Title
The Huge, Blue, Jesus Glass Statue

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6bs1t39k

Author
Robbins, Joanna

Publication Date
2013

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
RIVERSIDE

The Huge, Blue,
Jesus
Glass Statue

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

in

Creative Writing and Writing for the Performing Arts

by

Joanna E. Robbins

December 2013

Thesis Committee:
Professor Matthew Zapruder, Co-Chairperson
Professor Andrew Winer, Co-Chairperson
Professor Jill Alexander Essbaum
The Thesis of Joanna E. Robbins is approved:

________________________________________

________________________________________

Committee Co-Chairperson

Committee Co-Chairperson

University of California, Riverside
for my mothers
and my daughters:
may we continue
to grow
Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>911</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception II</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step Mom</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Haunting</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Remember</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I remember II</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floating</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made From the Same Cloth</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Unseen</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hold On</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redeem</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addiction</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Changed My Mind</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorry</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorry II</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SorryIII</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorry 1+2+3</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelter</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father Catfish</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Than Once</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes We Talked</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The One Time</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remember Means</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mom on ECT</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patterns</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where Sorry Begins</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A False Appearance</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Was Crying</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repress Remorse</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Cut</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sick</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He Guesses</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You Lie</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You Lie II</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You Don’t Get to Forget</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haboob</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
disorder: lack of
stability confusion
irregular sun
I’m going to call 911!

Dad! Are you listening?
Dad isn’t much of a responder.
I guess that’s why I intervened.

You were screaming.
Running, like a child
through the house,
your arms in the air.
You’d been lying

in your California Queen
for months with the curtains drawn
around the mattress, like you,
yourself, a California Queen.

You. A child
You. A little girl.
You. A raging bitch.

You grabbed the crystal ashtray,
hucked it at Dad’s head
but missed.

Then, whatever was in reach.
The portable phones.
The camera on the counter.
The salt. The pepper.
The sugar jars.

You think you’re going to take me away?!  
You think you can send me back?  
You want to get a divorce?  
I’m crazy? You think you’ve seen crazy?

One, by one,
out came the plates
like Frisbees.

Then, teacups,
you threw
at the ground.
Dad spent years, Mom,
waiting for you to be done.
I called 911 when you went for the pills.
By the time they arrived you were foaming
at the mouth.

I held your hands
until you were gone.
bare foot to ember
heel to glass
leaves tiptoe imprints in grass
Perception

For hours, as a kid, I’d hide in the bathroom with the door locked, drawing the images I saw in the textures of the cream walls. They would move and change for me. A snake would become a branch that became a horse with leaping legs. The face of a man might later be a woman. What always left me in awe, and in some way always brought me back, was how things disappeared.
Perception II

It’s documented
in my childhood files
of yellow paper sketches.

Right there. See?

A rooted tree. A bird.
A sun. On that day.
Once.

Age changes us.
Eyesight becomes worse.
We no longer
fill in the gaps.

We just see blurs
of empty space.
later
things always
look different.
When I was five
I wrote you a note:
“If I could choose
my mom,
I’d choose you.”
I meant it.
Step Mom

You taught me
how to plant flowers
in the ground,
to grow life
from dirt
not seeds.

That would take too long, you said.
And you never know if they’ll make it.

We grew
from sprouted stems.

I’d pop them out
of the black plastic tray
and you’d show me how
to pack the soil
around the roots.

You were good
at making things feel
like they belonged together.
The Haunting

I’ve made an appointment with the priests.

Two of them came to see us
in the full black garb.
One, wore a coat
that hung to his knees.

They came in to our living room.
You sent us kids out to the garage
so they could work.

What could they be doing that we didn’t do at church?
I pushed my ear against the door.
Haunted, you said. Built on an Indian burial ground.
I am the only non-Indian here. That’s
why the spirits have chosen me.

First they prayed normal.
Our Father… and so on.

Then, this:
oggallag gadong whowhoodallalma

It terrified me.
My eyes widened
and I stood still
with uncertainty. What
was going on? What is this?

I ran to the front window.
You were kneeling.
The men
in black were standing over you,
their hands

pressed onto your chest
and back. They spoke their gibber jabber
until they didn’t. Then,
they touched your forehead.

You were crying as you stood up.
They walked the length of our house
shaking smoking metal balls at the air.
Praying repetitive prayers.

