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## **“Fragrantasia: 24 Ekphrastic Poems about Scent”**

Maeve Rigney  
*Mississippi State University*

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# “Fragrantasia: 24 Ekphrastic Poems about Scent”

By  
Maeve Rigney

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Catherine Pierce  
Co-Director of Creative Writing  
English  
(Director of Thesis)

---

Becky Hagenston  
Professor  
English  
(Committee Member)

---

Donald Schaffer  
Associate Professor, Director of African American Studies, & Presidential Scholars Mentor  
English  
(Shackouls Honors College Representative)



Fragrantasia: 24  
Ekphrastic Poems  
About Scent

Maeve Rigney

## **Acknowledgements**

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## Introduction

Scent is omnipresent, and yet we usually lack the language to describe it. Perfume essayist Alyssa Harad states, “[S]cent itself is a language—one we are always trying, however imperfectly, to translate” (*The Book of Scented Things* xvii). All too often, we find the language of scent impossible to verbalize. We try and fail to describe our grandmother’s favorite perfume, the ozone of a cold night, or the chemical stench in an apartment hallway. In my thesis, *Fragrantasia*, I hope to translate the language of scent through poetry. My thesis puts fragrances into words and uses the ekphrastic form to augment the existing artistic value of specific fragrances. It also includes prose poems that explore the role that fragrance plays in memory. This introduction will lay some theoretical groundwork for the project and answer a few key questions: What role does scent play in our lives?; What language do we use to describe perfume?; and, Is perfume an art? Then, I will explore the connections between fragrance and poetry. Finally, I will describe *Fragrantasia*’s structure, goals, and recurring themes and contextualize my project within the field of existing poetic work.

Scent is all around us. On any ordinary day, we encounter it: the wilt of bouquets at a grocery store, the plastic of fresh diapers, the quietness of wet concrete, the steam of apple-cinnamon oatmeal, the acrid curl of a used cigarette. We are constantly surrounded by scent. Though we may not be able to consciously register the influence of scent, scent is subconsciously very special to us. Our sense of smell is incredibly powerful; Bushdid et al. published a study in *Science* that tested whether humans could discriminate between varying combinations of 128 different odorous molecules. The study estimated that humans can differentiate between over one trillion different scent combinations, making smell our most discerning sense (Bushdid et al. 2014). Our sense of smell is also our oldest sense—before we

could see, hear, or touch, we could smell. The part of the brain that processes scent, called the “olfactory bulb,” is located right next to the hippocampus, which is responsible for processing our memories. Researchers argue that this is why smell can trigger such powerful memories, why the smell of gingerbread reminds us of Christmas and the smell of an ex-lover’s perfume can summon a sense of sad nostalgia (Stafford 2012).

Our sense of smell’s intrinsic connection to memory is part of the reason why scent can provoke such strong reactions in us. However, sometimes we react strongly to scents we have never smelled before. For example, you might feel a stab of hunger when you smell a foreign dessert, or you may wrinkle your nose in disgust after smelling the rotting flesh of a large, unknown fruit. We often smell things before we can name them or know them in any other way. Smell can entice us into trying new foods and warn us about the presence of dangerous chemicals (Johns Hopkins Medicine, “Smell and Taste Disorders”). In this way, smell becomes a language with which we interpret the world. Our sense of smell not only provokes strong reactions tied to memory, but also allows us to explore the unknown.

Scent can also provoke physiological and emotional responses. For example, smelling food when you are hungry can lead to salivation and the production of insulin (Lee and Linden 1992). Pleasant or novel scents can also decrease heart rate, which signals relaxation (Fletcher and Wilson 2001). Scents can inspire fear as well as relaxation; in 1997, a study measured participants’ physiological reactions to unpleasant odors and found that they can trigger the fight or flight response (Alaoui-Ishmaili et. al 1997). Scent can also emotionally charge our memories. A review of scientific literature on scent finds that scent makes memories more emotional and evocative than other sensory stimuli (Herz 2016).

Our sense of smell does three very important things: it enshrines memories, acts as a language to help us decode the unknown, and provokes strong emotions. Perfumers harness our sense of smell's unique role in memory, perception, and emotion when they create a fragrance. A perfume can help us remember important events in our lives and can even emotionally charge those memories. Beyond that, though, perfume also elicits strong emotional reactions on its own. Many perfumers create scents with the desire to provoke an image or emotional reaction in the wearer. In short, perfumers are creating art when they create a fragrance, and scent is a medium for that art.

This particular art is based in science, and a grounding in that science and its taxonomies is crucial in understanding the artistic value of fragrance. Fragrance creation is a streamlined, scientific process. Fragrances are made of aroma chemicals, which are chemicals that have an odor (Wilson-Brown et al. 6). Perfumers dilute and mix aroma chemicals to form *notes*. According to Lucky Scent, a popular niche perfume retailer's Glossary of Fragrance Terms, notes are "a single element of a fragrance, the building block level of a scent" (Lucky Scent). Notes often correlate to smells found in nature, like cinnamon and rose. However, a perfume can also have "fantasy notes," notes that do not exist in nature, like amber and cotton candy. Oftentimes, a singular note is made up of many different aroma chemicals. A perfumer combines aroma chemicals in the same way that a painter would mix paint. A note can be compared to an element of the finished painting; it can be a tiny shrub in the background or a woman carrying a parasol in the painting's center. A perfumer can also mix aroma chemicals to form *accords*. While notes usually correspond to individual objects, an accord represents a perfume's general atmosphere. Accords can be objects, like vanilla or milk. However, accords can also be impressions of more abstract feelings like the discovery of a four-leaf clover or the waning

blueness of twilight (Wilson-Brown et al. 7). If a fragrance were a painting, an accord would describe the painting's atmosphere and technique. An accord can describe a painting's coloration, or whether it is pointillist or surrealist. Accords describe a fragrance's atmosphere, while notes describe the basic building blocks of a fragrance.

Like poems, fragrances often have a defined structure. Most fragrances have top, middle, and bottom notes. Aroma chemicals only retain scent on the skin or a testing strip for a certain amount of time. Some notes, like citrus and green notes, fade away into a fragrance's background in the first half hour. These notes are called "*top notes*"; they are what you smell when you first spray a fragrance. After the top notes fade away, a fragrance's character will be defined by its *middle notes*, which last from one to three hours. Middle notes can be heavy spices, like nutmeg, or florals, like jasmine. Around the four-hour mark, the *base notes* will dominate the fragrance. Base notes sit close to the skin and can last as long as a few weeks. Common base notes include patchouli, woods, musks, and resins (Wilson-Brown et al. 3).

Fragrances can be grouped into "fragrance families," which describe general groupings of scent notes. There are four main fragrance families that can categorize fragrances (Wilson-Brown et al. 5). First, there are floral fragrances, which chiefly rely on either single floral notes or a floral "bouquet." Second, there is the fresh fragrance family, which includes many other subfamilies, like green, aquatic, citrus, and fruity (4). There are also woody fragrances, which evoke "wood, moss, dirt, and damp leaves" (5). The fourth and final main fragrance category is oriental. An outdated and colonialist term, the term "oriental" in the fragrance world refers to opulent, rich, sweet, and spicy fragrances (Matlin; Wilson-Brown et al. 4). Oriental fragrances may include notes of resins, cloves, and incense (4). One fifth fragrance family is also worth mentioning: gourmand. An increasingly popular fragrance category, gourmand fragrances are



edible and dessert-like. A gourmand fragrance may smell of cake, chocolate, or licorice (5). My thesis contains poems about fragrances from all five of these families.

