

W H A T
I S
W H O

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SECTION V

TABLE OF CONTENTS

BONE IN THE THROAT

WHAT IS A TRANSITION

TO HAPPEN ONE DAY

WHAT IS TRUMPET

MOUTH TO THE VOID

PUPPY LOVE POEM

AMEN PILE

A TAPEWORM OF SOUND

WHAT IS RESTORATION

SO ARE WE DONE

PRACTICALLY SCIENCE

A SONG OF JOY IN THE FOREST OF THE COYOTE

WHATEVER YOU TOUCH

LEARNING TO PRANCE

BONE IN THE THROAT

You will not even recognize me
Once I finish this Miracle Whip,
The whole tub, my teeth so
Greased with relief & my hair

Barely clinging to my skin. If
Not for this bone in the
Throat, I would have done better
To warn you: you get one

Life only in this life. I
Am determined to cough this up
& apologize for the wishy-washy
Behavior these last nine or so

Decades. I am not one for
Muttering excuses, but I am one
For learning to prance like a
Deer, one last shaky attempt to

Add some grace to the landscape.
Let it be clear: there is
More than one rat in this
World. There are a few walls

Left inside this house. I must
Label my life ekphrastic, existence inspired
By this bone in the throat.

WHAT IS A TRANSITION

One way to change the self is to disassemble the self.
I cut my own hands off & worry not one bit
About god, or as this guy I loved in college once told me
In a Barnes & Noble bookstore bathroom—*Shit, piss, breath*

Are more important than philosophy. Don't bother, dude.
One uncle worked for his lung cancer, another
For his liver failure. One uncle labored hard for his state
Quarter collection, never a dime on a doctor,

Never one nickel on a check-up, till lungs & liver
Held clean hands, gust first of all into the after-
Life despite. It is mind-boggling to consider the number
Of medieval coins, once a small denomination

Worth millions now if only we fetch them from the ocean
Bottom. One way to disassemble the self is
To erase the self completely. Poof. I am haunted by music
I can no longer hear. I jump in front of a train

Hauling an entire orchestra to Iowa. I quit
Wearing t-shirts with puns on them. I no longer
Walk & read, what, with The Great Head Jarring during the summer
Of '14. This guy I loved in college claims his note-

Book made in Japan changed his life. He scribbles & no chance
Immediately of smudge. He writes HELLO on
A corner for me, & I carry it till I change my pants,
It forgotten & mushed with the other bits—pizza

Receipts, newspaper clippings of the hog show—in the lint
Trap. One must make a silly face to get something
Beautiful out of the mouth. During the song about her grief,
The singer was drowned by a siren. While avoiding

A hole in the ground, this guy I loved in college stumbled
Into a much larger hole. One way to erase
The self is to crack over time. The slow humpty, the random
Dumpty. Each night I have the same dream—I have two sons.

They saw a horse in half. They wear matching navy tank tops.
They share a stick of beef jerky. Hope & terror

Simultaneously creates a sensation like fixing
A helicopter when you do not know what a helicopter is.

I often forget the physicality poetry
Requires. I do not know how helpful this is. Am I
Being too dang obvious? The necessity of unfolding—
A towel to reveal my nude body, tortilla

To see if she snuck in jalapenos again. My true
Love says *soulders* & I shrug. One way to crack is
To live so long every gland is reduced to wilting, drips
Dotting the day, so one cannot tell which gland gives which glob.

TO HAPPEN ONE DAY

Shed light is always something.
I did not ask to be.
There, I said it.
My own response without question.
Like a hat over the years on numerous heads.
I have tip-toed this line fine.
Like a speck of snow on a feather.
I have found nothing of an afterlife to suit me.
So I stay here.
This study of simplicity.
This study of cauliflower ear.
This study of handling a goose's neck.
I am more liquid than you might imagine.
I am entangled in maple syrup & miracles.
Since the old hour I began, it is true.
I have refused to leave.
Even in the face of a treaty or a treat.
Drawing the ruins on the back of a receipt.
I can still be defined through cough syrup & fire trucks & turtles.
Chicken is still how we describe both the animal & the meat.
Also, the broth.
Unburied dogs & peanut shells make love in the trash.

WHAT IS TRUMPET

The tiny trumpet I left for
You is a masterpiece,
Though its whereabouts are truly a mystery.

Might be sequestered in that one
Pocket you grumbled too
Extravagant, too spacious till right now the curves

Of the trumpet hug the hollows,
Or it is discarded
Under the descended tree branch on 45th.

No, none of that. Lift up your shirt.
Ah there, right there it is,
Perpendicular to your fourth rib, your body

Entirely. You double to press
Your mouth to its trembling
Piece, like a matchbook, your twittering tongue huffs

A spark. Then the trumpet unhitches
& across the purple
Sky it flies. It reminds you of your Seattle.