Later
they drew crosses on our walls.

The illness was from the devil.
The devil was haunting our house.

There were lights
that turned themselves on
and off. In bed,
you were held down
by a spirit you couldn’t see.
I Remember

the list of undiagnosable ailments,

the prescription pill bottles always littering the nightstand.

the doctor’s manual of diseases.

Prednisone made your face fat. But morphine is what made you not recognize yourself.

You passed out in Nordstrom’s long enough to be locked in after hours. The lights were out and nobody was left in the building. But you.

I don’t even know how that happens.

I remember when you rubbed toothpaste all over your face and body. In the morning you were unaware.

I remember your drivers license. When you marked your eyes as RED And wrote down BLUE for your hair. I had to fix your application.

Do you remember the time you rammed six cars in the parking lot of your shrink? You went inside screaming.

There have been accidents, that you don’t remember.
Two years in a row on Dad’s birthday.
The last, you left
the crashed Cadillac at the scene
and hitched a ride home.

Dad got the call,
found the car—
there was no sign of you.
I Remember II

I remember
when you made chicken
and dumplings and forgot
to cook the chicken.

We all sat down
to dinner and it wasn’t
until we were at the table
that you realized,

*Oops, I forgot
the chicken!* So,
we ate dumplings.
a bird isn’t born
wretched that he cannot swim.
he knows no better
Preparation: the action or process of making something ready for use.

Sift flour, baking powder, and salt together; add liquid and mix to make a batter that can be dropped from a spoon. Drop onto boiling stew. Cover and cook for 10 to 15 minutes, depending on size of dumplings.
Floating

You said
*Come on girls, get on the boat!*,
shuffling my sister and I on to the steps
leading to the houseboat we rented
for the summer at the Colorado River.

I must have been seven.

You bought my sister and me matching red suits.
They had thin white stripes with crop cut T-shirts
that went over the suit. There are photos
from that trip with us posing together,
my sister and I with our hips popped out
like we were models.

When the sun went down,
I was certain
we were floating away.
Every night I woke you
crying.

You’d show me the anchor,
*Look, right there is the chain*
*Honey, we are safe.*

I’d stair at the bottomless abyss
watching for any kind of movement.
But because the water was rippling overtop,
I could never be sure
where the true ground was.
does the tadpole know
he will cultivate his own limbs
breathe and hop? breathe. hop.
Made From the Same Cloth

You,
In your preteen’s bathing suit,
with pubic hair
going awry. And you
didn’t seem to know. Or care.

At your son’s house
all five girls were there
in the Jacuzzi.
You were high
on Morphine, Mom,
and wore the swimsuit
of a little girl.
You were unkept
And on display.
And everyone looked away.
The Unseen

I think back to my childhood, to the God who spoke from the plastic loaf of bread sitting on our kitchen table. Every morning we read from a different slice, scriptures, words, letters, combined together to make up meanings for this life we were living. I prayed for God to save you, Mom. To restore us to some-kind of a normal family.

You taught us that God gave us trials and tribulations to overcome in order to build our character. That somehow your illnesses were in fact creating some kind of silver lining I had yet to see.

Do you remember when I said I saw Jesus in the mirror of our living room? We were having a family Bible study, and in the mirror I saw the outline of a body. I swear this really happened! Maybe, it was an angel without wings. Or, maybe, Mom, the devil.
Hold On

Get out of my house. Get out of my house!
You were dragging my laundry basket out of my room.
I grabbed the other side. It’s like a tug of war
with you, Mom. It’s always like a tug of war.

Don’t think you can take me?
I’m an old woman compared to you.
Come on, you said, and shoved the hamper back at me.

I stumbled. Wouldn’t fight you.
Get out, you bitch—it’s not your house—get out!

Our Christmas trees used to be so big
that they reached the second floor ceiling
in the entry way. Dad would drag it in

and I’d pretend to help. When we built this house,
he let me lay the tile and smooth the grout.
Get out! Get out!

I dropped the basket. Grabbed the phone.
You threw my clothes. Call your Daddy?
Go ahead!

I did.
It’s not my home.
You’re not my mom.
Redeem

When you were sick
in bed, you loved
your pretty things.

You’d take your jewelry,
spill it out
and surround your sleep
in diamonds and gold.

Once after shopping
you announced I saved
800 dollars today.