Knowing about notes, accords, and the differences between fragrance families is crucially important to understanding this thesis. Each poem in my thesis is based on a specific fragrance. I know that my readers will probably not have access to all of the fragrances I mention. Knowing about different notes, accords, and families can help the reader understand a fragrance without having smelled it. This thesis includes a glossary of all the fragrances I wrote about. The glossary lists each fragrance's notes, accords, and family/ies. My hope is that the glossary will allow readers who may not have access to these individual fragrances to understand what each fragrance is meant to smell like.

Fragrance creation, though, is not only a science; it is also an art. It is hard to "prove" that fragrance is an art because there is no universally accepted definition of art. However, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* gives several foundational definitions of art from philosophers Plato, Kant, and Hegel that are still used today. From these definitions, a few common criteria emerge (Adajian 2018).

According to Plato's *Republic*, art is supposed to be an imitation of that which exists in real life (Plato 73). Plato holds that pieces of art are supposed to be metaphysical representations of physical objects, and these physical objects are a representation of an unchanging truth. Fragrance is art according to this definition because it is often an imitation of what exists in the physical world. Fragrances are advertised as smelling of physical objects like cotton candy and cashmere. However, fragrance creators do not use cotton candy or cashmere as ingredients. Instead, aroma chemicals are fragrance's ingredients, chemicals synthesized in a lab that are meant to imitate the smells of real objects. The odor of cotton candy is made using the aroma

chemical ethyl maltol, and the odor of cashmere is often created using the aroma chemical cashmeran. In this way fragrance “notes” are often a fantasy: an advertisement of an imitation. Additionally, fragrances imitate reality through their names and bottle designs. An example of this would be Dior *Hypnotic Poison*, an almond-vanilla gourmand housed in a bottle that looks like a fantastical apple. The name *Hypnotic Poison* and the apple bottle design evoke the fairy tale Snow White, where a young princess is fed a poison apple by an evil witch jealous of her beauty. In this way, fragrance is not only an imitation of physical objects, but it imitates stories and elements of culture as well.

Plato’s definition of art is often criticized because it characterizes art as a danger which often misrepresents the truth (Grant 2012). However, fragrance holds up to other definitions of art as well. Philosopher Immanuel Kant describes art as “a kind of representation that is purposive in itself and, though without an end, nevertheless promotes the cultivation of the mental powers for sociable communication” (Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, Guyer Translation, section 44, 46). The second part of this definition—the idea that art promotes sociable communication—is particularly important. Art, like theatre, poetry, and paintings, prompts analysis and conversation. Fragrance does this as well, as evidenced by the online review site *Fragrantica*. *Fragrantica*, an online site for perfume reviews and analysis, has almost 700,000 members, over 1 million reviews, discussion boards, and a blog where dedicated experts analyze fragrance trends and composition. Many of *Fragrantica*’s reviews focus on a fragrance’s artistic composition and incorporate creatively written prose. Take, for example, a review of Serge Lutens’ Five o Clock au Gingembre, where Jacobean Lily calls the fragrance “an olfactory shaft of light banishing shadows and sending the blues straight to hell. Honeyed ginger tea with a dash of bergamot and a delicate infusion of spice and cedar in

a translucent amber cup” (Fragrantica “Five o Clock au Gingembre,” Jacobean Lily).

*Fragrantica* is rife with reviews, blog posts, and discussions that analyze fragrance, indicating that fragrance fulfills Kant’s definition of art because it promotes “sociable communication.”

The final definition, from Hegel, states that art contains a sense of beauty (Hegel, Lectures, [1886, 4]). Are fragrances beautiful? Do they have aesthetic value? In *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Ghiara Brozzo argues that perfumes have inherent aesthetic value and that our appreciation of perfumes would not be complete without acknowledging them as works of art (Brozzo Abstract). According to Chandler Burr, olfactory curator for New York’s Museum of Art and Design, fragrance is an art form because it “[elicits] emotion, thought, and some reaction” (Qureshi 2014). The very fact that New York’s Museum of Art and Design has an olfactory curator says something about scent’s significance in the art world. Biophysicist Luca Turin, in his book *The Secret of Scent*, said that perfume is art “if one defines art as any craft that is both difficult and beautiful,” which suggests that fragrance does have aesthetic significance (Turin 16). Additionally, fragrances are a candidate for aesthetic appreciation because they have physical effects on the human body. New and pleasant scents can slow down heart rate, which means that fragrance has an emotional effect that can be objectively measured (Fletcher and Wilson 2001). Fragrance is not only an art form because part of society considers it an art form, but because it has inherent aesthetic significance.

Art forms often interact with each other; for example, music can play in the background of a movie. Fragrance interacts with other art forms as well, one of which is poetry. Poetry and perfume are very similar and have a complex relationship. Perfume has long been compared to poetry. Luca Turin, a prominent figure in the fragrance world, wrote that individual aroma chemicals are like words, and that a perfume combines these “words” into a “chemical poem”

(Turin 36). Both perfumes and poems are supposed to be *surprising*. Poetry often surprises by using evocative language, while fragrance often surprises by shifting throughout the day. A fragrance may initially be characterized by its top notes, smelling of blackberries and pears. However, after thirty minutes, the same fragrance can drastically change character, reaching its middle notes, smelling of tuberose and Sambac jasmine. Then, after three hours, the fragrance changes character again to smell of amber and resins in a “drydown” of base notes that linger close to the skin.

Poetry and fragrance are similar in other ways. For example, you can have a different experience each time you read a poem and wear a fragrance. Every time you read a poem, you can discover a line’s hidden meaning or an image’s secret intricacies. Similarly, Luca Turin says that a fragrance can smell different each time you come back to it (36). In *The Book of Scented Things*, editor Jeanne Dubrow addresses the similarities between perfume and poetry: “Both perfume and poetry work on the senses to create persuasive illusions, both require craft, a study of tradition, as well as a need for innovation, and both are frequently dismissed as old-fashioned or irrelevant in contemporary society” (Dubrow x).

Fragrance and poetry have an intrinsic connection: they both are forms of art that are surprising and offer multifaceted experiences. There have been several poetry collections and projects that explore the connection between fragrance and poetry. These projects helped inform the construction of my thesis. In the next section, I will explore the current projects connecting perfume to poetry and explain how my thesis fits in with existing creative work.

### **Projects on Perfume and Poetry**

Four recent projects that focus on poetry and fragrance are *Penning Perfumes: An Anthology of Scent Inspired Poetry*, *The Book of Scented Things*, *Atomizer*, and *Volatile!*.

*Penning Perfumes: An Anthology of Scent Inspired Poetry* is an anthology of fragrance-centered poems that was released in 2012. Claire Trèvien and Odette Toilette produced this anthology as a creative collaboration between poets and perfumers where each poet received an unlabeled vial of perfume and was asked to write a poem about it. The poems include a lot of interplay between “scent and sound,” with sound being of particular importance (Trèvien 9). Many of these poems focus more on images and emotions than cohesive narratives. *The Book of Scented Things* is another anthology of fragrance-related poems, and it was edited by Jehanne Dubrow and Lindsay Lusby. Just like in *Penning Perfumes*, *The Book of Scented Things* is comprised of poems meant to describe specific fragrances. One hundred poets took part in the project, and each participating poet received a vial of unnamed fragrance. Interestingly, each fragrance was chosen to correspond to a poet’s aesthetic, voice, or writerly obsessions. The resulting poems are all different from each other. Some prioritize narrative. Others prioritize the scene, and still others prioritize sound. Another fragrance-related poetry project is called *Atomizer*, which was released by Elizabeth Powell in 2020. Unlike the previous two projects, which are anthologies, *Atomizer* is written by a singular author, and its poems are all interconnected. *Atomizer* does not focus on specific perfumes, but rather addresses how we use scent to interpret the world, including non-perfume scents (Powell 74). In addition to these three poetry projects, there was also a poetry exhibition called *Volatile!* put on by the Poetry Foundation from December 2015 to February 2016. The exhibition included a panel with scent designers and poets to discuss the interplay between scent and poetry. In *Volatile!*, curator and design historian Debra Riley Parr presented objects that evoke a connection between scent and poetry. *Volatile!* also included an exhibition that explored a narrative of a young boy who is

turned into a mythical beast through 12 different scents (“*Volatile! A Poetry and Scent Exhibition Opening*” *Poetry Foundation*).

