



SECRET-TELLING BONES

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the operating system





the operating system print//document

SECRET-TELLING BONES

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*For Chintan,
who holds all my secrets
and knows every bone*





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1117111



FOR ERIN

I remember you different, and that
is how my memory keeps you. It was a stretch
before the men we chose knew us—when your hair
rappelled in sloppy knots to your waist. The years
your mother thought we were lovers, always
balled up with joints and cupcakes
while The L Word labored on.
Even know, in nostalgia,
going to Slaughter's isn't the same. There are no
hangover breakfasts over monster biscuits.
No couch guys, shit-covered walls or you
making French toast in our fall apart kitchen.
Do you know,
you're the only person who's never
been cruel to me? How strange
that you're a mother now, that your son
will never know you as anything but—
still, I know. I'll remember. With the men
you'll grow old. Your hair will thin even
more, your breasts begin to favor
your mother's burden. But you and me,
us half-girls, half-women, we'll grow young
together. Isn't is lovely, that's how I'll always
see you: Girlish and flecked with freckles, not
a whit of makeup, and your smile (glorious)
with teeth that cage our history from extinction.

11/8/11





HOW MANY CROWS MAKE A MURDER?

How many crows make a murder? I asked
in the bird shit-covered adirondack
chairs that hovered like watchful mothers
over the hotel pool. The two of us,
our white skin blinding in the Mumbai sun,
worked fingers over phone screens
to find the answer. The hotel manager
watched from his little perch,
kept sending free naan swimming in ghee
while bronzed men took our photo
every time their wives turned away.
It has to be at least three, you said.
I wasn't so sure. Should three
constitute a murder? The big
black beasts stealing
our nuts and screaming for the bread
wouldn't say. Murders
are a secret thing. Something
you don't talk about in public, especially
with leopard print bikinis plastered
wet and scared like shaking children
against goose-riddled flesh.

11/6/17





OUR DESCENT

It was three days after a New York bombing
and the first time
you didn't kiss me goodbye. Give wishes
for a safe flight, and to me it was clear—

if it weren't for the others, you'd will
that plane to plunder from pregnant clouds,
a painful afterbirth. How neat,
how tidy, how perfect it would all be. Nobody

would know the coldness of the morning, how
you refused to even pretend
to hear me. How it was your mother
I touched last. Who would know

how much I drank at the airport bar,
that I worried the weight
I'd put on would be too much
for a plane to bear? No one.

You could slip on the victim's
jacket, wear it real sharp and I,

I would die with a fall, full of grace
I never managed in life. I like to think
the descent would be smooth
as your skin and slow, so slow. Reluctant

and hopeful as our restless beginnings.

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YOUR GRANDEST REGRET

You began to hate me slowly,
like a child practices skin colors
and rolls *nigger* over pink tongues.
Try it first, delight
in the oil slick naughtiness,
position yourself over me and see
all the possibilities I arrested.

It wasn't as I imagined. Disgust
is better than pity (though there was a dusting
of that, too). Like the rest, for you
my bones gave way to shapes
you could name. *Acromion, ulna, ilium*. Magic
dripped from my flaws. You started to point

to my sustaining thinness, the anorexia
never fully stumbling away. To the new muscles
creeping over my body, shy creatures
monstrous in their strangeness. And you told me,

Men, they don't like thin women. Muscled women.
They like us soft and fat like their mothers. And I knew,

between the darts of hatred, intentional
forgets and controlled apologies you
were already miles away and me,

a squinting disaster in the rearview. A mistake
you couldn't sweep away or rinse
down the drain like burned milk. Me,
your grandest regret, will never be enough
to become all the everything
you always wished me to be.





ON LOVERS

I've had many affairs, but the guilt
was scarce. A sticky, chewy sauce
that hugged my tongue too tight—
surprise! Still, it never ruined the deliciousness.

It was, as they say,
worth it. Like chocolate cake

is worth each calorie, good sex
worth the pregnancy worries,
your face worth all those sacrifices. I think
there's something wrong with me,
in me, something missing
or never was. How should a person feel
when they slide with slippery ease
from one warmed-up set of sheets
to the next? Worthless, worthy?
Like a slut, or swollen with freedom?
I don't know, I don't know, all
I know is this: I've taken many of you
between my legs, between my teeth
and it was glorious, all of it,
each time, every time and I will die
legs splayed and happy, unashamed
for the crematory to burn me up.

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“BAILA MORENA”

It wasn't all bad. I remember
the good, and it wasn't in the big moments
(it never is). The year *en Moravia* whipped
me raw with the scaling Tico Spanish,
the dirty buses and whistles trailing
from scooter saddles. But that quiet day
the rain twisted my locks
into a frenzy and pressed the cotton closer
to your heart than I ever got—that

is our Costa Rica. Tucking into *casadas*
while the *queso* vendor across the street
shouted *palmito* specials to the downpour.
¡Aquí solo calidad le vendemos! The flies
hugged us close in the tiny *soda*
shop while *Baila Morena* lulled us all
into a stupor deeper than Imperial
could ever muster. We knew the *palmito* in the city
would never compare to the fresh wonder
balls sold in huts papered with banana leaves
along the winding rainforest back roads.
You knew I was already half gone
by the urgency of my swallows. And I knew
it would take years shrouded
in a different love,
a different life,
to ever listen to that song again.

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IF I WRITE ABOUT YOU

If I write about you, you're important
even if it's just once, even
if it's in passing. My love collects like coins,
fine precious metals,
in the cobwebbed attic of my heart. It occupies
all corners, each seam of every beam.
If I write about you,
I'm keeping you and nobody or nothing
can claim your space. You've become
a part of me, as necessary as my limbs,
my breath, my blood. When I write about you,
it's a testament—my shouts to the world
that in this instant, you're everything that matters.
And even if it fades,
even when it dims,
the echoes of our collision
will reverberate in my chest, play conductor
to the orchestra of my heartbeat.
Do you know what power you have,
how many blessings you're gifted,
when I play god and make you immortal,
supplicating like a peasant while you're reborn
omniscient in the drying ink? I choose happily
to bow before you, grateful and obliging
to simply be here
basking in the splendor of You.





MA'AM, I AM TONIGHT

Rare are the great moments
recognized in the making. That night
in Nashville, the rooftop,
the five of us. I watched the magic
fall slow from the sky straight
into our darkest places. The drunkards
stumbled through, the guitarist
fingered worn strings, but he sang
everything we shouted at him.
Funny,

how pregnant sadness grows
when you watch happiness
ripen to spoil. Seconds are fast
but hours so much faster. Even then,

the taste of the whiskey, the smell
of your hair, all of it was passing

and so many times over terrible
than something already passed.
There was nothing
of meaning, no milestones,
but here's what I keep:
The squeals of the swing

dancers downstairs. How Christmas
lights hung heavy as breasts. And the words,
the throat-choke melody
of "Walking in Memphis" that we screamed
into nostalgic cacophony.

