.
You chew through a box
of pencils til the throbbing stops.
Bad ears. Bad dreams.
Like the drowned, only bone dry.

5.

The ouija board says *no, yes, no*.

Spells out *Clara, light*,

something soft panting beneath the table.

Your hands so cold you could taste

the dead like burned out matches.

bad endings

By morning, we've moved our beds
against the walls and placed ghosts

in all the closets. Dawn a mess of pigtails
and paper dolls. A broken water glass.

Mama says even our sweaters have holes.
But even our holes have holes.

Something always falling through,
the body like a bottle thicker at the bottom.

She makes us carry soap on our tongues
until our words are soft as murders.

Some nights everything blurry
like dirty water. Some nights,

a flickering above the sink.

locks

In town, a man offers my mother a fistful of keys
and places his hand against her cheek.

Morning a tyranny of yellow curtains
and sad advances, where the ear is sometimes

an open purse, others a bottle
where the dark seeps out. In the pool hall,
most men know the inside of her mouth by
touch. Know the scent of her hair by the
approximation of daylilies. She opens
their bodies one after another in the dark,

holds sparklers in her teeth two at a time.

By morning, a suitcase floats the banks
of the river, empty except for shot glass
and a woman's red heel.