Later, I found a huge,
blue, glass statue of Jesus
stuffed in the trunk of your car.

But that wasn’t the worst of it.
The 2 carat diamond ring
you bought with our grocery money?
That was the year

Dad got our food on delivery
from some mass production warehouse.
A case of ketchup. Half a cow.
Two gallon jugs of pancake mix.
No expiration date.
Addiction

It started with pills.
“Accidents,”
that led to ER visits,
that eventually became,
*Call the hospital for me honey,
see if the compassionate
doctors are in.*

If that didn’t work,
you’d throw yourself
down the stairs,
injure an arm,
bruise a tailbone,
crash a car. And when

that still wasn’t enough,
the pain clinic
installed a morphine pump
inside your gut.

Every hour, on the hour,
it dripped, Mom,
morphine, into your spine,
not different than the kind
of treatment a cancer patient
would receive.

You would go in once a month
for a refill. It was that easy.
For years.
Pills and the pump.
Once, you told me
you weren’t doing the pills anymore

and within minutes
while still talking to me
you were dislodging
a bottle of morphine
from the inside
of the fireplace.

I don’t think you were trying
to pull off anything,
other than survival.
I don’t think you remembered
telling me two minutes prior
that you were off the pills.
That’s one of the things it does,
erases memories.
A duck’s quack cannot echo
A duck’s quack cannot echo
A duck’s quack cannot echo
I Changed My Mind

They say that’s my prerogative
as a woman,
to dig through the trash
to find the candy
that I thought I didn’t want
or more realistically
didn’t need
because my diet starts today,
no, now tomorrow,

right after I eat
this box of Peeps—
hot pink bunnies
covered in sugar
with little brown dots
for eyes, and maybe
a few more M&M’s

because they taste good
and somehow
they feel good.

Late at night,
I sit alone
holding one less face

where a family used to be,
each bunny in row, attached at the hip,

like we used to be,
before you left
before I told you to go—

Get out,
Get the fuck out,
I believe were the words I used.

But nights like tonight
when digging through the trash
is an option,

I think about you.
when a tree is cold
it grows more leaves.
Sorry I

He hit the phone
out of my hand.

Choked me
while smashing my face
in to a wall

I threatened to run
to the neighbors
for help. But

I didn’t leave.
Sorry 2

He peed on me in bed,
Held me down,
Both hands around my wrists,
And fucked me while I cried.
Yelling.

*You think I like this?*
*You think this is good for me*
*when you look like that?*
dogs can see better when the light is low
Two Babies. Two Baby Daddies. (*Sorry 3*)

*Open the door!* *You fucking bitch.*
*Last night you sucked my dick, *
*Now you won’t even talk to me?! *
*Fuck you, slut!*

I’m not sure how this happened.
**Sorry**
1. Feeling or expressing sympathy, pity, or regret.
2. Worthless or inferior; paltry.
3. Causing sorrow, grief, or misfortune; grievous.
I Hid in My Daughter’s Room (*Sorry 1+2+3*)

He came to the window yelling.  
I didn’t think he could see.  
There were pink curtains.

But then he punched through the glass.  
He punched the window and shattered it.

Then, he left.

A third police officer caught him  
while the first two officers  
were still at my house  
taking my statement.

The call came in  
over their walkie talkies.  
His hand was bleeding.  
He needed to go to the hospital  
before they would book him.

I filed a restraining order.  
I never showed up to court.
keep a goldfish in the dark
and he will turn white
Shelter

Dad built us that house.
There.
On the top of the hill.
With his own hands.

Always been a hard worker. Dedicated
and loyal. Loves taking care of us.
Makes him proud. Do you remember

when he surprised you with your first new car?
The maroon four-door Chrysler with velvety seats.
He came home and parked it out front.
It was filled with balloons.

He liked that kind of stuff. He still takes
all the girls prom dress shopping.
It’s tradition.

We bought mine
on Rodeo Drive.

It was an all-day excursion.
A beautifully green,
floor-length fitted dress.
I was a princess.

Did you
want to be a princess, Mom?

To be rescued
from your tower?

To be rescued
from yourself?
Father Catfish

I read somewhere that father catfish keep eggs in their mouths until they are ready to hatch, depriving themselves of food, sometimes for several weeks.

I couldn’t help but remember all those catfish I caught with my own father,

how their lungs protruded as I wheeled them in.