I
///15 ///





MI REGALO

There are no *I'd likes, give me's*
and *may I's* in Costa Rica. It's all
Mi regalo. Gift me. Gift me the big
coconut, the Pepsi in a plastic bag,
the roasted cashews baking
in the equator's heat. *Mi regalo*
gallo pinto, a machete
to cut the grass, decapitate the lids
of garden tarantula's dens. Gift me

that bus pass to Limon, take me
away from the razor-topped fences.
Gift me long days in the jungle, seven-
legged spiders suspended
above our hammocks. *Mi regalo*

a return flight, an airport ride
in the breaking-down white station
wagon with the cigarette-burned
seats. Gift me a standby seat,
a skim over the ocean, a forgiveness. Gift me

another chance with him.

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Early Saturdays, before the dawn,
before the morning birds,
I walked the trails of Forest Park beyond the zoo,
crushed the arteries of Hoyt Arboretum
beneath my spreading feet, turned the fallen petals
from the rose garden to shaving peels.
It was here, in the darkness of Portland mornings
that I felt most alive. Before the throngs
of tourists arrived, before the fat pink trolley
made its chortling rounds—when rabbits were still brave
enough to dash between bushes
and the good swings wide enough for birthing hips
held a layer of night frost close as you,
the one I left sleeping in our loft. Weeks before
we left, headed south to the border town,
I felt the wondering eyes scaling me
and for once I wasn't alone. Welcomed
into his Parliament, he reigned proud
on the stump, bearing witness to my noisy
shoes, the complaints of my knees,
my complete lack of grace before his being.
Inches away, he didn't blink, he didn't turn,
not once faltering like so many others. This
was my farewell, my blessing to go, my reminder
of the beauty from which I came and from where
I'll never return.

1711



WHEN TO STAY

They say I don't know when to leave, I say
they don't know
when to stay. What good comes
after the bars shut down, past the window
of *these shoes could go all night?* Knowing
when to stay is what brought me to you.
Knowing how to stay shot us
through the affairs, the culture battles, the year
I ran away to another land with another man
and yet you played stowaway
in my organs. When you know
when to stay, how to close down
the party and watch the lights come on,

you see everything. The way the floors
are caked in syrup and the booths
are worn to threads. How the dancers
wear their stretch marks and the barbacks'
fingernails are chewed. We stayed through
the last song, the final bathroom checks,
when the last dish was scraped of tots
and plopped into the machine—through the ugly
and into the empty morning streets
where New and Hope trudge soft
and amble on bare feet into the next.





JACKSON STREET

Nothing we found fit, so we built
our first house from the weeds
up. Virgin land, gurgling with spiders
and an out of control apple tree—it dropped
fermented fruits on the earth, drunken
offerings for livestock
that hadn't roamed that farmland
for decades. Above the flood plains,
past the blackberry bushes,
it took months to close,
to get the permits, collect
yes stamps like A grades. Then,
on a frosted September day
that felt like winter, we asked blessings
of the land, permission from the gods
to Build. I wore that one sundress,
black with cutouts at the midriff,
and old cowboy boots. With burning sage
in one hand and a gathered skirt
in the other, I circled our small hill,
our Home,
muttering prayers in the chill
while you snapped photo
after photo from weathered Jackson Street.

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LAND LORDS

We pay rent to the animals,
to the raccoons who plunder the plum
trees, smacking and swallowing
like little hunchbacked beasts. To the squirrels
who pick the most pregnant of apples
and leave pine cone trails
on the patio. To Oregon's giant house
spiders, scrabbling frenzies across oak floors,
whisked out with Windex-soaked newspapers
to keep on willing a mate outdoors. The skunks
with their cactus tails and viper heads,
nosing through spilled cereal
from our mornings on the oiled swing.
And the deer, whose clumsy steps
betray their graceful thighs, calves
like fine buffet legs and breasts riding proud.
For them we pay in fat blackberries,
splitting cherries and red pears. But the roses ...

the roses ...

those I dust in curry powder
and tight pinches of turmeric. Perennials
are for us, and the animals, the poor things,
they blanch and choke at the bite.

/// 20 /// I





Cages are relative, the animals showed me that. Gallops and scurries from unclaimed Oregon wild out back. Nightly, they came for discount cereal, day-old pastries, the scraps and crumbs of our sorry offering. The skunks groomed us to serve their favorites earlier in winter, the raccoons showed us they didn't like plates or trays, thought they were traps, proved they'd never miss a crumble. The littlest ones, the babies, the kits and fawns and joeys, jolted with increasing confidence towards the glass doors. Watched us with curiosity as they feasted. When we'd open the doors, foots would stomp and tails went up, rushings fast into the darkness because we, we were escaping. And we bolted from our cage with a feral ferocity.

11121111



THE LUMBER YARDS

Like everyone else, my father
worked the lumber yards, coming home
smelling of sawdust and killed woods. He fell
the trees of the Great Northwest after prison,
working his way up to the cushy
foreman job. *All I do is press a button*,
he would say. In first grade, we had to write
to Congress, our Senator and the papers
about how terrible it all was, the poor owls
driven from Home one sawed down pine
after another. Those homeless owls
are what gave me Barbies, weekly trips
to the video store, a father who came home
at the same time each day, aromas of the forest
and chip shavings on his jeans. He *was*
the mill, those weighty logs stacked neat,
the brown shaved off and bound tight
in ropes and chains. Forget the owls,
the protesters, all the wild things buried
deep in the mountains or on garish display
in the streets. A tree doesn't die when it falls
any more than he did. It's reborn, re-created,
turned into something nice and tamed,
something to be used and enjoyed, then discarded
as if what it became wasn't short of a miracle.

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TO GRIN MACABRE

Some are scared of the starved, others
arch away in awe, afraid what we have
will catch. A few hover close, fruit flies thirsty
to lick up tips—hopeful
to become one of us. When your scaffolding
begins to show, it's not all at once.
First the bottom rung of ribs
peek out like a shy debutante. Next,
maybe your cheek bones protrude
a little more than they should, a sudden
pergola above where baby fat cheeks
used to pudge (where the apples
once blossomed). Hold out your hands—
press your fingers together tight.
Can you see the rays? Skinny enough
and it bursts like heaven between the bars, only
your knuckles can touch. Beautiful, right?

But here's what they don't tell you: People
start falling away as easily
as your hair down the drain. Nobody knows
how to talk to a skeleton. All bones, it's hard
to work your tongue. Hold on
to friendships. Make love
when your stomach's raging in the empty.
So let us go,
let me burrow deep into the earth
where I belong and the others like me
turn in their graves, disturb their plots
to grin macabre at the newcomer.

1 /// 23 ///





PLOTS

They say women are supposed to kill themselves
neatly, like good girls. Leave no mess behind
so everyone else can go on
with minimal disruptions. No lovers left
to scrub floors, pick up brains
or pour hydrogen peroxide on crusty bits.
That's why bathtubs are so popular. Just two
slices up the wrist, *flick flick*.

Not me. Me,

I'd buy a gun. A big one. Put it
on credit and get a whole box
of bullets. (I imagine you get strange

looks if you ask for a single). And
I'd wear white, all white, like a bride
or a monk. Do my hair and smear
on real spendy lipstick so you couldn't tell
where my lips started and the blood
began to lick. I'd hold that gun a long time,

my last stupid purchase. Warm it
in my palms, memorize the lines
with loops and whorls. Then,

I'd pull the trigger with empty lungs,
and I'd want
to think of nothing, I'd try
to think of nothing but I know—
God, I know—my mind would fill,
dark like frozen chambers,
with all those heavy thoughts of you.