*Penning Perfumes: An Anthology of Scent Inspired Poetry*, *The Book of Scented Things*, *Volatile!*, and *Atomizer* are all poetry projects that thoughtfully consider the intersection of perfume and poetry. I hope to add to the artistic conversation that the previous four works have started with my chapbook-length project, *Fragrantasia*. I hope that *Fragrantasia* draws from and differentiates itself from its predecessors. Being comprised mainly of ekphrastic poems, *Fragrantasia* fits into the current body of work relating poetry and fragrance; however, it also adds something new. Currently, both *The Book of Scented Things* and *Penning Perfumes: An Anthology of Scent Inspired Poetry* include poems that describe individual scents. While the editors do not call these poems ekphrastic, the poems fit under the definition of ekphrasis because they describe fragrances, which are works of art. *The Book of Scented Things* and *Penning Perfumes: An Anthology of Scent Inspired Poetry* are, from what I have found through extensive reading on the topic, the only two poetic works that include ekphrastic poems about fragrance. However, both are anthologies with lots of contributing authors, and the poems are not interconnected. *Fragrantasia* is a unified, single-author work comprised of ekphrastic poems about fragrance. Thus, it can have consistent themes, like themes of female empowerment and the fantastical. Additionally, unlike the anthologies, my work can have overarching narrative. With my prose poems, I tried to develop my own personal stories into a singular overarching narrative that stretches throughout the work. *Fragrantasia* builds on the work of others by using the form of ekphrasis to describe fragrance. However, it also adds something new by using ekphrastic fragrance-related poems to build a cohesive chapbook with consistent themes and overarching narratives.

My primary goal in writing *Fragrantasia* is to translate perfume into language. Perfume essayist Alyssa Harad notes that we do not often have a cultural vocabulary to describe scent like we do for other senses. For example, we can describe sandpaper as *rough*, and we can say that a voice has *vibrato*, and we can say that a chocolate-dipped pretzel tastes *sweet* or *salty*. But there is no common lexicon to describe a beautiful smell. Harad states that scent “both resists and inspires language” (*The Book of Scented Things* xv). Scent lacks a common cultural vocabulary, and this both challenges and stirs the creativity of those who wish to write about it. The brilliant thing about poetry is that poetry describes the indescribable. Poetry can create a vocabulary to describe fragrance where none exists. My poems’ sounds and images serve as a vocabulary to describe the fragrances that I write about.

I decided that writing poems about fragrance as a general art form seemed too abstract and impersonal; instead, I chose to write ekphrastic poems describing individual fragrances. According to *The Poetry Foundation*, an ekphrastic poem is a “vivid description of a scene, or, more commonly, a work of art.” Ekphrastic poems expand on and complement an original work of art (“Glossary of Poetic Terms” Poetry Foundation). Though the term “ekphrasis” is usually applied to poems about visual art, nothing about the definition limits the term in this way. I believe that not only can a fragrance poem be considered ekphrastic, but that the ekphrastic poetic form can be more effective when it is used for fragrance than when it is used for visual art. Observers of visual art can usually describe the piece of art, at least in a direct and literal way. Perhaps the piece of art depicts a woman surrounded by cherubs. Or maybe it is a white canvas covered in dripping purple circles. Either way, the audience can physically see the piece of art and describe what is going on a basic level. However, people often do not know how to describe perfumes when they smell them. I remember shoving perfume test strips into my father’s hands,

begging him to smell them and tell me his thoughts. Always, the answer was the same: “It smells like perfume.” Sometimes he would use additional words: “It smells sweet. Flowery. Fresh.” People who are not professionally trained cannot distinguish fragrance notes through their nose alone. Even dedicated hobbyists lack the language to describe the individual chemical components of a fragrance. With visual art, observers can distinguish components of the completed piece: a woman in the foreground, a stippled brush stroke, the color red. However, since fragrances are such complex chemical creations, it is nearly impossible for a casual observer to parse the individual components of the whole and analyze them. As a result, while people who view visual art often know what the art is depicting, people who smell fragrances are often left at a loss for words. This makes fragrance the perfect medium for ekphrasis. The poet’s job is to provide words where there are none, and fragrance creates a situation where there are no words. Through the form of ekphrasis, I use sound, images, and narrative to describe the emotions evoked by a particular fragrance and bring words to a wordless situation.

The 19 ekphrastic poems in this chapbook have a variety of different tones, sounds, and voices. For example, one of the poems in this collection is from the point of view of a child, while another is from the perspective of an old crone. I tried to make each voice of the poem sound how the fragrance *feels*, to evoke the same emotion and atmosphere that the fragrance evokes. Fragrances are scientific creations, but as art pieces, they create an atmosphere and elicit emotion. This is what I tried to capture in *Fragrantasia*. I also tried to make each of the poems have different tones; some of the poems are optimistic, while others are sad, while still others are inundated with fervent anger. Also, many of the poems are narrative poems. They tell the stories of loving mothers, freed genies, and succubae. A few common themes emerge among these narrative poems. First, all of the speakers are female, even when the poem is about a masculine



fragrance. Additionally, a large portion of my thesis focuses on the fantastical. Two of my poems are about an elementary-school-aged witch, and one of my poems is written from the perspective of a woman who is trapped inside a Babushka doll by an evil wood smith. My ekphrastic poems also frequently feature marginalized women who find their own strength and power. In one of my poems, a supernatural being kills a rapist, while in another, Aphrodite finally escapes the bonds of her unhappy marriage with Hephaestus. These fantastical poems capture the fantastical essences of the fragrances they are based on. Overall, the poems in my chapbook all try to capture the artistic nature of the specific fragrance they write about.

In addition to the 19 ekphrastic poems, *Fragrantasia* also includes five prose poems. These five prose poems are not ekphrastic poems. The purpose of these poems is not to describe a fragrance, but, rather, to understand how a fragrance has impacted certain events in my life. As I discussed earlier, fragrance is deeply intertwined with memory. When we smell our mother's perfume or the scent of our least favorite teacher, we do not think about the artistic value of these fragrances; rather, we think about the person the fragrance is associated with. In these situations, fragrance loses its shape as simply an art form and becomes a hallmark of memory. The five prose poems explore key memories in my life through the fragrances I choose. These fragrances track my experiences with friendship, illness, and death. With my prose poems, I wanted to explore the connection between fragrance and memory, rather than simply exploring the inherent artistic value of an individual fragrance. Specifically, these poems deal with *my* memories: my struggles, my desires, my fears. The prose poems make *Fragrantasia* a very personal project for me: here, fragrance serves as a vehicle that I can use to write about and understand my own life.

Scent is vital to how we see the world: it provides a way to interpret our surroundings and helps encode our memories. Above all, just like poetry, scent is beautiful. There is a meaning to

the phrase “Stop and smell the roses”: scent is something worth pausing life for, just like poetry.