How disgusted I was.

I misunderstood.
More than Once

I didn’t bring people home in high school, Mom, because I was embarrassed.

When Gina brought her boyfriend home you O.D.’d on prescription pills.

They had to drive you to the ER to get your stomach pumped, the three of you shoulder to shoulder,

in her boyfriend’s bench-seat pick-up truck.

These things happened.

They happened so often that when you would run to your room to take another bottle of pills,

Dad would just sit

at the table and drink his coffee. He’d finish his meal before rising to load you up and over his shoulder like it was just another day at work.

Sometimes you sat in your room called the whole family to tell them you’d be dying soon.

Sometimes I think Dad was waiting for you to die.

Sometimes I think he even hoped you might. Mom, we all did.
Sometimes We Talked

about how maybe
we should help
you die.

Horrible,
but it’s true.

We discussed
grinding pills
into your food

but we never got past
the point
of the conversation itself.
The One Time

I did
bring someone home
we had to take you
to the hospital too.

I heard the garage door open.
I looked out the window,
saw you half-way up
the long driveway.

You were still sitting in your big Cadillac.
The door was open.
Your legs were turned out,
heels on the cement.

You slurred, Park my car, Jo.

You didn’t even say hello.

Your paper bag had a wine bottle in it.
You slung your Channel purse over your shoulder

and tried to stand up.
You faltered a little,

then walked on,
the motor still running.

I was still that child on egg shells, Mom.

You made me run upstairs.
You were wearing a neck brace.

You opened bottle after bottle, taking pills
with whatever was in the glass.

The double-sized bottle of wine
was almost empty.

You complained about pain. In your back.
Your neck. Something was wrong. “Call
the hospital. Ask which doctors are on tonight.”

I knew what to do.
I’d done this before.

The “compassionate” doctors weren’t there.
“The pain! The pain!” A few more pills.

Your hands shook too much
to open the bottles.

My new boyfriend was with me,
standing against the wall.
I forgot to introduce him.
I forgot he was there.

In your recliner, you debated what to do.
I hovered and waited for your direction.

“The hospital,”
you said. “I need to go.”

And so, with my boyfriend at the wheel of your Cadillac,
we drove to the hospital so you could plead for more.

In the waiting room I welcomed him to the family.

We ordered pizza. Dad showed up.

They gave you a shot.
You sat down to join us,
opened your purse
and popped two more pills.
a cockroach can stay alive for days without its head
Remember means to bring to mind or think of again, but you have to know it happened in the first place to remember it at a later time.

My oldest daughter was six the year you finally got off the morphine, Mom, the year Dad finally left you, for eight months, just after you walked into the bank, high, and withdrew $30,000 from Dad’s business account.

Somehow you always pulled a paycheck from the business for a job you never did. Ironically, on paper, you were the Treasurer.

You said you don’t remember what you did with the money.

You said you don’t remember a lot.

My oldest daughter was seven on the first Christmas that you remembered her being there. But we had been home every year for Christmas, Mom.

My oldest daughter was six the year you finally checked yourself into a detox unit, and finally had the morphine pump removed.

That same year, when my oldest daughter was six, you were finally diagnosed Bipolar.
disorder: lack of
stability confusion
irregular sun
Mom on ECT

One more treatment and I’ll be happy.

I don’t even know why I am doing this-
   What?
Z-o-m-b-i-e?
   Your father says I’m like a z-o-m-b-i-e.

Emily’s mom works at a hotel in San Diego. I’m gonna talk to her. I’ll find her and see what she thinks.

Are you going to church?

   I don’t even know if I’m in touch with reality.

Cuz life gets pretty hairy out there.

I wanna go see Gary.
I could call Gary tomorrow.
What? It’s a holiday?
   Shepard’s class

Who was a Shepard?
   Honey, was Jesus a sheperd?

…that watched over the flock

   Cuz I’ve been a Christian a long time.

Not gonna do AA anymore
I’ve done all I can do.
Patterns

When the air of uncomfortability overtook the space of our home, it was always time to pack. Really, what I mean is, it was time for me or Dad to pack whatever basic necessities you would need for an extended stay. Which in this case could be tricky because dental floss could be used as a weapon, and lipstick, well, I still don’t know what lipstick can be. But it can’t be brought in, passed the double doors that lead to what you called the lock-down. The long hallway that houses the crazies behind peek-a-boo windows that reminded me of the Jack in the Box toy— and that fear, I held as a kid— waiting for it to pop.