/// 24 ///





SECRET · TELLING BONES

Twice in Jaipur and once in Delhi,
female security officers grabbed
my hand, spread the fingers, incredulous
at the wedding *mehendi*. Startling, right?
That this seemingly white girl
had snuck into their fort. But this,
this is far from the secretest secret
club. Just one stripped me bare
with her teeth, whipped me whimper
hard with her tongue. *What's this?*
with a poke at my hip bone—

it jutted from my pants
like a weapon. And she saw me,
the whole embarrassment of me, the years
of calorie counting and *too fats*
and starve, starve, starving
to redemption. My first answer
was most honest. *Nothing*
(that's me). My second sounded
an excuse: *Bone* (the damned reason
I could never fully disappear).

Show me, she commanded,

and I did. Raised my kurti, slid
my pants down homegrown
muscly thighs and displayed
my secret-telling bones
for the world to prod and judge.

11/25





MY BODY, MY SELF

I've put you through so much, and still
you hold me up—shaky
legs and bumpy arms. The years I fed you scraps
at best, you lapped up every crumb, used
each speck to carry on. The times
I beat you stupid, beyond
the ability to stand, flinch from the traumas
or keep fists above breastbone. Remember
the time I slipped you the ecstasy, only
it was some kind of speed-meth monster
that left us lurching in the Atlanta heat? Me,

I would have left me by now. *Long ago.*
But you,

you've stayed, solid. Through the disrespect,
the slaps, the ridicule and pummeling
abuses. And not once did you break. Give up
for good. Not gather all your everythings,
but stood tall on too long legs
and screamed, demanding for more.





RELIEF

We and every mammal on earth take twenty seconds to piss. Imagine that, the great equalizer is between our legs (of course). It doesn't matter how many warm beers we forced down during bumbling pauses at house parties we never wanted to attend. If we just got the trots training for a pointless race, or held our bladders tight as a newborn because the bathroom was too many steps away (and we so lazy). We're the same as baboons, house cats and cattle being pointed to the slaughter house. And that toilet paper? Those Turkish toilets? The bidets, baby wipes and hoses we swear never touched our asses? Those don't make us better than the wild things hunkered down, embarrassed, eyes averted in the fields.

11/27/17





KENNY, IN BREEDING

Kenny the tiger died like Gregor, of misunderstandings
and loneliness. We like to anthropomorphize what we don't understand,
ingredients of our nightmares and, of course,
what we pity. Researchers aren't sure
if Down Syndrome is the right diagnosis,
but one thing is certain:

They called Kenny sweet. So bizarrely adorable
in his ugliness—squat little body and mushroom
face that made him look stupid. Safe. Tigers,
they should be feared. We should tremble
in respect at their swaying, that wild
in their eyes. What was there for Kenny
but overcompensation with kindness? Sticky fingers
grabbing at his bars and children delighting
in his differences? Whatever killed him,

it wasn't the inbreeding. Not the side effects
of his body born bad. He knew there was nothing
like him, mistook the zoo
for a circus. The cage for a freak show stage.
What aloneness there must be
when you're damned to this world with no body.
A horror body. A body like no other.
And what a gift, what lightness,
you must feel when leaving that broken shamble
behind like trash, a crumpled pile of starts
that just weren't good enough for here.





LET ME GO QUIETLY

I don't want anyone saying they knew me
should I die ahead of others or when I'm gone
before the whispers. I don't want women
I can't stand, who despise me pound for pound,
muttering niceties over raw earth or prettying up
memories alongside casseroles. I don't want
men sniffing around, saying how lovely
I was when they used to comment on my bones,
the propensity of my skin to mar. I want you

to be the only one to say my name like it mattered.
The body of my pieces I wrote for you, the meat
of my words thickened from our story and the heat
from what we bore isn't for the gawkers
or forced, awkward acquaintances. Let them forget me,
feel satisfied that their bodies wore out last,
store up those social graces like pinching shoes
they'll never wear. You're the witness
to my entirety, attestant of my every,
the only I want following
my loping footsteps into the deep.

11/29/17





RED DELICIOUS

You had a Red Delicious sticker plastered
to your foreman badge. As a child
I didn't know *Apple* was a bad word, the same
as *Oreo* or *Twinkie*. When I asked what it meant,
you just flashed those dazzling white teeth and said,
It's what they call us Indians. You owned it,
took pride in it. Reclaimed it. What was so wrong
about being something natural, something healthy
that produces those strong, thick ivories, something
delectable?

But not you. You, my father said,
You look just like your mother. God,
she was beautiful in her youth. All long, thick
hair flying behind the motorcycle like a wedding
dress train, starved down to ant-like
waist from meals of mustard and lettuce leaves.
But how I wanted your toasted skin, mine
was so pallid next to yours. I craved that delicious
red coloring and,

as a child,

soaked chestnut into my skin day after day
roasting in my mother's tanning bed, letting the cancer
sink in slowly, a dirty marinade
that made me look like you. The ugliness
didn't show 'til decades later

and by then you were gone, smoke,
fragments of bone burned to ashes a lifeless
gray shade, boring, nothing like you,

and with not a trace of scarlet.

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OPENSE ZOO

The Danes dissected a lion before
a puddle of children. Cut him right
up, pulled the hide spread eagle
in a mockery of pornography—the kids,
they reacted like us all. Fingers creeping
over eyes, but still
they couldn't look away. *It's important
the children see
what the insides look like*, an old man
told a news reporter while his granddaughter
clutched at his trousers. What would they see
if they did that to me? Tore my insides apart
like barbeque, rutted around
in my intestines like pigs in muck, held
up my heart as a prize? Would it be
so incredible, so grotesque?
Would the children peer
between pudgy fingers and pinch
their nose at the stink? I can't imagine
I'd hold nearly as much interest,
that the outcry would be so deafening
because I,
I am not beautiful. I am not rare. I don't scare
you when you happen
across me prowling hungry in the night.





THE ANIMALS OF MY FATHER

A squirrel killed my father, a tiny thing
(The squirrel—not my father, he
was a Stoneclad). A prison tattoo, freehanded
in faded blue, clutching an acorn
like salvation. His cellmate needled
the rodent into my father's copper forearm
forty years ago between games
of Spades and comparing love letters.
Indians aren't fond of doctors, at least
not him,
he'd only go when forced like a petulant child,
demanded to pluck out his own sutures
with rusty pliers. He didn't know
Hepatitis C snuck into the squirrel's bouffant tail
decades ago, that it slipped into the liver,
doing more damage than all those December binges
when he disappeared for days at Christmas.
After he left us, after he refused to take me, laughing
I got out before you did,
he added a buffalo to the menagerie—
it looked foreign and wild, too dark
with lines wickedly sharp. The buffalo couldn't save him
any more than his new family. Even so,

when I hear the stories—my proud father,
with calligrapher's black hair
rushing down his back, falling like a redwood
in a Wal-Mart parking lot, being forgotten
at the Indian hospital in Oklahoma, abandoned
in a wheelchair for hours with tears
like currents down his cheeks, unable to move,
without words, magnificent mane fallen easily,
wounded soldiers in the bathtub basin, I'm happy

that our last words were I love you
and that I'll always remember him untamed,

strong and beautiful with unclipped wings.