It reminds you of the first boy
You ever kissed, also
The first boy who ever hit you. It reminds you—

You, too, require another's touch
To make your wicked sounds.

MOUTH TO THE VOID

No one listens to me right now.
Sorry for all the talking I

Have wasted, feeling sorry I
Did fling the canoe & did not

Hit water. What they always say—
Have enough courage to express

Regret to get you through the night.
After forty-eight years, I thought

What the hell & dismantled it.
My fort of cardboard boxes. I

Started a business today.
We make flowers out of ashes

Seeing how never had I
Any interest in corpses.

PUPPY LOVE POEM

It could be a bad idea to build stairs
Out of rawhide, but really who could know
For sure. I thought it was impossible

For another to love me, but then I let Ginny Bug off
The leash & she made no nods to the road.
She sat in my lap & I swear to god

She loves me. That was this morning & now
I stay up melting, a volcano wrapped in translucent skin.
I sweat the shape of the pompadour I once had

Into the red pillow. I slide off Diana like a horse
Tired of its hillside & into the valley it goes.
But I am so in love with Diana, with my position

Upside this ridge. I am solid in my loins, despite
These symbols I expel from my nose.
Mucus in the shape of an egg cracking hard.

Mucus in the shape of a dove in Virginia.
Mucus in the shape of a flute without a flautist.
Mucus in the shape of several risen biscuits.

Diana rolls over to kiss my baking forehead, to shove
Ice cubes into my mouth to keep me
From dying, mostly figuratively. Ginny Bug kicks

Across the meadow of a dream. In the dream, who knows
What she chases. A hot-dog-headed cat. A creek
Made of smooth peanut butter. She has legs.

In life, Ginny Bug eats bees, snorts fire ants, leaps
From moving vehicles, dives headfirst into a cactus
Without a flinch, a wince, or a flummox, & just because.

AMEN PILE

My mother assembles her amen pile.
It is a particular kind of mound.

To the outside world, she begins to sing,
So the toad rolls from under the leaf.

So the lightning bolt digs itself from the sky.
So the algae stitches to the top of the pond.

Each can hear it better from here.
This appreciative form of madness.

The child born with one head, two arms, two legs, & one fine heart.

The ghostly glob in the x-ray merely a smudge.

The stove turned off as feared not.

The brakes grab again & again.

The rain came when needed & left when overstayed.

The first breast had no lump, & the second breast had no lump, & the ovaries were smooth.

The sister forgave her, & her beloved forgave her, & her child forgot why anyone
was even mad.

The urine was only red because of a recent abundance of beets.

The pill brought its desired remedy & none of its side effects.

The bank account flashed four figures for the first time in a decade.

The dog emerged each 5 p.m. from its shady spot beyond the above-ground pool.

The brother accepted her hug & the sister her check.

The voice revealed itself to be outside the head belonging to an old friend across the
parking lot.

The family stroll after dinner ended as it began—quietly, slowly, with no one hit by a tractor.

The key under the ceramic deer had not been lifted or washed away.

The pain in her chest flickered for only a second, & then she walked into church.

The lipstick appeared on the collar in the nick of time.

The books made their occasional appearance in her hands.

The answering machine held no threats & no obituaries.

The laundry was folded by someone else, & the trash was taken out by someone else,

& The food looked good & delicious on the table.

The father & the mother never once stirred in their graves.

The child turned at the last possible moment into an adult.

The h&s did not shake, & the heart did not moan.

A TAPEWORM OF SOUND

In Alabama, I heard an unprescribed hello, a trill
In the dusk while I waited
For my sandwich, & onward

I trudge, feeling tucked between phantom greetings, & today lug
The anger monsoon around
Curled in the shadow of what

I claim as deflection—the grieving wall punch, the forgotten
Syllables uttered in gripe,
The speeding down the back road

Around the traffic jam. All of a sudden I send my phone
Flying. Like the dew baked back
Into the pavement, it rose,

Meaning the frustration arose. Whoops. Another distraction,
As is the fresh-swept porch &
The cat with her tuna treat.

A colony of bats appears like every card ever
Slipped from the magician's sleeve.
To the side a woman breaks

Up with another. They run off in opposite directions.
Memory is that fishing
Pier one sees in Midwestern

Ponds, corner collapsed into its own reflection, creaky &
Sweatered with moss, but stand just
Right, it can be possible

To fish from it, & maybe, you will reel in a keeper. I
Think that is what the voice was
Beginning to say to me.

