

# **THIS TOO — SALVATION**

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For Carol Frances Dixon—who taught me how to love

and for Donna Blackwell Knox—who teaches me every day to keep going

*Let this darkness be a bell tower  
and you the bell.*

Rainer Maria Rilke

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I

## ***Langue Lou***

*Mangé pitit* she says *Mangé*

chewing the marrow of her language  
and laying it on my tongue. I swallow  
her words with greed with longing.

Thick tongued my cousins stand at water's edge  
unable to swim the oceans of what they have lost  
these forty years ravenous for the patois

she once chewed for them the seaweed they refused  
in their immigrant's foolishness to consume.

I carry on my back my grandmother's words wrapped in linen.  
Uneven grit. Dim souvenirs of colonization.

*Mangé pitit mangé* she repeats.  
Waves ascending. Teeth. Tongue. Ocean.

*Pitit mwen respiré Chéri mwen respiré*  
*Bliyé demain chéri Bliyé*

Ten years after her death  
I kneel on coal black sand  
finger cold rosary beads and wail—

*Mangé pitit mwen mangé*

## Daydream

At eight I sit at my grandmother's feet      *Manman mwen*  
reading The Count Of Monte Cristo.      Watching      *Papa mwen*  
her barefoot bunions press the pedal of the antique  
sewing machine she fetched from Haiti the same year  
she fetched me. Down

go her toes      hurtling      towards open  
space. Then      the miracle  
of slowing. The ease with which  
she releases the crank. I cannot see her hands.  
Only the wheel spinning

spinning *Ti Cocotte Ti Cocotte Ti Cocotte*.  
When I shut my eyes now raised gold letters  
on black metal spell S-i-n-g-e-r      as I snatch  
textile dreams from the arctic February air. What if  
I'd allowed my immature

fingers to trace  
each sturdy beat  
each miracle of slowing  
until I could mimic perfectly

the pressing feet      the easy release  
the unbound hands      the wheel  
spinning  
spinning

*Ti Cocotte*  
*Ti Cocotte*  
*Ti Cocotte*



## **My Uncle Robert's 'Fro**

Valentino we called him. *Ayitien*. Something about his afro enticing  
a steady stream of happy girls towards my grandmother's warm kitchen  
and the heady bouquet of dark coffee brewing there.  
Each girl's rosy face stamped with some kind of yearning

I at twelve am desperate to understand. The white girls  
love him. The black girls say his chocolate's too dark:  
bitter sugarless. *Ayitien*. I watch his smile as he presses  
lips against blonde tresses on the living room couch—

Something he whispers leaves them all giggling.  
Could they be imagining what it would be like  
to part that oversized afro with their fingers

to discover a secret place where tongues  
might press themselves like pomade against  
the sanctuary of his scalp? Or dreaming the secret

way his brother pressed me at seven.  
*Ayitien*. Against mattress springs spinning  
their own quirky squeaky songs

**Her Eldest Son**

Had wrapped his fingers

around my waist. Fused shame  
and sex and spine. Tightened ventricles. Slowed

the thrusting of the blood till the word body  
ceased to exist. And when

in my thirties I told  
my grandmother this

her hands cupping my head  
between her palms

Her *Je ne savais pas chérie Je ne savais pas*  
sank its anchor against my chest

as she stared at her feet.  
Eyes shut she whispered—

*Moi aussi Moi aussi*

## In Response to Lucille Clifton's "June 20"

*Mother*: your fingers at least did not itch  
to enter me. Your penetration by way of a wooden  
*hairbrush*. *Tête douce* The same brush your hands  
use to tame my curls in the first hard  
glint of morning. *Tête soi*

Me on a small stool fidgeting against your arm  
tight across my chest. *Tête du* My breath  
fast and hard. Late night dread pressing  
me down down against your bed.

I long to discard the pen and ink  
of this poem that brush your letter—  
green and yellow airmail stamps purple  
ink across onion skin. Long to discard  
the you that begged *your* mother to take me.

This letter cradled even now in my grandmother's  
dresser. Ten long years after her death.  
*Take her from me* your fingers insisted  
again and again *Or I just might kill her.*

Closest I will ever come  
to an apology

*Manman mwen*  
*Manman mwen*

*Ti Manman'm*

## Confession

I know the path by magic not by sight.  
Tell priests and psychiatrists nothing.  
Stockpile sin. Load up shame against coming.

Oak grove pulse. Hive mind eternal.