DEAD DON'T GO

The dead don't go, they burrow
into our bones, worm hungry
to the marrow. I still feel
my father blinking
through my solar plexus, asking
what went wrong. The girl
I left behind to hang
herself, her burst of freckles
spreads malignant across
my caving collarbones. The dead
don't leave, they decay slow
and organic, looking for a home
that feels something familiar.

111133111





YOU LOOK SOMETHING

My best pieces, my showstoppers
are the ones they can't quite grasp.
You look something—that's what they say
when my cheekbones don't match
my whiteness, or my eyes
just aren't quite right. And I'm not
offended, far from it, I'm grateful,
immensely pleased,
to be as solid as *Something*.

What's the other hand
I could have drawn? To look
Nothing, not worth a closer inspection,
as godawful *Same* as them? Of course,
they never guess right.

Latina, especially Mexican,
that's their favorite. Because when you look
Something along the west coast corridor
you must have struggled your way up
from Mexico. Your blood must
have been muddled in California,
skin blanched as you rooted
up north. But sometimes,
sometimes,
they stumble in the right direction.

Like the old man who waited
'til you left, turned whip fast and asked,
Are you Native? And I reveled in getting caught,
in being seen. But before I could answer,
before he could grapple his prize,
I love Indian women flew from his lips
like spittle, an airborne fetish. Still,
I bought his car, I touched his hand
and I played the part he wanted—
the quiet Indian girl
who looked something.





CHIARO SCURO

My sister took all the color, our father's
swarthy beige buffalo hide skin. She got
all the Cherokee, his complete, dashing
looks from the honey in the irises to the chaotic
black mane. Nobody
doubted she was an *NDN princess*, they called her
exotic, fetishized her, lusted with voracity
over that seared golden flesh. Sole heiress
to our Native side, she inherited the bad
with the beauty—benders and binges,
one man after another, crashing cars
followed by jail and rehab. But me,
I got nothing of his coloring or character.
And the honey?
It dripped from my eyes as a child.
I passed

easily, the only trace of Native etched
like an artist's afterthought into my cheekbones,
a scrawling signature in the corner, staking
claim in the mess of brushstrokes.
Yet I got his presence, the years he stole
from her, he clung to them jaw gritting
tight, as if he had something precious—

and if we found out, we'd all want a piece of it,
tearing and mauling like savages
until he was left with nothing, empty handed
and cheated,
just the confetti remnants of something cherished
forgotten and trampled on the floor.

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MOURNING LIGHTS

My father visited me in a cramped
Atlanta hotel room five years
after he died. It was hours since
I took the ecstasy from a drag
queen's bra, long after I faltered
through the doors of a basement
club on the other side of the city. I couldn't recall
how I'd got there—let alone the miracle
of slurring the right address in a taxi. The dawn's
pink fingers were just reaching in, trailing
across my wailing head, clawing fierce
into bruised eye sockets. I knew him

by his force, the dramatic entrance, that sizzle
in the air. I was still coming down, but in his glory
he hovered like a poltergeist in the room, lighting
up those cheap nylon sheets and bad prints
bright as a firecracker. In a panic I stuck
my head under the threadbare covers, sure
the ghosts would lose interest, the demons
wonder at my own magic when my wan moon face
disappeared with a snap. Weeks later I found my comfort,
my two fingers of numbness, smooth and strong—my father
came to me as ball lightning, a phenomenon explained
by science and dismissed as nature's freak show. But I know,

in the deepest, secret chambers of my heart,
he gathered all his essence, all his power, all
his everything to fire up my world, and I—
I hid like a coward, a shaken toddler,
his crowning disappointment in the dark.





THE MOVING ON'S

Today I was lonely
for you. For us, for what
it used to be. The Nehalem
days are over, the nights we'd careen
upon one another with other people,
then into each other after last calls.
Tonight I was lonely for the desperate
hopes of used to be's. We grieve sadness
just as much as happiness, as deeply
as love, as hard as the worst days.
Just now, I'm lonely
even with you right by my side, steady
through the comforts, wailing inside
as I curl up my feet and you stroke your moustache,
confident in the familiarity while I grasp,
drowning and desperate, oceans away.

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URNS

There are times I want to say *Nevermind*, cut
it off before the spread goes someplace dangerous.
Not because I was wrong, not because the act
wouldn't take a longsword to my insides
or because love wanes, like it's as flippant
as the moon. But because one day,
one of us will miss this. One
of us will grapple at memories and stifling
air. Just one of us will make a grab
for the good side of the duvet, claim victory
over the last wilted tortilla. And I know
it will be me. It's what I owe, what
I inked my name in stinky desperation
for all those years ago. You'll go first and I—
I will happily go second. Pick up the crumbs,
the left behinds, the love still gooey
from groggy morning and late-late nights. This
is why I go on, why we go on, why I'm poised
for the Seppuku that I begged hard,
busted kneed and blubber-drunk for.





SPRING FRENZY

Soon, it will be three, the deadest
of the night. You, in trusting sleep, believe
I'm balled onto my side of the bed. Likely
dreaming of India and grinding
my teeth. You don't know
I'm here, beneath the alien light
listening to the drunks below
and devastated
that we can never go back. When did it happen?
When did you start falling
asleep first, boiling water for rubber
bottles and shooting Roloids
like cheap candy? What was the date
when we became happy
with grueling Uno games and dinners
without wine? Where did it go—
all that uncertainty and grabbing ons
of *just once mores*? We left it behind,
even the burned edges,
like shoes we outgrew or graphic tees
cracked with sweat. So many,
they don't come out together. They lose
grips in the haunted house, sight
of one another in the mirror mazes. But we,
we held tight. I followed your scent, you
listened for my breath and in the headache
sprouting bright of it all we've burst
like spring in frenzy smack into blossom.

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THE WRONG KIND OF INDIAN

I keep the smudged Pendleton blanket
nestled like a Christening gown in the hope
chest. It's green, smoked
with sage and cedar, blessed
by a medicine man beneath towering
tipi poles staked unnaturally permanent
into the earth. At the time

I didn't know washing the smoke over my body,
soaking it into my thirsty flesh, it wouldn't work
until years later. For a lifetime I kept myself locked
into my own hope, buried
in my own safe place, safe choices, safe
dullness. You opened it up greedily, treasures
tumbling like dismissed toys to the floor.

An elder brought you to me, all siren's smoke
and nature's magic—neither of us
are the wrong kind of Indian.
When Columbus found me, he thought he'd found you.
He was lost, reckless and foolish like us.
Then again,
what miracles, what marvels, wrong turns
and losing yourself can bring forth.





THE CONSTELLATIONS OF MY BODY

I flanked myself in pretty, a dressing
since I had none of my own. I was always friends
with the beautiful girls,
the Hawaiian girl, the girl
next door, the girl
who killed herself. They adored me the same
as children do, toddlers demanding and wondering
why I ignored their magnificence while everyone
else fell awe struck at their feet. That's why

I tanned the cancer into my flesh, chasing
her exotic reaches, shaved my teeth
to needles and cemented on porcelain, filling
my mouth with bathroom fixtures, let doctors
cut me apart like a hunting prize in the filth
of Central America, piece me back together,
all mismatched quilt of muscle and skin.