I cranked into each turn knowing what eventually was coming, holding my breath with my teeth clinched in preparation for that moment that inevitably made me feel bad. And then, I’d do it again.
Where Sorry Begins

Let’s get up in the night, he said,
Make popcorn. Watch a movie.

I had a bed
on the floor
in Grandma’s room,
but she was old, and
hard of hearing when awake.

Don’t tell Grandma, said Uncle Jim
It was 2AM when I woke up.
(Or maybe he came in and got me?)

The TV was fuzz in the living room.
Black-white squares hummed the dark.

You missed the movie!
I’m about to go to bed!

I was sad. He ate all the popcorn by himself.
I remember I wanted to look in the trash.

He said,

come here

then grabbed my hand.
I stepped into his bedroom, reluctantly.

Uncle Jim wore sweatpants.
His hairy chest was bare.

Will you give me a massage?
My back hurts.

He lay on the floor by the bed,
his head partway out the door,
I sat on his butt and smeared lotion
in circles with my soft hands, child hands.
I used too much.
I dumped it like ketchup.
My turn, he said.
I want to give you one.
Mom, I checked out.

I might have been already naked.  
I might have been sitting on him with bare legs.

He was rubbing my body.  
Spreading man hands  
down the bare of my back  
and in-to my ass. My ass!  
He kept pulling at it,  
yanking the cheeks apart.  
His thumbs, grazed  
my center.

Mom, I said nothing.  

It’s just the human body.

As if to comfort me.  
Over and over and over and over and over and over.

It’s just the human body just human body just the human human body body just

As if to comfort me he talked about God  
And Adam and Eve and maybe he quoted Bible verses.

It’s the devil who made us self-conscious not God

He stood over me, his hands on the inner-edge  
of both his hipbones, inside his grey pants  
with the elastic waist  
under which he wore nothing.

I had never seen pubic hair until that moment.  
Black and everywhere and curly.

The uncertainty became certain.

He set me on his knee.  
He knelt the way a man would kneel.  

you know I love you don’t you?
Mom, I just nodded.

\[ I \text{ want to be naked together.} \]
\[ I \text{ want to do what naked people do together.} \]

But I just wanted to go to bed.

“Uncle Jim, I’m tired.”
Those were the only words I remember.
The only thing I could softly squeak.
I sat on his knee. “I’m tired.”

He hugged me again and again and again and again.

\[ you \text{ know that I love you don’t you?} \]

He let me put my clothes back on as he watched.
only half of a dolphin’s brain sleeps at a time. The awake half makes the dolphin come up for air.
A False Appearance

You came at two pm
I was in Grandma’s room
with the door shut
pretending to be asleep
pretending to be asleep
pretending to be asleep

when you opened the door
I darted to the driveway
climbed in your car
and waited

Grandma and Uncle Jim
me in the car
you on the doorstep
you guys were laughing
I couldn’t hear
but you were laughing
I Was Crying

Gina said, “He gives me the creeps. I don’t like him.”
It was Uncle Jim. Your brother, Mom.
There was talk downstairs
about him coming for dinner.
In our brand new house.
Gina and I were sitting on the top of the stairs
folding laundry. A year passed
before we spoke of him after that.
Repress Remorse

The guilt, for you,  
a demon  
that chased you  
in the dark.  
You don’t remember  
telling me,  
but you did.

*I thought Daddy  
would leave me  
if he found out.*

You kept  
a conscious  
secret.

To not know.  
To not know.  
To know.  
To not know.  
Not know  
Knot. No.  
No.
I Cut

Dad pressed charges. A social worker came to the house. She was young. And pretty.

She was sitting on the edge of the couch when I came into the living room.

I sat in the furthest chair and slouched in a ball. My hands were in my lap.

She handed me cloth dolls with real clothes.

I laid the girl on the pillow (she was asleep). The boy doll I undressed. The dolls had people parts.

I put him over her and cut the pillow with my hands

Into the middle
and back out.
Into the middle
and back out.
Into the middle
and back out.

I made a crease. It was—like that? The social worker asked. I shrugged. I guess.
Sick

*go to your happy place*

Instantly I’m a child
in a pink night gown, in a hospital,
sick with pneumonia.
You and Dad beside me.