I hope to combine the beauty of poetry and scent in my thesis. My end goal for this thesis is simple: to write something worth reading. I hope that the poems that follow are thought-provoking and enjoyable to read. Mostly, I hope my thesis inspires the reader to look at the scents in their life in a new way.

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## Staying with the Lotus Eaters

### *Five o Clock au Gingembre*

The tea shop is invitation-only,  
 and you have a wax-sealed envelope.  
 Come sit at our mahogany tables,  
 and learn the four different types of cinnamon,  
 how to listen to a moth yawn.  
 Read the untranslated Canterbury Tales,  
 and make your “þ”s and “æ”s as sharp as arrows.

Your mother is not here to gawk  
 at the women in tuxedos.  
 Your father can no longer etch  
 words into your back.

Stay here, and eat our gingersnaps,  
 our scraps of forgetting.  
 The word “mother” turns to “other”  
 as the ropes that bind your feet  
 disintegrate into long-lost spice.

Here, every nursery rhyme that told you “no”  
 is a disassembled ship.  
 Ocean flows in through the splintered planks,  
 submerging your neck,  
 filling your lungs to capacity.  
 You sink through the blue  
 like a smooth stone.  
 Somehow,  
 you are not dead.  
 Somehow,  
 you are breathing easier than ever.

## Love Poem in Eden

### *Chergui*

We catch figs in our teeth,  
watch tobacco leaves unfurl  
in the shape of the Sun.

Let me wash your feet  
with scented oil,  
dry them with the breath of my hair.

King Solomon said his betrothed  
had the eyes of a dove.  
I wonder if he said this  
to his 699 other wives as well.  
I have never seen doves in your eyes,  
only eagles.  
There is no peacemaking here,  
no olive branch perched on your tongue.

You bloom sacred apples.  
Slow my quivering hands  
as I gather them from your mouth.  
Arch my back against squash vines  
and our old, knotted bedpost.

Like God,  
I blinked through the millennia,  
but you taught me the unholiness of a pause,  
the delicate sin of waiting for your fingertips.  
Teach me again  
how to wait.  
Slow me.  
I want to draw out this moment  
like a magician's handkerchief.  
I want to keep pretending  
we are in a garden.



**Angel**

*Angel*

He tells her that she has cotton candy eyes,  
that spun sugar is just begging to be eaten.  
She chokes on daquiri syrup and stumbles.  
His smile is caramels left out in the sun:  
melted, molding.

The moment hands touch flesh,  
I slit his throat with pinstripe ease.  
People often mistake my dagger  
for crystalized nectar,  
but its cool metal can filet a windpipe.

Don't bother to bury the corpse.  
We will put his head on a pike  
to warn all the others  
who want to touch without consent.  
Women are not iced cakes in cardboard boxes.  
We are the salt of flesh  
and the metal of blood.  
Our wings are made of webbed skin,  
and we are beating away wind,  
sharpening our knives  
against the tips of our tongues.

**O, Unknown***O, Unknown*

O, Unknown,  
 your moon-face is  
 at the crest of my ship.  
 you are the daughter of the black matter  
 and mother of desire.  
 you are the dwarf star  
 at the end of the universe,  
 the skulking animal  
 who piles chicken bones at my doorstep—  
 no note of explanation.

O, Unknown,  
 why do you arrive at the most inopportune time?

when a stranger thumbs my breast,  
 when my car smokes and howls on the scutch grass,  
 when my father draws his clenched fist backward,

you are there,  
     guns smoke on water,  
         crushing ladybeetles in your palms,  
             asking:  
                     what will happen next next next next next next?

O Unknown,  
 show me a side of your face  
 that isn't fear.  
 I want my veins  
 to run hot electric  
 with no explanation.  
 I want to find a brass key  
 suspended in lapsang souchoung.  
 I want secret gardens  
 and strange,  
 spiraling vegetables.  
 I want to stand at  
 the edge of a cliff  
 and see you expand  
 into forever.

**The Crone of the Creek Dreams***Coromandel*

A frog sits soft in my hands  
as I skewer it.  
We have a lot in common—  
both full of red strings  
and slime.

We are different, though.  
The frog does not dream  
because it is dead.  
I am not dead,  
and I dream every night  
of the rumor  
of the red dress.

I once saw a wealthy trader get eaten by wolves.  
He left behind a canvas wagon  
and a coromandel screen,  
gilded with a lacquered garden  
and a woman in a crimson dress.

The woman is silk powder on  
velvet skin—moonlight flickers  
on the edge of her fingertips.  
(Moonsilver always bounces off me.)

I am sick of sharpening my nails  
with a fishbone;  
I want to trade the crickets  
behind my ears  
for a golden hairpin.  
I desire a face of rouge:  
plush and total.

I would even settle  
for being her linen parasol,  
lace in her cold hands,  
absorbing the heat of the Sun  
as she picks orchids from the garden.

**Almosts***White Oud*

The airline switched my seat to 34B, and I met you. During the flight, I learned that you sang the James Bond theme while you drunkenly stole limes from a grocery store. I learned that your fingers cramp when you etch blueprints for architecture school. I learned that no one can make *chilaquiles* better than your grandmother in Mexico. When you learned that I loved fragrance, you promised me a small thing, a scented thing. We stood in the airport bathroom as you fulfilled your promise, pulling out a tiny glass bottle covered in gold filigree. You dashed some oil on my hand, saying how nice it was to spend those nine hours talking together. You left to some unknown gate, and I watched as your suitcase wheel caught on a cracked tile.

Later, I am in a too-small plastic chair, baked in florescence, waiting for the screen to flash my departure time. I keep smelling my wrist: agarwood and rose. It burns in me. For a moment, I imagine you are sitting opposite me, thumbing through a travel brochure. We are planning to spend the layover together and take a tour of the Atlanta aquarium. You gush about the whale shark, your favorite fish, and the sliminess of sea anemones.

I see your number in my phone, and I do not click on it, fearing you gave it out as a formality. Many people pass with their rolling suitcases. All are going somewhere else. How liminal this space is. The sound of goodbye heard through water.

**Baby Witch Adventures! (Vol 1): The Violet Tree**

*Lolita Lempicka Mon Premier*

Baby Witch found the star fragments  
her mothers hid in the closet  
behind the Christmas presents  
and ate them.  
They tasted like licorice wheels.

Suddenly,  
white fire bloomed  
in her blood vessels,  
singing the first lullaby  
her mom had ever sung to her.

Baby Witch pushed  
her pointed hat out of her eyes  
and snuck out.  
Her tiny feet skipped  
across pink earth  
until she reached her special spot:  
a singular apple tree in a field.

It was dying.  
This was why she came.  
She pressed herself against the apple tree,  
hugging its graying bark.  
*Unwither*, she told the tree.  
*Be okay*.

When she exhaled and opened her eyes,  
the tree was purple and covered in violets.  
But it was healthy, alive.  
A lavender apple fell on the ground next to her.  
Baby Witch bit into the  
edible *thank you*.

**the first person who ever carried me**

*London for Men Burberry*

the Christmas tree looks like it has a deep voice,  
like it grew up lonely on a mountain,  
but I know that the right amount of tinsel  
will make it *sing*.

the guy from Lowe's looks like Santa,  
as he moves the saw with a *chitter chitter chitter*,  
cutting off all the sad branches that don't belong.

I am watching sky sparkles  
melt on my tongue,  
when you lift me into the carseat,  
giving me a tiny kiss on my forehead.

someday I will be staring  
into a deep, ravenous pit of lost,  
fumbling with declined credit cards,  
and the phone numbers of people  
I will never call back.

but, for now,  
I am still, motionless,  
as I pretend to sleep  
in the back of your Highlander,  
hoping that you will carry me in your arms  
all the way to bed.