I burn withered masks atop cracked branches  
shattered stone.

Felled bark. White sage.  
Unremitting dialogue with the dead and dying.

Whatever the news. Whatever  
the break in weather.

I dig a secret grave. For shame. For sin. Bury  
them in the dried fecal matter of stampeding boars.

Carve surname    coming.  
Carve surname    going.

*This dark path—magic.*

Every day  
I shut my eyes.

Will my deadened darkness  
to see

### **Liberation Theology**

Hail Mary. Mother of the sacred  
Pelvis. The tormented womb.

Holy Mary. Sentinel of unbound desire.  
The silenced amygdala.

Blessed art thou  
Amongst suffering labia.

Now and at the hour  
Of each small death

## **Damn The Flood**

I was nine when my body first coiled.  
*Callé*—my grandmother called the clotting.

I never really thought the blood  
that tainted my cotton panties had anything  
to do with death and dying.

*That would have been a blessing.*

I was not like other girls. Adult  
hands stirred my insides blank.  
A stream of shame

I could not shake.  
Year after year after year.

So many questions swirling  
that unsanctified burgundy water  
in that tiny stall of St. Theresa's.

Mother and Uncle. Crouched always  
at the bedside of my imagination. Almost

forty years since that startling spill.  
And I still clench

when I sense its coming

## Caribbean Bargain

If I could remember the purple leaves  
of the bougainvillea outside my window  
*Les vagues. La mère. Pieds bien mouillés*

I could forget the high chair the belt  
buckle the reddening welts.

If I could remember the sweep of the Caribbean sky  
whitewashed fishing boats straddling the sea  
sashay of women sauntering to market basket  
of banana summoning this step this rotation of the hip

I could forget stretches of days locked  
inside madness.

*Criyé pitit criyé!*  
*Rellé pitit rellé!*  
*Sonjé ti fi mwen!*  
*Sonjé!*

*Chaque jou.*  
*Ti fi.*

*Chaque jou*

## Pink and Yellow Flowers Swaying

In an abandoned corner in Port-au-Prince  
I crouch. A five year old girl  
aching to forget her mother's hands.

My mother tells jokes and stories and  
more jokes and stories    barbers tales  
of perfection and how blessed she is that *her*  
daughter is *so obedient*  
*so respectful*                    *so kind*.

It's the word *kind* that does it  
that moves me    braids thick and long  
and neat against my shoulders  
to crouch        in the dark        in a room full of ancient  
books and dust        and push hard into those white  
satin panties    the ones with the embroidered  
pink and yellow flowers on the back.

All night I refuse to sit        clutch the weight  
of all I do not know how to speak.  
The stink and how it slinks from room to room.

Goodbyes concluded I settle deep  
against taxi leather. My small bottom  
safe in its own angry waste.

*After:* My mother's hands press soiled panties  
to my face in the living room of the pink house  
we live in. I kneel naked on cold hard tile  
cradling my rosary    reciting one hundred Hail Marys.

Bit by bit: I erase the ropes she's tied tight  
around my thin ankles    with a drawing pencil I conjure.  
Transform swinging belt buckles

into a bridle and gallop past dusk sketching  
white satin panties and small bottom clean.

Embroidered flowers on the clothesline  
as I ride and ride and ride



## **Elegy for Papa**

For Nana Ofosu-Benefo

In your Yonkers hospital room weeks before your death  
you take your grown daughter's hands as if she is once again  
that tiny newborn in the crook of your arm—marvel aloud  
*You have my hands!* Your eyes luminous. Your joy  
a gift she'll recount again and again with pride. Months  
later when the Asonomaso stand glorious  
in their Kente to eulogize your lived life  
my bones thrum to the rhythm of the countless  
stories that stitched together  
made you whole.

We call you Papa. We hum every letter of your name  
with precision. We inhale your jet black skin  
for safekeeping—the still full wooly head of hair  
neatly trimmed beard white as first snow  
the belly chuckling at every greeting.

You my very own Ghanaian Santa  
the man whose tales I inhaled like music  
the man who taught me that I could sit  
and listen and breathe

without terror  
without dread

### **Animals Play Dead**

And when the predator has moved on  
they shake and shake and shake  
their insides loose.

Children play dead too.  
Little bodies bowed by the bony

weight of all they do not have words  
to name pretend big

hands in damp crevices  
belong there. Til the day

comes when all you can do  
is shake and shake and shake

your insides                      loose

II

## **Ten Years Dying**

Your body arcing towards the window.  
Ten feet from the bathroom.