WHAT IS RESTORATION

Look, Mark is holding
A Monet with its dots, its pink dots specifically,
Squished by a thumb. Look, Mark holds

A nude from the later
Erotic Period, streaked with semen. It remains true:
The frames of most beloved paintings

By now undid their bones
But occasionally his telephone rings for this &
This alone, & across the lands

Mark goes, like a soldier,
& only with a scrub brush, a white cloth, & a bottle
Of secret formula. It is

Whiskey & feline tears.
A boy trips & punches a hole through the priceless. A man
Appears & applauds the boldness

Shown by the artist, &
Then Mark appears & patches the painting, much to the scoff
Of the previous man. Mark knows

The love of art is not
The same as its protection & nuh-uh, certainly not
Its resurrection. Mark knows there

Is a bird designed to
Follow airplanes & eat the streaks left in the sky. Mark dons
A feather & hustles to work

To remind himself he
Has a purpose. Mark has a purpose in this stupid life.

SO ARE WE DONE

The dogs will tell you how little honesty is
Left in this world. They wish to be swatted
On the nose clearly when they have really gone
& done it, the crisp feeling of rolled-up news
Right between the eyes. Today is just one of
Those days I wish teeth were renamed mouth bones.
Honestly, yes, it hurts to chew, to be chewed.
The hills threaten to chomp us each into morsels.
The roads promise to end us after this next
Breathless turn. Today is just one of those days
I wish someone understood how I love Paul, how
A palm tree rustles to explain to the maid
Its affection for the piano that keeps it company
Through the giant window she cleans thoroughly every Tuesday,
How the rabbit elders will not allow the young
Rabbit to approach the sunflower it has been admiring
The whole summer long, how the goose crashes through
The window to take back the feathers it lent
Once to the pillow, how my friend Barbara gifted
Me her stuffed pony in the third grade after
My grandmother died, she did not even like ponies
Anymore anyway, even when her dad became a new
Person & shuttled her to Tampa, where he saw
Fit for her to become her own new person—
This one with step-siblings, palm trees in the yard.
Last I heard, she became Barb-left-to-raise-
The-family's-final-four-chickens. Of course,
The wolf came. Barb had no one to turn
To, seeing as how God went on vacation, so
Yes, Barb did eat the chickens to protect them
From the wolf, & yes, the wolf ate Barb
To protect her from God, whenever he came back,
Or what Paul told me in Chicago last Sunday.

PRACTICALLY SCIENCE

Ebola in London & elsewhere scientists get a sackful of zebra finches drunk.
From high enough, every river is a mirror.
Ohio & North Carolina feud on
Where human flight got birthed & no one in the Midwest knows how
To properly claim Lincoln.
You can see the WRONG WAY sign from either side of the highway.
The good thing about boredom is that it eventually ends.
Your hair in the breeze.
The pistons pumping its steam.
The trickles we hardly noticed spurt out the side of the cliff
Now frozen & noticed
Like a cougar's jawline on the edge of the forest.
We scurry away
Listening to a song about tractors.
Researchers found 41% of teen boys are texting
& do not realize you are being chased by police.
76% of adults drive right by the castle.
Scientifically, there is a difference between seeing
Your mother's hand crocheting the latest doily
& holding that hand
As she takes her ninety-four years into dreaming.
She might not wake.
She might dream about your thirty-year dead father.
She might see the end of the tunnel.
She might go there & find the light but also a plate.
Who put nachos at the end of the tunnel?
Surely it was Karen, her first love, science tells us.

A SONG OF JOY IN THE FOREST OF THE COYOTE

The first time I heard Diana
Sing I assumed I had drifted into the heavens

Which everyone knows is painted inside
The belly of some unknown but great mammal

I never thought I would get close enough to grace
To see. She was forty-two

Different angels & still is. I applied
Salt water to my scrapes & borrowed a shirt

With buttons from the local church
Lost-&-found. My sister always said you fight

Fire with sweet vermouth, the flame's distant
Cousin. My brother said all you need is a good

Brake job & a sturdy pair
Of sunglasses. I stuck pins in my eyes

Just to be sure. I tapped my teeth
With ancient coins to keep time.

The day I asked Diana to marry me I took off
My shirt, which I had done

Thousands of times before, but never like this, never with
The sun devouring the trees in quite this manner.

WHATEVER YOU TOUCH

The one true way to occur forever—
Be so boring life forgets
To end you. You must not tolerate
Much overlap between the television &
A window, the fresh pie or the string
Of bullets wrapped sideways
Around the officer's massive torso.
Even if they ask. It is history
That tells us many inventions
Ultimately extinguish their inventors.
Francis Edgar Stanley & his automobile
Met their end against a woodpile.
Perillos of Athens in his brazen bull
Burnt to a crisp the way he always imagined
For others. In this state, babies can be
Handed over within thirty days, no questions.
You must not wear slacks to your own
Apocalypse. You must not talk
A big snow among a dry desert.
Often times, you will read
Where a certain person died of exposure.
You will ask, *Exposure to what?*
The answer is life, you answer.