Even the lawyers say
I shouldn't have survived.

My silence agreed when strangers called me fat,
when others said I was too ugly to bask in the company
of such beauteous presence, when the old queen
in London laughed, You'll never be beautiful.
And then there was you.

In the frozen dermatologist's room, he
taught you to sniff out cancer like a hound,
the rough edges, the swirling browns.

Do you love her constellations? he asked,
and your silence said Yes—the stars of my body,
shooting meteors, the fallout from years
in tanning beds seen for once as gorgeous
in their danger, those remote incandescent
miracles dying bright like fireworks
in the darkest, most secret of my nights.

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THE POETRY BROTHEL

Last night I was a whore
at the seedy poetry brothel
where men and women bought
my time with poker chips. In return,
I took their arms or hands, led them
to back rooms and read them my words—
split open my insides stuffed with you—
over candles that smelled
of strange flowers. My waist-
length hair kept tucked under the black
bob wig, my toes gone numb in too-
expensive shoes, and you
watched from the bar. I was never good

at flirting with women. Not much
better with men. But I think
it would have been easier
(*I would have been easier*)
to let them needle and nose
between my legs
rather than give up the words
I birthed for you, flying loose
between my teeth. It was an affair
of the dirtiest kind, the first
cheat where the guilt stuck hard.





LOOK AT ALL THE BEAUTIFUL

Kept private like our genitals
are supposed to be,
you'll find the good
trails. The ones nobody
talks about, where blackberry brambles
shoot through old bark chips
like zombie hands and spiders weave
wet threads licking your face
come dawn. It's not easy,

keeping quiet. Cradling secrets.
Like children,
they get loud and heavy. They squirm
and you want to drop them, see
their little heads explode like watermelons.

I wanted to show you,
look—

how the trail spreads her legs
like un unabashed woman. Choose
your fork and trust. Look
how the creeks and rivers bore
their own way, not giving a damn
for the carnage. See me
here, grinding through the morning
light. And once more, look, just look.

Look at all the beautiful.

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NESTING

I have one of you sitting
in my throat like a pigeon.
Dirty birds—

we hate them because they're like us.
When you ask,
Tell me something, the droppings
are so sticky, dusty white I can't
choke them out. My voice
has always been stifled,
after all,

it's far too crowded down there
for us all to sing at once. But know,
scrape by struggle, I'll tell
you everything with my fingertips.

You'll find my words scrawled
on paper scraps, your *something's*
inked in permanence. They're loud,
gaudy and nakedly unashamed
in a way my voice could never bear.
So let the bird be, the filthy thing

is cleaner than all of us,
and especially me. What diseases
I've waded through, infections I've borne
and disgusts I've clutched dear
to whoosh across the wild to you.





SEEING

When you stopped seeing me as American, stopped
noticing the snowiness of my skin, the lack of oil
in my hair, that's when the last walls gave way—
crumbled like fish pebbles at our feet, powerless
and fading to dust. There are still times
I see your Indian,
your Other, the way you look toasted in gold
next to my raw milky self. It's in photos,
chanced by mirrors, and when waiters halt
at the accent. But mostly, our blinders are strapped
on tight and I see straight to your depths. Past
all the nonsense, the *don't matters* and the things
we're supposed to notice. I see you to the core,
where the sweetness grows,
and *forever-always* pacts are made.

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ALL MY KING'S HORSEMEN

My legs were made strong, like a king's horse,
to carry me through this life, capable
of taking the desire paths that branch off
from the pavement. My arms were crafted
to carry others—other people,
other things. My hips splay wide, bone
crowns riding those long mare legs, perfect
thrones for heavy loads. Give me
our child, and they'll ride like royalty,
kulfi sticky hands coating my breast,
an anointment. A blessing.





FLY SONGBIRDS JUST LET GO *

go, let just birds' song fly—us without love is stupid, so
keep up the watch. laziness kills motivation, forget never:
hands tangled with longing, and sticky kisses,
always branded (we forget). don't
you remember I'll forever
want you, need you. children, all like
inside wild things, some closely listen
(prey, simply scared, get you if
indolence creeps in). and grips loosen,
year after year. love you more, the
promise whispered. a break never
spreads quickly, cracks deeply, thus love my
dizziness. the quiet, please. you beg, so I
hold on, hold on, hold on just me and you.

** Unlike most reverse poems, this is a genuine reverse poem. Instead of being able to read each line both forwards and backwards, each word can be read forwards and backwards.*

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COLUMBIDAEJ

Your family stitched the *sagai* together just like that
and the pigeon couplet cooed pillowtalk at dawn.
I was taught how deep to bend, to whom to bow
and the art of brushing feet with hennaed hands.

My pigeons cooed sweet nothings in the pink
while my Gujarati ran dry, Hindi bled into high school Spanish
and the art of brushing your grandfather's feet
was a play at submission nobody believed.

My Gujarati dried up, Hindi bled into Tico Spanish
as your mother fed me eggless cake and *pani puri*.
we played at submission, everyone pretended
a *gori* was good enough for the eldest.

Maa fed me *pani puri* and eggless cake
the day I drowned in *chaniya choli* because
a *gori* was good enough for her eldest, so
your family stitched the *sagai* together just like that.





LANDMARKS MADE OF STONE

I remember when forty was old, when
I was sure I'd escape the cancer,
when I thought my mother was beautiful. Remember

when the creak of your jacket sang like whales,
your skin soft as whipped butter
and my lips a feral ground
undiscovered? We were kids,
the lot of us, allelomimetic
but thinking we were the first. Nobody
from nowhere had found such fortunes—

quick, bury it again, hands clasped fast,
fingernails clawing through dirt
before the world sees what we've found.
Together, we'll bury our gems,

stash the gold and erect a cairn
only we'll remember the shapes of. Oval
and smooth, round with river-hewn
edges. And this one,
the jagged one, the one with obsidian
stretch marks in the igneous. This one

we'll know as ours through the blindness,
the aging, the total
fall-apart of our cocoons.

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PACK ANIMALS

We sleep like dogs, backs pressed
flush against each other. Pack
animals, you guard the door
while I keep watch of the closet—who knows
what monsters may appear,
which drunk neighbors might rattle
down the hall. Your body's heat
slips moist fingers over my hips, sticks
my skin to yours while we curl
in for the night. Bony knees
and thick thighs reach outward
like stars in our cry, our little litter,
our mute in the duvet wilds.





ALPHA TO OMEGA

You get cookies at the Gujarati temples, proof
that you were *good*. That you showed up. That you whispered
the right prayers to the right idols. (Of course,
I didn't know the prayers. I followed you like a puppy,
quiet and obedient). Here's what I learned: It takes
the exact same time for you to say the prayers
as it does me to recite
the Greek alphabet in my head (a hangover
from the college years). *Alpha*, tap the turmeric
blend on the forehead. *Beta*—the same word
your mother calls me (daughter). *Gamma*,
wonder why I had to cover my hair
when all these other women didn't.
Delta and *Why aren't these people looking
at me? Am I not so different? Epsilon*,
these are the smells of your childhood,
the sounds of your memories. All the way
to *Omega*, the end and the sweets.
I've always loved desserts, the rewards
that close those firsts and leave a slick
of guilt on your tongue, crumbled
evidence of goodness on lips.