Accident. Wet panties. You crying.  
Late night bath. How modest you were  
even with me—the woman who for years washed  
you down. Brought you clean panties  
Walked you back to bed

Sometimes you were the baby never planted in my womb.  
Your red face. Your wet face. The anguish there that kept  
my movements brisk / efficient. Me repeating over and over—

*It's not your fault.*  
*You didn't wet yourself on purpose.*  
*I'm not angry at you*

Sometimes I was angry. Sometimes tired.  
Disheveled.  
Sometimes I craved disassociation.  
Wet fingers dry

The bed in your office only five feet away.  
Fewer accidents.  
Same shame.

I awakened every time you moved.  
To double check.  
To make sure.

*We didn't know your kidneys were failing*

The sex. The distress.  
The sleep I didn't get.  
Stiffened thighs stinging.  
Old belt buckle tattoos.  
My shame. Me yanking  
away from your touch. This craving  
to administer my own  
clitoridectomy

You—my child and the mother I always wanted.  
The sex. My shame.

*It wasn't my fault.*  
*Was it*

I couldn't tolerate the pleasure how moving  
lips and fingers ignited;  
forced my face beneath swimming  
tendrils of sea grass  
to consider the large pores  
of a mother's face  
the deciduous scruff  
of an uncle's neck



Survivors both. Babies marked  
by scarlet streams  
of adult  
sweat

Sometimes love  
you were the good mother  
The mother that didn't tug  
small hands. inside. her lonely thighs.

But who. can trust. a mother.

*Not me. Not me*

I stumble inside the pauses:

Where the touch  
of your hands dearest once slithered  
beneath those of the woman  
who birthed me

Where the sex  
obliterated everything but  
the guilt  
the shame

I imagine  
me whole enough  
to delight  
at cold wind brushing  
breast tugging nipple  
minus the fear  
minus this anguish.

Face and hands extended:  
That confused toddler shouting  
*See. See. For you. I can.*

But she didn't.  
And I couldn't

In 28 days 640 hours 40320 minutes  
an entire year will disintegrate with your body  
into this urn I carry with me everywhere

secreted inside the glove compartment  
of my station wagon. It was our road trips  
you loved best—me fully present at your side  
No disassociation allowed

Us talking and talking  
a private language forged  
while listening to Motown  
unspoken desire

Every inch of the king size bed we once shared  
now bloated  
with the lavender intimacy  
of clean laundry

to separate to fold

My fingers numbed against the frozen masquerade  
of your face at the viewing your mother insisted  
on but didn't attend. I sleep four five hours now  
on and off on the full size bed in your office.

I never vacuum any more.

Dream instead what's left of your cell dust  
entering my nostrils awash in the sticky  
mucus of your worn lungs  
too tiny blood vessels.

Until the anguish  
and the shame  
are at long last

less blinding than the sex

III

### **The Empty Beach**

You and I were once neverlanders   believers  
in taut flesh   musculature   tank  
tops. Carefree steps swinging towards the setting

sun   the empty beach. Twenty years  
together. Now my wary feet tango  
with your absence. Sometimes I clutch

your hand-carved cane and remember  
what it was to be a cone licker—  
sweet cream   sticky fingers   cold lips

## **How White The Field**

Last snow fall of the year

Lone tree at meadow's edge—  
Standing hush of frozen lake.  
House where I sip tea.

Your last Christmas.  
You insisted what you wanted  
was brand new boots—snow boots.

Never worn boots  
in that Eddie Bauer box  
on the shelf in the garage.

Milky thaw of frozen grass



## **All Day I Waited For The Phone To Ring**

For my Uncle Robert to tell me my grandmother  
was gone. The woman who took me from the hands  
of her eldest child to save me from those nights

of hairbrushes inside my baby parts belt buckles  
against my baby skin. I'd awakened knowing  
she was moving past the threshing floor

towards flight. For you my love,  
no phone call. Seven days at your side.  
The week before you had stopped clotting

despite plasma despite transfusions. I stood there  
as I had every day from October  
to April. Held your hand as they disengaged

the feeding tube. Held your hand as they disconnected  
the ventilator. And when your mouth gaped open—  
Your throat reflexively gurgling. Your eyes

no more alive than a mannequin's. The silence  
of the machines roaring past my left ear. The staccato  
sobbing of the women. My clenched  
toes. Talons digging into my palms.