## Aphrodite, Freedom is a Fox-Stride Away: A Reimagining of Myth

### *Shaghaf Oud*

You place the fox skull  
on your goose-down pillow,  
making sure it doesn't stain  
the ruched satin.

You envy the fox,  
wild and free  
when it died.

You remember  
when Zeus said  
you were a poker chip  
with a lipstick stain,  
when the man you called father  
enslaved you to Hephaestus  
with a handshake,  
unblinking.

*"He's such a good man,"*  
Hera said,  
when she saw  
the gold filigree rouge case  
Hephaestus made  
to match your chains.

There are thousands of versions of this story—  
the frayed leather children's book,  
the Oracle's honeyed musings,  
the booming stone mouths at Acrocorinth.  
Every version collapses into a singular memory:  
while you scatter violet petals over the bedsheets,  
Ares recalls how you ripped limb from socket at Thebes,  
remembers you as warmaker.  
He is the only other strategist you've ever met,  
and you kiss the salt out of his mouth.  
As fingertip meets meets thigh,  
a golden net ensnares you,  
suspending your intertwined bodies in mid-air.  
Oh, how Hephaestus gathered the Olympians to laugh  
at your naked form,  
how he pressed his hands against your pulse,  
the very nature of your sex—

Today, the stories will be different.

You pack your pearls and drachmas  
in a cowhide knapsack.  
Your stomach is strong with cedar  
and bleached bones.

You are ready.

Later,  
the Olympians will express surprise  
that you were able  
to braid Hephaestus' intestines  
with only a paring knife.  
They don't remember  
you learned to fight in the innards of a whale,  
that you brandished a swordfish spine  
on its felted tongue.

Do they forget that you  
were born of the sea,  
crested atop alabaster foam?  
Before mirrors,  
before hands cupped your breasts,  
you stood naked and alone upon the fish-froth,  
and there was nothing else for miles.



**Opium***Opium*

the woman is black leather evening gown  
and the shimmering of patchwork beading,  
her lips the color of entrails,  
her voice a dislocating shoulder.

I reach out to touch the pin-up waist  
of this illusion cast  
by burning my grandmother's incense.  
no—not an illusion.  
illusions are written by tendrils of curled smoke,  
the aftertaste of a soft dream.

no. my hands feel the beat of her flesh  
and the etchings of her desire.

I feel the urge to pray,  
and I mutter something vague about the future  
in an arcane language  
that tugs like fishhooks on my mouth.

her smile curls too far upwards at my whispered *Amen*,  
revealing so many triangular teeth.

as she gnaws the sinew of my neck,  
I can almost taste fire.

## Bipolar I: A Guide to Becoming Holy

### *Kaleidoscope Bath and Body Works*

#### I.

You didn't even notice when we baptized you. You were walking with [*censored: pixelate with the sound of a ticking clock*] when you felt [*redacted*] submerge your neck, your hair, your eyes.

During the baptism, we bend and break your molecules. You have no choice in the matter: changing shape is how you become holy. Water dissipates, and you tell your friend, [*censored: replace with the image of your shattered kneecaps*], that you suddenly feel tired.

Exhaustion is the first step to sanctification. The Lord God preached until his eyelids melted. The Lord God starved and crawled through the desert. Jesus wept at the burial of a dead man, and you weep over your present worthlessness. You weep over protein bars, and [*redacted*] your hollowed-out ribcage.

You run to the doctor during a Chinese test after feeling pain in your [*censored: replace with the sensation of cotton balls grinding against each other*]. The doctor informs you that your pain is caused by vitamin deficiencies. In reality, it's us. Our talons are clutching your [*redacted*], tearing your defiled organs into submission. We gnaw your skin and continue to make redactions.

You try to drown out our hymns with secular music, with meditation, with therapist appointments. The therapist tells you [*censored: replace with a mixing bowl full of kneecaps and onions,*], but you can't hear it over the sound of our song. You ask for medication.

The psychiatrist wonders if there's a history of divinity in your family. You say that your uncle had a brief stint of holiness (in fact, he was a demigod), but your psychiatrist says he's too distant of a [*redacted*] to count. She gives you Zoloft: our favorite food. SEROTONIN serotonin SEROTONIN serotonin SEROTONIN serotonin SEROTONIN serotonin SEROTONIN

#### II.

Zoloft accelerates our process of sanctification. We rip off your limbs and recast your body in platinum. You are holy now, an emissary, half robot.

You dance to secular music, waking up your [*redacted*]. Now that you're holy, you're allowed to sin, like how cops are allowed to text at traffic lights.

You find someone to [*censored: replace with a tongue licking an unfurled wisp of cloud*]. Comb your fingers through black curls, inhale sharp when he kisses you.

We keep you from sleeping. Divine messengers have better things to do—like cut their hair with craft scissors, buy 11 perfumes, smoke [*censored: replace with the laugh of a canary*] with a girl

you met 2 days ago from [redacted], drunkenly overshare poetry on [censored: replace with red gown and sparkling vibrato].

Your parents haven't called you in weeks, too afraid to pray to you. No one prays to you. All you have is your fridge with frozen brussel sprouts, six containers of cottage cheese, and a deep gnawing pit of *not holy enough*.

We help you become pure goddess. We help you [censored: replace with dancing marionettes that have mouths like ravenous pits]. We help you sing the hymn of [censored: replace with kneecap-onion stew]. Holiness is giving you headaches. Pain like searing [redacted]. You text [REDACTED], he asks if he can [censored: replace with lightning striking a bug-eyed frog]. You beg for [redacted], talk to [redacted], go to [redacted's] house, think about [censored: pixelate with the sound of wind gusting over black cliffs].

You will never be enough. You are close to [redacted]. Park your car on the side of the [censored: replace with the powdered wood of perfume]. Be as good as [redacted]. Do it. Do it. DO IT. You unscrew a white cap, swallow 15 [REDACTED], grab the bottle of [redacted.]

And in that moment, you see us clearly. The gods. You see the mold in our hair. The orange fungus spreading across our chests. The milk marshes of our eyes. Our mouths froth smoke, and you choke on it, asking,

"Why am I [redacted]—Where are my [redacted]—What is [redacted]?"

You spit out smoke. "I..."—"Can I..."—"Can I take [redacted]?"—"Can I take it back?"

"Can I take it back?"

We are the gods, but even we do not know the answer.

**Domestic Life with a Succubus***Like This*

As you finish your Bloody Mary,  
you inform me that I'm type O negative.  
I pretend to read Cosmopolitan  
as you drain your cup of me;  
I ignore the eyeballs in the frying pan.

You hunger for my flesh,  
but I hunger also, desperate for  
the sick spice of your flower,  
the cicadas in your hair,  
the ginger-sharp hay-scratch  
of voice saying, "I want you."

I know you are using my femur  
as a soup-bone,  
but I cannot resist the splendid illusion  
of this house:  
family portraits, nights in the garden, children.

I vacuum breadcrumbs  
and pull toes out of the DVR,  
ignoring the butcher knife that sloughs off my skin,  
cherishing my time here  
until there is nothing left of me  
but a voice,  
which I use to call your name.



these are my eyelids that can still blink that can still blink that can still—

*I crack and break. My top half slips out of his hands, onto the floor. I look up at the ceiling. I am still looking up at the ceiling.*

*What was inside the shell of my body? Was it a tangle of veins, a tiny beating heart? Was it the key to my soul? Or, perhaps, my babushka body contained a smaller me, a lesser me, tinier, more docile, more compliant.*

*I do not know the answers. I am too small—just a little broken doll, sitting in a woodshop.*

**Desire: The Fruit Forbidden to God***Secretions Magnifiques*

A blink of an eye is a thousand years to the Lord,  
so perhaps he doesn't understand how the *now*  
petals and blooms  
and wilts.