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THE OTHER SIDE

Call this a love letter, call it
Our Story,
unlike anyone else's, but with threads
and adornments from the Great
Ones—the star-crossed fables, the fairy tales
we craved and gobbled down as greedy
little beasts in our parents' arms. Call this
What shouldn't have been, all hurdles
and bounds through flaming hoops,
seasoned with heartbreaks and flavored
with blindfolded leaps. There are all kinds
of names for what we've done, for who
we are and where we've been.
Call it a freak accident, a liquored up
lurch into just the right nook
of just the right place. This
is called finding the great stuff
and having the thick tenacity
to hold on knuckle white
through all the blinding explosions.





PRIX FIXE

We will never know all parts
of each other, how delicious
is that? For us, there's no dessert
(or maybe it's served first). Waiters
don't stalk in the wings, stuff
us with bread or rush to tell
the specials. There will be
no returns to the coat checks, no tip
for the valet. Some plates
still remain in the kitchen, go cold
without us ever knowing. We'll think
the *amuse bouches* appetizers,
the entrees far too large for a tasting.
What happens
when all the rules go to hell? If you wear
the wrong jacket or I don't
curl my hair? Nothing—no stomachs
will growl or blood
sugars fall like tantrums. We will always know
only the choice cuts of one another—just how
delicious is that?

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A KING-SIZED OCEAN

Our feet still breast-
stroke towards one another. Diving
into the duvet depths, sailing against
pilled satin sheets nubbed and bubbled
from kicking, calloused feet. I'd swim
an ocean's yawn for you,
to the darkest leagues into uncharted
wetness where the frilled sharks sleep-
circle and the wolffish prowls.





THE UNFOLDING

I don't know what's coming next,
but god, I can't wait to live it. I told you
years ago,
that I just knew—it wasn't foolish hope
or drunken wishes, but a fact. You and I
are a given, just as my eyes
are green and your hands too big.
What took you so long? The ride's
been idling, chortling exhaust for years
in the waiting for you. And now,
the tickets are punched,
the baggage stowed (it was overweight
and we paid for that, of course). Now we,
clasping hands over *Asks or tells*, bolt
whip fast stupid to the unfolding.

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SPOON ME OUT

I saved it for you, the good stuff,
the best years. The crustiest parts
of the walnut bread, the biggest slabs
of the pecan pies, the loveliest amuse bouche
of me—the hours when I’m most alive,
not suffocating in deadlines or tensed
in the pauses before the storms. Even then,
years ago,
before I knew our opening notes,
in the prelude before our symphony, I saved
the sweet spots for you. And I’m not saying
it’s anything special—it’s not nearly as decadent
as others.’ My grace falls short and I stumble
like a newborn colt on shaky legs still
wet from breaking into this world. My beauty
is left wanting, an afterthought of sorts.
And I can’t speak

to tell you romantic things, new reasons
why I love you or how your chest still
feels like home. But I can write,
and I’m loyal beyond anything you can imagine—I saved
the choicest meats for you, the prime cuts
from my body, the most tender morsels
of my mind, the effervescence of my spirit, so

cut me deep, tuck into the spread, and spoon
me out, rich and steaming mouthful
by hungry, salivating mouthful.





AN EVENT WORTH CELEBRATING

Run hard (like you mean it)
from a life that's uneventful,
for it's events that make a life.
My mother taught me the product
of being afraid. Of staying inside,
of what happens when agoraphobia
snaps you up like wanting pelicans.
It's quite possible

my life is already half over. Is over.
Could end today or maybe
I'll outlast them all. Each event
folds me over (I'm cake mix
with surprise flour balls and grainy
sugar goodness heading happy
to the blender). Every event
adds another buttercream rose

to my icing, an extra pinch
of salt to my insides. Who cares
how hot the oven gets? How many
hungry mouths wait, milk
cups in hand, on the other side?

Stack me layer-layer high, add
the sprinkles and fondant pieces.
I'm an event that demands celebration,
a party they'll talk about (especially
when the drinks kick in)
for years past my sell-by date.

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Jessica (Tyner) Mehta is a Cherokee poet and novelist. She's the author of three prior collections of poetry including *Orygun*, *What Makes an Always*, and *The Last Exotic Petting Zoo* as well as the novel *The Wrong Kind of Indian*. She received a writer-in-residency post with Hosking Houses Trust, Paris Lit Up, and the Women's International Study Center (WISC), which helped complete *Secret-Telling Bones*. Jessica is the owner of a multi-award winning writing services business, MehtaFor, and is the founder of the Get it Ohm! karmic yoga movement. Visit Jessica's author site at www.jessicatynormehta.com.





POETICS AND PROCESS

*Jessica Tyner Mehta in conversation
with Lynne DeSilva-Johnson*

Who are you?

That's a loaded question. Answers vary depending on who's asking, current moods and recent happenings. I'm a Cherokee woman poet, writer, entrepreneur, business owner, Type-A with a dogged sense of unease and ambition. I've seen more, lived more and experienced more than I ever would have imagined growing up in that small Oregon town. Had I known at fifteen where I'd be at thirty-five, I never would have believed it. A lot of living has been packed into these years.

Why are you a poet?

I have no other choice—I believe I was born a poet. I've never been good at verbalizing. Words get stuck in my hands. My forms of expression have always come out not just in writing, but specifically in poetry. Things can be said with line breaks and alliteration that I just can't muster in any other kind of writing. Crafting my novel was like giving birth, painful and slow. Poems come fast and in gushes, though I dare not say with ease.

When did you decide you were a poet (and/or: do you feel comfortable calling yourself a poet, what other titles or affiliations do you prefer/feel are more accurate)?

For me, being a "poet" can be part of who you are at the core as well as a way to define level of publication. I believe I "became a poet" when my first book was published, or perhaps when my first piece was published in a literary journal. At the same time, I've always been a poet. I still find remnants of poems I wrote at seven-years-old. It's like asking when someone became a mathematician. Was it when they got their degree in math, their first math-centric job—or was it when they fell

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in love with numbers in first grade? It's a journey with a lot of curves, not a final destination.

What's a "poet", anyway?

It depends whom you ask. The simplest definition is someone who writes poetry. It can be part of defines who you are, a job description for the lucky few, but I prefer a definition penned down in a very official-sounding dictionary: A poet is "a person possessing special powers of imagination."

What is the role of the poet today?

This one's tough, especially as a Native American poet. I've had some people tell me it's my "responsibility" or "job" as a poet to address certain political, ethical or moral conundrums—particularly with the Dakota Access Pipeline. Is it out responsibility as poets, writers, creatives or artists to use our talents for a certain voice? A lot of people think so. I don't, and I'm often in the minority. I write about what I know, what I'm passionate about, what (personally) hurts and heals and loves. This is, unsurprisingly, not always about specific issues or happenings that may or may not be making headlines. The role of the poet has always, naturally, to put into beautiful words essences of the human spirit. To make others feel beyond borders other forms of expression might not be able to cross. However, it's not a "responsibility" of a poet, simply a happy side effect. I've never written for anyone but myself. It just so happens that, like every poet, how I write often tugs at a reader because at our very center we've all experienced very similar stings in life.