You are “fuzzing” my arm.
You have acrylic nails
that make music
against hard surfaces.

I love
when you touch
your fake
French tips
to my skin.

I love. When?
You touch.

I love. When?
You’re fake.

I love. When?
My skin.
When?
When?
When?
if you cut off a snail’s eye,
it will grow a new one.
He Guesses

On the phone I asked you and Dad separately,
“Why would you have left me there
if you knew he had already been to jail?”

Dad fumbled for speech. Stuttered.
Told me to ask you. He said,
“I had never heard that.” He said,
“I only met him a couple times.
He came over and helped put stone up.
But I don’t ask a lot of questions.”

He said, “I didn’t even know him.”
He guesses he came back from ‘Nam weird.
That’s what he heard anyway.
You Lie

You admitted you knew
he had been to jail.

_I didn’t know what for, Joanna._
_An d he wasn’t there very long._

Later, you took it back,
claimed you didn’t know
he had ever been in jail.

_Honey, God, I don’t know._
_It was so long ago, but you weren’t little._

I was in third grade.

_I have no idea, Jo, but it was before_
_I got bad on morphine. Was I—_
_bad on morphine? I don’t think I was._

You said you never went to your mother’s house anymore...

_He took care of mom..._

_And— I took care of you._
II

You told me
I stayed awake
You told me
I didn’t sleep
You told me
He tricked me
There wasn’t
a movie
And I wasn’t
Sneaky
And I’m not
To blame

And I do not
Need to feel
Ashamed
It Was Still a Secret

even after I told my sister

even after I told the social worker who came to our house

even after the courts locked him behind bars

even after the summer of my nightmares, the ones I don’t remember though my real mother tells me I had them

even after I screamed in the night and woke up crying

even after I couldn’t say what I was dreaming just that I was scared

even after my real mother phoned you and Dad

even after you blamed her for my “irrational” fears

her lifestyle

her partner

anything—right?

as long as it wasn’t you.
You Don’t Get to Forget

Say Uncle,
give in,
put out
scraps for the dog,
meat on the bone
bone on the meat,
pull at the ass

Uncle, one more time,
I’m tired
I’m numb,
I’m not sure
what’s being done,

go away,
go to jail,
come back,
go again,
come back
born, you say, again,

Sing-song sing-song
Jesus oh Jesus
the blood
of oh Jesus

You cannot dilute
the red
of my skin, this sin
this sin this sin,

Oh no, you cannot
wash me away,
you hear me,
you stay,

day, after day
year after year,
you with me

you stay, you stay
you stay
Jesus oh Jesus
the blood
of oh Jesus

You cannot dilute
the red
of my skin, this sin
this sin this sin,

lives in, lives in,
lives in,
this bed, this house,
this head of mine,

yes you
you cannot
wash me away
you hear me,

I stay,
day, after day
year after year,
Oh me with you
I stay, I stay
I stay. I stay,
I stay, I stay,
I stay.
deer cause more human deaths than any other species.
Acceptance

My freest, most memorable moments came in the open spaces of hills shaded by Eucalyptus trees. Before the idea of possession and ownership was presented as an option, this land, in my single-digit years, was a playground to climb, to dig, to explore beneath the surface and find sometimes answers, but more often, questions - in what seemed to be the obvious purpose. Oh, to be a child again!

It never occurred to me that someone could own dirt, that someone could own trees and leaves. That was like saying someone owned the wind.

Then the land was sectioned off and plotted for homes. Tractors moved in, cleared the foundation, leaving lifeless, flat dirt squares and a group of outraged kids behind.

We wrote messages with sticks in the ground, warnings that the hills were haunted. When that didn’t work we took to chiseling at the edge of the cliff with rocks, thinking somehow this would shorten their lot, thus, I guess, not permitting them enough space to build whatever fancy home they had envisioned on what we called, “our cliffs.” That too, went unnoticed and the homes went up, marking for the first time in my life, notable boundaries I had no control over.
Haboob

Five
big-winged
black birds
circle
something dead
I can’t
yet see.

The cliff
in it’s boastful
red standstill
seems more
than accepting
of the lack
of life here.

The blink
of an eye.
A sky
turns
black.

Armageddon
dust rolls
wipe
my path.

I’m putting masks
on my daughters
and taping doors
shut, but
nothing

I can do
stops us
from breathing.