He does not know that underneath  
our powdered soaps and coiffed hair  
there is only desire.

Desire is a saucer of milk  
spilling onto molten iron.  
Desire looks like hands  
feathered against the sky.  
Desire makes us the salmon that  
swim against current  
to lay eggs on the river rock.  
Desire makes us the river.

We know desire, the spice on its forked tongue.  
Before you take your melatonin,  
you whisper hurricanes in my mouth.  
Sea sprays my hair,  
my pussy, my skin.

Tonight,  
my blood is a spiked flower, blooming,  
and your thighs are liquid salt.  
Lick the ink of me  
into the shape of your name.  
Tell me we were born  
in the same coil of kudzu,  
that when you touch my body,  
you are coming home.

## Unbaptism

### *Happy by Clinique*

After five days in the psych ward, I beg for a fish. I ignore my dad's hunched shoulders as I skip through PetCo, as I inform him of the marvels of the *ghost shrimp* and the 47 species of seahorse. I pick out a gilded Betta Fish and name him Charlie, after Willie Wonka's golden tickets. It takes approximately four hours for Charlie to die. I weep. How sad it is to spend your life swimming in your own waste, to see the world through clouded water and disease.

My parents disturb the burial rites of Charlie and demand I take the medication I was prescribed. *Seroquel*. My enemy. Over the next few weeks, the smooth pink pills haunt me—I inhale 3 slices of chocolate cake at once, vomit Beyond Meat™ chunks into my therapist's toilet.

I tell my therapist that Seroquel turns my thoughts to syrup. Specifically, my grandma's bottle of Hershey's chocolate syrup, all black and grimy. My therapist says I am still shakily balanced on the Blade of Death and shouldn't be too hard on myself. Right now, having thoughts is not imperative. Staying alive is imperative.

Staying alive—so hard before, so easy now. The pills kill the gods. No more gods lighting fires in my house, tempting me to jump out of the window to escape the smoke. There is no pressure to be holy. My body unbaptizes itself, forgets the prickling ice water, the white robes, the slender hands.

My psychiatrist asks if I am *okay*, and I think about the first perfume I ever bought with my own money. Eight hours of shoveling crackling leaves and swiping off roly polies to earn ambiguous florals and a bouquet of citrus. I remember dropping the bottle and breaking it, trying to gather the scattered pieces of glass as if I could put them back together again. But some things can never be the way they were before.

Every day, my thoughts are vibrations through gelatin. I fall asleep in class, wake up to fog, forget how to spell the word "whomever." The dead gods are piled in my backyard, and I look at their severed hands. My therapist told me severed hands can't curl into a fist. To myself, I whisper *okay, okay, okay*.



**In Which a Free Genie Longs for a Human Body***Shalimar*

I hate my oilsmoke form,  
the way it stings eyes,  
the way my breasts blow away  
in the wind.

My body is curled vapor,  
cigarette breath  
with a face,  
an unattended stick of incense,  
trailing.

I long to again have a body--  
hands to cradle a baby robin,  
fingertips to brush against your browbone,  
a leg to wrap around yours.

When you used your third wish to set me free,  
I wonder if you knew I'd remain this way,  
coiling slick from the gutter,  
or if you thought I would become the human  
I told you I once was,  
golden and studded with rubies.

Now,  
I am only swirled steam and a voice.

I want to use my voice to say, "I love you."  
Let my voice whisper away the leather purse night,  
and all its silver coin stars.  
Allow me to murmur goodbye  
to the wail of cracked stone.  
Let me lullaby you  
until the miasma of lamplight  
turns into the word *if*.

**Black Orchid***Black Orchid*

The orchid bends under the weight  
of its dark chocolate coating  
Its leaves drip black liquor.

*Dazzle me*, it says, curling its stem  
in anticipation.

I tell the orchid about the old library books bound in skin,  
about how magma blooms from my fingertips,  
about the languages of the wiry black shadows winging overhead.

In return, I ask the orchid  
to give me back my locked-up memories:  
the secret chorus of subway cars  
against metal on a damp night,  
the way her oxblood boots stamped against cement  
and moonsilver reflected off her gloved hands.

Orchid, tangle my body in your body  
until spine becomes stem  
and I bleed petal.

Slit me open,  
and there will be pollen.

Slit me open,  
and I will be alone again  
in the soft lamplight,  
hands outstretched,  
holding—almost—  
her voice.

**Ode to Naps***Pillowtalk Poet*

A dewdrop clings to a blade of grass  
as I whisper:  
*Take me.*

Take me at the sunbright hour  
of 1 pm.  
Take me while a squirrel crunches leaves  
under its feet,  
while a flag ripples faintly in the wind.

My eyelids droop,  
as a cloud unfurls its cottony tendrils,  
pulling me into the air.

For years, the cloud teaches me sky,  
until I can reel in atmosphere  
like fishing line.  
I balance fog on my nose,  
carry pieces of sun in my arms.

I know that soon,  
I will lift the full weight of the King.

I become the driver of the Golden Chariot,  
Apollo be damned.  
The reins fray under the strength  
of my fingers.  
I pull the Sun westwards  
as I perch on my gilded seat,  
my back a sail against the wind.

I bring squares of light to your carpet  
and scatter sunshards across your milktea.

My eardrums swirl with roaring wind.  
My mouth is loud and full of birds.

Their silken feathers are soft  
like the back of my desk chair,  
upon which I am draped,  
eyes closed,  
drooling,

remembering nothing of my former life.

**The Plague will Pass Over Our House if We Cover it in Lamb's Blood***Japanese Cherry Blossom*

You do not say whether COVID is on his death certificate. We all know that it is. We know a lot of things we don't say. We know the deer that lived behind your house is on the side of the highway, dead. We saw the lining of its stomach. We know about your maskless trips to the grocery store, the hugging at the Trump rallies. Denial runs deep in this house.

You say microbes aren't real unless you speak them into existence. I heard that dying of COVID feels like you have bees in your lungs. I imagine breathing honey instead of air.

*Trapped. Trapped. Trapped.* This house is a shrinking box. Ever since he died, you wear so much scented lotion. I remember the way you asked, "*Did I give it to him?*," the cracking of voice. I want to touch your face and make it smooth, say *I love you grandmother*, fill your head with untruths like *there was nothing you could do* and, *grief is a ship sailing northwards, out of our sight*. But I can't speak through the honey in my mouth.

**Baby Witch Adventures! (Vol. 2): Into the Fae Wild***Pink Sugar*

The unchurch bells rang twelve times  
as the basket appeared,  
all woven dragon-scales and golden thread.  
A peek inside revealed starblood scones.  
Baby Witch ate four at once.  
Hydrogen combined with helium,  
creating tiny explosions in her lungs.  
Toasted caramel dribbled onto her chin.

“Eleanor—stop that!” one of her mothers chided.  
“We do *not* accept gifts from the Fae in this house.”

When the riverswirl meringues appeared the next day,  
Baby Witch made sure her mothers couldn’t see her  
bite into their glittered ruffles.

The gifts kept coming:  
calclacite cakes,  
moonrock buttercream,  
rainbow-wind-drizzle custard.

Baby Witch knew that Fae gifts  
incur Fae debts,  
but was still surprised  
when a fairy dragged her into the forest  
to toil away the treats.