What do you see as your cultural and social role (in the poetry community and beyond)?

I'm often dubbed a "Native American poet," by myself as well as others. What does that mean? It simply means being Cherokee has informed who I am as both a person and a writer—it doesn't mean I can speak for every Cherokee or Native American. Instead, I see my role as being informed by my experiences (culturally and otherwise). Do I have a relatively unique perspective? Of course. We all do. Is it important to have such a voice, a so-called "NDN" voice, heard in the poetry

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community and beyond? Of course, just as it's important to have every voice heard. My Native background has surely positioned me and my voice in a certain light, and I can no more remove that from my poetry as I can my experience as a woman. However, roles are fluid and new ones are added as we move through life.

Talk about the process or instinct to move these poems (or your work in general) as independent entities into a body of work. How and why did this happen? Have you had this intention for a while? What encouraged and/or confounded this (or a book, in general) coming together? Was it a struggle?

I'm not one of those writers who makes myself sit down daily and at least try to write poetry. I write for a living, owning a writing services business, so of course I do write daily. However, poems seem to come in bursts, often at very inopportune times. In those bursts, general themes do emerge. It usually takes me awhile (weeks or months) to digest a certain experience or time in my life. Naturally, when the poems emerge post-digestion, they're organically themed. I never "intend to write a book" of poetry. Secret-Telling Bones is my sixth book and fourth book of poetry so, technically speaking, I'm pretty comfortable and familiar with the process. For me, it's never a struggle to write if I abide by my natural process. I can tell by the end result when I'm forcing work. It's only a struggle when that happens, and I'm at the point in my writing career where I don't push it.

Did you envision this collection as a collection or understand your process as writing specifically around a theme while the poems themselves were being written? How or how not?

As I mentioned, themes occur naturally for me. I can often tell when I'm "done" with a particular type of poetry writing, and at that point I start putting together a manuscript. Any new poems are tucked away for future projects. However, I never sit down with an intention to "write a theme."

What formal structures or other constrictive practices (if any) do you use in the creation of your work? Have certain teachers or instructive environments, or readings/writings of other creative people (poets or others) informed the way you work/write?

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I write very few formally constructed poems, save for the occasional pantoum. I also wrote one “true reverse” poem, which was more a practice in word play than what I consider authentic (to me) poetry. I do believe we’ll tend to mimic writers who we read. My favorite poets are Li-Young Lee and Kim Addonizio, and my own work has been compared to Addonizio’s—so I think there’s some truth to that.

Speaking of monikers, what does your title represent? How was it generated? Talk about the way you titled the book, and how your process of naming (poems, sections, etc) influences you and/or colors your work specifically.

My book titles are usually named after one of the poems in the collection, and often represent general themes of the books. Overall, much of my writing concerns love (the beauty and ugly of it), my experiences as a bi-racial NDN, and living with an eating disorder (anorexia and exercise-induced bulimia). “Secret-telling bones” refers to both the most obvious signifier of starvation as well as my upbringing and relationship with family. It’s also why my mother is featured on the cover. Many things are perhaps genetic that we don’t consider—anorexia is just one of them.

What does this particular collection of poems represent to you
...as indicative of your method/creative practice?
...as indicative of your history?
...as indicative of your mission/intentions/hopes/plans?

It’s a very good representation of my work, approach and creative practice. To me, it’s clearly “my voice” which I hope is transparent and approachable. I believe words, especially poetry, are meant to be read. Enjoyed. Digested and peeled apart. As a confessional poet, I don’t hold anything back, which means my history regularly leaks onto the pages. There’s no room for modesty or embarrassment. I don’t dress up my past or exacerbate it. I want it to be presented in my own honesty. My hope and intention is that my work truly reaches some readers. I spent so much of my life thinking I was the only person who felt a certain way or experienced a particular trauma. There are so many of us out there. I wish I’d fumbled the “right” books into my own hands when I was younger. Perhaps I wouldn’t have felt so alone or strange.





What does this book DO (as much as what it says or contains)?

It offers a snapshot into specific emotions, events and happenings that—while the specifics might be somewhat unique—the overarching feelings have been experienced by all. It's a living, breathing testament to the human spirit and our incredible propensity to survive. Thrive. It's a hand held out and a promise that, no matter how much it seems that way, truly we're not alone.

What would be the best possible outcome for this book? What might it do in the world, and how will its presence as an object facilitate your creative role in your community and beyond? What are your hopes for this book, and for your practice?

Honestly, and I know this sounds clichéd, the best possible outcome is that it genuinely reaches at least one person. Seriously, I would be over the moon with one. If it helped one reader see that there are others out there “like them,” that's the first step towards understanding, community and compassion. Of course, I also hope this books help better cement my role as a creative within various communities, both locally and globally. I found my home amidst the poets, the creatives, the so-called crazy ones. It's comforting to dig deeper into my practice armed with my books for momentum.

Let's talk a little bit about the role of poetics and creative community in social activism, in particular in what I call “Civil Rights 2.0,” which has remained immediately present all around us in the time leading up to this series' publication. I'd be curious to hear some thoughts on the challenges we face in speaking and publishing across lines of race, age, privilege, social/cultural background, and sexuality within the community, vs. the dangers of remaining and producing in isolated “silos.”

It's easy to pigeonhole me. Native American. Female. Bi-sexual. And I'll admit, I've had no problem with previous publishers submitting my work to niche awards whether it's based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or age. However, I've never sought out a “Native American publisher,” “LGBTQ publisher” or any other publishing avenue that was based largely on my fulfilling a certain niche they were lacking. I'm not saying these niche publishers are wrong or taking the

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wrong angle—I'm just saying it can be a priority for all publishers, mainstream and otherwise, to seek out a variety of voices and writers.

“Quality” is not synonymous with mass appeal. Nobody, including publishers, are required to showcase perfectly diversified books and writers. However, they're armed with a very powerful platform and position, and given the opportunity to do with that as they wish. Making the effort to look beyond the easy and readily available might not be the simplest or fastest approach, but it can certainly be the most fruitful.



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WHY PRINT / DOCUMENT?

*The Operating System uses the language “print document” to differentiate from the book-object as part of our mission to distinguish the act of documentation-in-book-FORM from the act of publishing as a backwards facing replication of the book’s agentive *role* as it may have appeared the last several centuries of its history. Ultimately, I approach the book as TECHNOLOGY: one of a variety of printed documents (in this case bound) that humans have invented and in turn used to archive and disseminate ideas, beliefs, stories, and other evidence of production.*

Ownership and use of printing presses and access to (or restriction of printed materials) has long been a site of struggle, related in many ways to revolutionary activity and the fight for civil rights and free speech all over the world. While (in many countries) the contemporary quotidian landscape has indeed drastically shifted in its access to platforms for sharing information and in the widespread ability to “publish” digitally, even with extremely limited resources, the importance of publication on physical media has not diminished. In fact, this may be the most critical time in recent history for activist groups, artists, and others to insist upon learning, establishing, and encouraging personal and community documentation practices. Hear me out.

With The OS’s print endeavors I wanted to open up a conversation about this: the ultimately radical, transgressive act of creating PRINT /DOCUMENTATION in the digital age. It’s a question of the archive, and of history: who gets to tell the story, and what evidence of our life, our behaviors, our experiences are we leaving behind? We can know little to nothing about the future into which we’re leaving an unprecedentedly digital document trail — but we can be assured that publications, government agencies, museums, schools, and other institutional powers that be will continue to leave BOTH a digital and print version of their production for the official record. Will we?

As a (rogue) anthropologist and long time academic, I can easily pull up many accounts about how lives, behaviors, experiences — how THE STORY of a time or place — was pieced together using the deep study of correspondence, notebooks, and other physical documents which are no longer the norm in many lives and practices. As we move our creative behaviors towards digital note taking, and even audio and video, what can we predict about future technology that is in any way assuring that our stories will be accurately told – or told at all? How will we leave these things for the record?

In these documents we say:

WE WERE HERE, WE EXISTED, WE HAVE A DIFFERENT STORY

*- Lynne DeSilva-Johnson, Founder/Managing Editor,
THE OPERATING SYSTEM, Brooklyn NY 2016*

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TITLES IN THE PRINT: DOCUMENT COLLECTION

An Absence So Great and Spontaneous It Is Evidence of Light - Anne Gorrick [2018]
Chlorosis - Michael Flatt and Derrick Mund [2018]
Sussuros a Mi Padre - Erick Sáenz [2018]
Sharing Plastic - Blake Nemec [2018]
The Book of Sounds - Mehdi Navid (trans. Tina Rahimi) [2018]
Abandoners - Lesley Ann Wheeler [2018]
Jazzercise is a Language - Gabriel Ojeda-Sague [2018]
Death is a Festival - Anis Shivani [2018]
Return Trip / Viaje Al Regreso; Dual Language Edition -
Israel Dominguez, (trans. Margaret Randall) [2018]
Born Again - Ivy Johnson [2018]
Singing for Nothing - Wally Swist [2018]

One More Revolution - Andrea Mazzariello [2017]
Fugue State Beach - Filip Marinovich [2017]
Lost City Hydrothermal Field - Peter Milne Greiner [2017]
The Book of Everyday Instruction - Chloe Bass [2017]
In Corpore Sano : Creative Practice and the Challenged Body
[Anthology, 2017] Lynne DeSilva-Johnson and Jay Besemer, co-editors
Love, Robot - Margaret Rhee [2017]
The Furies - William Considine [2017]
Nothing Is Wasted - Shabnam Piryaee [2017]
Mary of the Seas - Joanna C. Valente [2017]
Secret-Telling Bones - Jessica Tyner Mehta [2017]
CHAPBOOK SERIES 2017 : INCANTATIONS

featuring original cover art by Barbara Byers

sp. - Susan Charkes; Radio Poems - Jeffrey Cyphers Wright; Fixing a Witch/Hexing
the Stitch - Jacklyn Janeksela; cosmos a personal voyage by carl sagan ann druyan
steven sotor and me - Connie Mae Oliver
Flower World Variations, Expanded Edition/Reissue - Jerome
Rothenberg and Harold Cohen [2017]
Island - Tom Haviv [2017]
What the Werewolf Told Them / Lo Que Les Dijo El Licantropo -
Chely Lima (trans. Margaret Randall) [2017]
The Color She Gave Gravity - Stephanie Heit [2017]
The Science of Things Familiar - Johnny Damm [Graphic Hybrid, 2017]
agon - Judith Goldman [2017]
To Have Been There Then / Estar Allí Entonces - Gregory Randall
(trans. Margaret Randall) [2017]

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Instructions Within - Ashraf Fayadh [2016]
Arabic-English dual language edition; Mona Kareem, translator
Let it Die Hungry - Caitis Meissner [2016]
A GUN SHOW - Adam Sliwinski and Lynne DeSilva-Johnson;
So Percussion in Performance with Ain Gordon and Emily Johnson [2016]
Everybody's Automat [2016] - Mark Gurarie
How to Survive the Coming Collapse of Civilization [2016] - Sparrow
CHAPBOOK SERIES 2016: OF SOUND MIND
**featuring the quilt drawings of Daphne Taylor*
Improper Maps - Alex Crowley; While Listening - Alaina Ferris;
Chords - Peter Longofono; Any Seam or Needlework - Stanford Cheung

TEN FOUR - Poems, Translations, Variations [2015]- Jerome Rothenberg,
Ariel Resnikoff, Mikhl Likht
MARILYN [2015] - Amanda Ngoho Reavey
CHAPBOOK SERIES 2015: OF SYSTEMS OF
**featuring original cover art by Emma Steinkraus*
Cyclorama - Davy Knittle; The Sensitive Boy Slumber Party Manifesto
- Joseph Cuillier; Neptune Court - Anton Yakovlev; Schema - Anurak
Saelow
SAY/MIRROR [2015; 2nd edition 2016] - JP HOWARD
Moons Of Jupiter/Tales From The Schminke Tub [plays, 2014] - Steve
Danziger

CHAPBOOK SERIES 2014: BY HAND
Pull, A Ballad - Maryam Parhizkar; Can You See that Sound - Jeff Musillo
Executive Producer Chris Carter - Peter Milne Grenier;
Spooky Action at a Distance - Gregory Crosby;

CHAPBOOK SERIES 2013: WOODBLOCK
**featuring original prints from Kevin William Reed*
Strange Coherence - Bill Considine; The Sword of Things - Tony Hoffman;
Talk About Man Proof - Lancelot Runge / John Kropa; An Admission as a
Warning Against the Value of Our Conclusions -Alexis Quinlan

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DOC U MENT

/däkyəmənt/

First meant “instruction” or “evidence,” whether written or not.

noun - a piece of written, printed, or electronic matter that provides information or evidence or that serves as an official record
verb - record (something) in written, photographic, or other form
synonyms - paper - deed - record - writing - act - instrument

[Middle English, *precept*, from Old French, from Latin *documentum*, example, proof, from *docere*, to teach; see *dek-* in Indo-European roots.]

Who is responsible for the manufacture of value?

Based on what supercilious ontology have we landed in a space where we vie against other creative people in vain pursuit of the fleeting credibilities of the scarcity economy, rather than freely collaborating and sharing openly with each other in ecstatic celebration of MAKING?

While we understand and acknowledge the economic pressures and fear-mongering that threatens to dominate and crush the creative impulse, we also believe that *now more than ever*
we have the tools to relinquish agency via cooperative means,
fueled by the fires of the Open Source Movement.

Looking out across the invisible vistas of that rhizomatic parallel country we can begin to see our community beyond constraints,
in the place where intention meets
resilient, proactive, collaborative organization.

Here is a document born of that belief, sown purely of imagination and will.
When we document we assert.

We print to make real, to reify our being there.

When we do so with mindful intention to address our process,
to open our work to others, to create beauty in words in space, to respect and acknowledge the strength of the page we now hold physical,
a thing in our hand... we remind ourselves that, like Dorothy:
we had the power all along, my dears.

THE PRINT! DOCUMENT SERIES

is a project of

the trouble with bartleby

in collaboration with

the operating system

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