Baby Witch soon learned the small differences  
between fairy and butterfly.  
She built thumb-sized houses  
and summoned snakes  
with the twirl of her finger.  
She soon forgot everything  
but Fae tongue.  
When her Mothers found her at sunset,  
she was swinging through the forest,  
blowing holes in the sky  
with the strength of her breath.

**Nocturne**  
*Eau des Baux*

Your body is a crescent moon curl  
on the mattress.

Butterscotch streetlights  
melt through the blinds.

Outside,  
the magnolias are blooming.

There have been so many days  
before this one.

Every night,  
the same crickets hum melted mahogany.

Every night,  
the same wordless wind touches brick.

Every night,  
the same piano-soft "I love you."

You have never been close to death,  
and yet I search  
for the rise and fall of your chest,  
wondering what would happen  
if it stopped.  
I know that it won't.  
Every day we put cranberries  
and pecans in our spring salad.  
I always wash the dishes,  
and you always dry them.  
*Repetition* is in our blood.

My favorite book is on the bedside table.  
I've read the epilogue five times,  
and I still don't know  
if the characters are happy.

## The Grave with No Body

*St. Louis Cemetery No. 1 by Alkemia*

### I.

I hover, bodyless,  
above my gravestone.

My neighbor smells of nitrogen  
and cheap satin.  
She has warm bones,  
so her husband still comes to pray  
and give her grocery store carnations.  
Those with cold bones  
clamor for the clipped ends of his sentences,  
a stray scrap of petal.

I wonder what it is like to have a husband  
who does not speak poison.

I am neither cold bone,  
nor warm.  
My body is flesh:  
flesh dipped in lighter fluid,  
flesh wrapped in plastic,  
flesh coursing down the river.

I wish I could find it  
and bring it home.

I want to leave my punctured lungs at your doorstep,  
bake charred eyes in your lasagna,  
sprinkle chunks of appendix into your bath.

I want to make my way back to you,  
*husband.*

It only takes a needle and thread to sew flesh.  
When I am stitched together,  
You will taste my blood  
in your mouth.  
I will bind your feet with maggots.  
The night sky will be the rotten  
flaps of my skin.  
When your mistress's daughter



is born,  
her first word will be *murderer*.

When I pull my flesh from the river,  
you will know how it feels  
to be hacked to pieces  
slowly.

## II.

I overturn opalescent stones,  
looking for my severed hands.  
I wonder if my earlobes  
are being carried  
by throngs of silver fish.

*"Minnow, minnow, minnow."*  
Their voices are toddler babbles  
and windchime.  
I think they are taunting me.

I sift through mud  
seeking a chunk of my skull,  
a shred of my tongue.  
Cattails greedily reel  
in the wind.

*"Minnow, minnow, minnow."*  
A baby fish reflects Sun  
off its wiggling body.

## III.

There is so much that thinks here.  
The elk on the riverbank  
smells of leather and wildflower,  
thinking of openness.  
The tadpole thinks of  
slime and playdates.  
The snake spends its long, tired days  
thinking of coming home to its eggs.  
The mud thinks in drumbeats:  
*"Ha-bum, Ha-bum, Ha-bum."*  
My head used to chant the the word *husband*,  
but now I have to strain to remember  
his name.

*"Minnow, minnow, minnow."*

*"Minnow, minnow, minnow"*

*"Minnow, minnow, minnow."*

*"Minnow, minnow, minnow."*

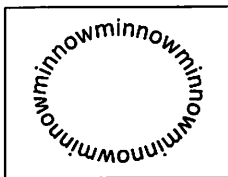
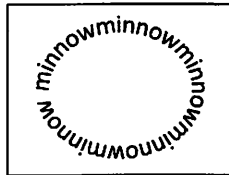
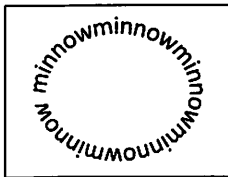
#### IV.

I forget why I came here,  
what I am looking for.

I am too busy testing the strength  
of my new body,  
all water and wind and mud and twig.  
I pull everything southwards.

Come here,  
tadpole and leaf  
and mosquito  
and lily pad.  
Let me carry you in my arms,  
and bring you home.

The silver fish call me mother,  
and always circle through me,  
singing:



In their language,  
they are saying thank you.

## Lavender Milk

### *Lavender Milk*

You teach me  
about your favorite dinosaur,  
how to watch *Finding Nemo*  
27 times in one year,  
how small hands can struggle  
so hard to write the letter C.

In return,  
I teach you  
about the snore of a snake,  
the melting point of a marshmallow,  
the silver fish that swirl the ocean.

I never tell you about the nails-on-a-chalkboard days  
scratching against the horizon.  
I don't tell you that you will spill boiling tea  
on your fingers, that they will throw away your resume,  
that grief will needle holes inside you,  
putting hollows in your lungs.

I don't tell you  
because those days aren't today.

Today, you are safe.

Today, we are alone in this white-curtained room.  
A plastic planetarium projects stars on the ceiling.  
You are on your side, breathing even.  
The world will have to slash  
through my body and flesh to touch you.

## Burying the Gods

*Daisy by Marc Jacobs*

It's time for me to stop procrastinating. It's been a year, and the corpses of the gods are still stacked on top of my flowerbed. Their bones crumble in my hands—my brother has been using the dust as plant food for the hydrangeas.

As shovel breaks soil, I remember the month I decided to split my pills in half. How swift and precise was the pill cutter. How smooth and fast the days moved. How taut and stretched the skin of the gods looked when it regrew over their faces. How much the backyard reeked with the smell of dried meat, the sound of soft singing. I ignored it, until, one day, while I was watering the azaleas, a god wrang my neck.

My doctor saw the talon-marks and told me to stop splitting pills. And so, every day, I swallow my round white tablets, insurance against a resurrection.

I pack the dirt smooth and stare at the newly dug grave, waiting for a god to grab my ankle. But it never happens.

I am so good now. I pile the dirty clothes into my basket. I scrub pots until the dish soap makes my hands raw. I wake up at 7 am, and the light streaming eagerly through the blinds is the only thing greedy to reach me. I have made peace with sleeping in class. I am okay with being drawn out of conversation and plunged into static. I am okay with eating mush. But how long will it last?

When I imagine the years sprawling out in front of me, they take the shape of a metronome. I imagine days ticking. And I wonder if they will make any other sound.

In the year that follows the burial:

I do the dishes,  
     fold the laundry  
         clean the kitchen,  
             switch my medicine,  
             ride the bus,  
 take notes during lecture,  
     do the dishes,  
         fold the laundry  
             sweep the kitchen,  
             ride the bus,  
     take notes during lecture  
 do the dishes,  
     fold the laundry,  
         clean the kitchen,

switch my medicine,  
 ride the bus,  
 fry a piece of salmon,  
 fold the laundry,  
 increase my dose,  
 highlight my textbook,  
 do the dishes,  
 raise my hand in class  
 take a whiff of my collarbone,  
 buy a plastic rose,  
 fold the laundry,  
 ride the bus, light a pumpkin candle,  
 feed a koi fish, ace my Chinese final,  
 increase my dose, start biting my nails, decrease my dose,  
 sweep the floor, read *Catcher in the Rye*, burn lavender,  
 make scented pinecones, do the dishes, hold a baby frog,  
 ride the bus, buy sticks of myrrh incense, spit out a jello shot,  
 breathe the scent of gasoline, plant a cactus, research remote islands,  
 research *when will this pandemic end*, do the dishes, walk my dog,  
 feel the river behind my house pulsing, swirling, get a cavity filled,  
 wrap my arms around the bending river, sweep the floor,  
 feel the river inside me, all of its tiny fish, pet a lamb,  
 kiss my girlfriend in the sprawling fields of mint,  
 and breathe the scent of white flowers,  
 of grass on the lawn,  
 of wet sidewalk,  
 of rotten tilapia,  
 of *river, river, river*,  
 of citronella,

of camphor oil,

of my high school signature perfume, oh how it smelled of strawberry-colored cheeks and gilded dragonfly lullabies and reminds me of the word thank you. *Oh god oh universe thank you. Thank you for days that feel like suede against my fingertips. Thank you for the word daffodil and all its deliciousness. Thank you for letting me see the Magna Carta. Thank you for the time I backed my car into a pole and barely dented the bumper. Thank you for origami. Thank you for sneezes. Thank you for your trees full of apricots. Thank you for the sprawl of years, where I do the dishes. Where I sweep the floor. Where I live.*

## Glossary

### **“Staying with the Lotus Eaters”**

*Five o Clock au Gingembre by Serge Lutens*

Accords: Warm Spicy and Woody

Top Notes: Tea, Bergamont

Middle Notes: Cinnamon, Woodsy Notes, Candied Ginger

Base Notes: Pepper, Honey, Amber, Cacao, Patchouli

### **“Love Poem in Eden”**

*Chergui by Serge Lutens*

Accords: Amber, Sweet, Tobacco, Honey

Linear Notes: Tobacco Leaf, Honey, Amber, Hay, Incense

### **“Angel”**

*Angel by Thierry Mugler*

Accords: Sweet, Patchouli

Top Notes: Cotton Candy, Cassis, Jasmine

Middle Notes: Honey, Red Berries, Rose

Base Notes: Patchouli, Chocolate, Caramel, Vanilla

### **“O, Unknown”**

*O, Unknown by Imaginary Authors*

Accords: Powdery, Iris, Woody

Linear Notes: Orris, Black Tea, Tea, Tolu Balsalm, Sandalwood, Musk, Moss

### **“The Crone of the Creek Dreams”**

*Coromandel by Chanel*

Accords: Amber, Woody, Warm Spicy, Patchouli

Top Notes: Bitter Oranges

Middle Notes: Patchouli, Orris Root, Rose, Jasmine

Base Notes: White Chocolate, Benzoin, Amber, Olibanum, Incense

**“Almosts”**

*White Oud by Amir Oud*

Notes: Oud, Rose, Saffron, Sandalwood

**“Baby Witch Adventures! (Vol 1): The Violet Tree”**

*Lolita Lempicka Mon Premier by Lolita Lempicka*

Accords: Sweet, Soft Spicy, Cherry

Top Notes: Cherry, Star Anise

Middle Notes: Licorice, Violet, Orris

Base Notes: Praline, Vanilla, Tonka Bean

**“the first person who ever carried me”**

*London for Men Burberry by Burberry*

Accords: Tobacco, Sweet, Cinnamon

Top Notes: Cinnamon, Lavender, Bergamont

Middle Notes: Leather, Mimosa

Base Notes: Tobacco Leaf Opoponax, Guiac Wood, Oakmoss

**“Aphrodite, Freedom is a Fox-Stride Away: A Reimagining of Myth”**

*Shaghaf Oud by Swiss Arabian*

Accords: Sweet, Oud, Vanilla, Rose

Top Notes: Saffron

Middle Notes: Oud, Rose

Base Notes, Oud, Praline, Vanilla

**“Opium”**

*Opium by Yves St. Laurent 2009*

Accords: Amber, Warm Spicy, Balsamic

Top Notes: Mandarin Orange, Bergamot, Lily of the Valley

Middle Notes: Myrhh, Jasmine

Base Notes: Opoponax, Amber, Patchouli, Vanille

**“Bipolar I: A Guide to Becoming Holy”**

*Kaleidoscope by Bath and Body Works*

Accords: Woody, Powdery, Iris



Top Notes: Pink Pepper  
Middle Notes: Iris, Cedar, Black Pepper  
Base Notes: Sandalwood, Vetiver, Patchouli

**“Domestic Life with a Succubus”**

*Like This by Etat Libre d'Orange*

Accords: Sweet, Warm Spicy, Herbal

Linear Notes: Pumpkin, Immortelle, Ginger, Tangerine

**“All of Our Stories Spell Forgotten”**

*Mitsouko EDP by Guerlain*

Accords: Mossy, Earthy, Warm Spicy

Top Notes: Bergamot, Citruses, Jasmine  
Middle Notes: Peach, Ylang-Ylang, Jasmine  
Base Notes: Oakmoss, Spices, Cinnamon, Vetiver

**“Desire: The Fruit Forbidden to God”**

*Secretions Magnifiques by Etat Libre d'Orange*

Accords: Marine, Lactonic, Aquatic

Linear Notes: Seaweed, Milk, Coconut, Iris, Opoponax

**“Unbaptism”**

*Happy by Clinique*

Accords: Citrus, Floral

Top Notes: Orange, Blood Grapefruit, Indian Mandarin  
Middle Notes: Lily of the Valley, Freesia, Orchid  
Base Notes: Mimosa, Lily, Magnolia, Musk

**“In Which a Free Genie Longs for a Human Body”**

*Shalimar by Guerlain*

Accords: Citrus, Amber, Woody, Vanilla

Top Notes: Citruses, Lemon, Bergamot  
Middle Notes: Iris, Patchouli  
Base Notes: Incense, Vanilla, Opoponax, Civet, Tonka Bean

**“Ode to Naps”**

*Pillowtalk Poet*

Accords: Powdery, Amber, Musky

Top Notes: Powdery Notes, Geranium

Middle Notes: Ambergris, Cloves

Base Notes: Musk, Amber, Sandalwood

**“Black Orchid”**

*Black Orchid by Tom Ford*

Accords: Warm Spicy, Earthy, Woody

Top Notes: Truffle, Gardenia, Ylang-Ylang

Middle Notes: Orchid, Spices

Base Notes: Mexican Chocolate, Patchouli, Vanille, Incense

**“The Plague will Pass Over Our House if We Cover it in Lamb’s Blood”**

*Japanese Cherry Blossom by Bath and Body Works*

Accords: Floral, Fruity, Woody

Top Notes: Plum, Apple

Middle Notes: Japanese Cherry Blossom, Tuberose

Base Notes: Musk, Sandalwood, Vanilla, Amber

**“Baby Witch Adventures! (Vol 2): Into the Fae Wild”**

*Pink Sugar by Aquolina*

Accords: Sweet, Caramel

Top Notes: Raspberry, Orange

Middle Notes: Cotton Candy, Licorice

Base Notes: Caramel, Vanilla, Musk

**“Nocturne”**

*Eau des Baux by L’Occitane*

Accords: Vanilla, Amber, Aromatic

Top Notes: Cardamom, Pink Pepper

Middle Notes: Cypress, Incense

Base Notes: Vanilla, Tonka Bean

**“The Grave With No Body”**

*Saint Louis Cemetery #1 by Alkemia*

Accords: Earthy, Mossy

Linear Notes: Moss, Earthy Notes, Clay, Concrete

**“Lavender Milk”**

*Lavender Milk by Firebird Bath and Body*

Accords: Lactonic, Vanilla

Linear Notes: Lavender, Vanilla, Coconut Milk, Marshmallow, Sugared Musk

**“Burying the Gods”**

*Daisy by Marc Jacobs*

Accords: Ozonic, White Floral, Powdery

Top Notes: Violet Leaf, Blood Grapefruit, Strawberry

Middle Notes: Violet, Gardenia, Jasmine

Base Notes: Musk, White Woods, Vanilla