All I really wanted was to clamber  
inside your flesh and fuse  
my electric heart shut

**April 2 2013: Leaving Your Body**

The hawk. Fierce silver. Red-tailed. Diving.

Outstretched claws inches from my windshield.

As I leave the hospital where you

no longer

are

## **Your Favorite Clogs**

Because I called the Boys and Girls Club  
and scheduled the pickup I gather  
shirts and pants from hangers sweaters off shelves  
socks tee shirts from drawers I haven't opened

since long before. I am careful  
to use only my peripheral vision.  
Afraid the knots I've used to mask  
this sorrow might slalom open again.

I pack your shoes in black plastic bags. Your favorite clogs  
(the blue ones you reclined in year round In the heat  
In the rain On the beach At Fiorelli's near Lincoln Center  
At Katz's on Houston chomping a knish) laying on the bedroom floor still.

I tell myself my aunt the one you loved who can't wear closed  
shoes because of her gout might want  
them. Tell myself that one day soon  
I'll put them in the car—

Your dead skin peppering  
every groove

### **What I Tell Myself**

Believe me the feathered  
down of her belly was real.

I bowed low before it. Licked  
a part from big toe to crown. Pressed  
lips hard against her flexing. All  
sinew and wing            tapestry and loom.

Swallowed quill.  
Spit out shaft.

and wept.

\*\*\*\*

When there is no body to grab on to.  
No body to inhale in to.

No crimson corpuscles to remind me I'm still breathing.  
Or damp sweat clinging skin to skin.

What is left

### **The Terror**

You—heavily sedated. Multi-syllabic drugs  
pushing consciousness below the surface  
into watery dreams I'll never visit.

Tonight after ten days  
your long lashes flickered three times  
before your eyes opened focused.

Your silent terror  
strips me until I am naked  
beneath the bright lights of this ICU.

Bustle of nurses moving in and out

**That first time you read one of my poems**

The hush after you finished

*Beauty without meaning or truth  
is easily forgotten* you said.

Twenty years later  
the feverish thrum

of whirring machines forcing  
blood through failed kidneys

pumping oxygen through the one  
still functioning lung.

Your long ago words surfing  
the artificial pauses

between this living  
this dying        breath

## **Dream Shadows**

Broken glass.  
*Swirled wine. White linen.*

Parted lips.  
*Pinpoints of light.*

Branches bowing beneath snow.  
*Buzz of my fluttering belly.*

I call your name three times.  
Skid across slick ice.

*...and still    you are dead.*

## Kilimanjaro

I climbed into the worn skiff  
oars solid and steady between  
trembling fingers. Your shadow  
in the doorway of the cabin  
outlined in dusk.

Minutes before. Me screaming seething.  
Melodrama of buttons ripped from my shirt.

You were no saint either. Your tongue cutting  
like cancer. *Don't run away* you said. *Stay*  
*and fight* you said. *For once.*

I docked on the opposite shore.  
Looked over my shoulder  
where you loomed.  
Like Kilimanjaro



**Every day I pull into the driveway expecting to see**

Your silhouette framed by the window  
inside this house we once hypothesized together

Every object a chronicle—

The pens collected  
The books on writing

The computer silent anticipating the return  
of your fingers pounding its keyboard

Joan Didion's *Year of Magical Thinking*  
propped open even now.

That first moment I awaken  
I look for you.

That last moment before I fall asleep  
I rummage for your scent

## Truth Is

*Sometimes we loved each other.  
Sometimes not.*

Days when your scent  
helixed around my throat

*Sometimes I inhaled.*

Your eyes melted  
me      broke my broken—ness

The binaries throttle me even now  
That acute desire to hurl

you at the wall  
to crush you

*There was so much love. Neither  
of us knew what to do with it.*

## **East Coast West Coast Swing**

I never let myself think I couldn't  
get you on that plane. Your eyes  
a swirl of vast turbulence  
verging on panic.

We flew first class  
so you could stow  
claustrophobia between us  
with room to spare.

I wiped the windshield clear  
midflight and then again  
when we landed.

Held your hand  
and strolled past  
palm trees to the bright blue  
convertible waiting curbside.

"California" you said.  
Naked sunlight cupping  
you in its rays.

"California" I answered.  
Cottages of Malibu  
swinging by

**And You Are Still Dead:  
Even After Listening to Ornette Coleman & Reading Toni Morrison**

The world we once inhabited—claustrophobia—  
Restless flesh   Heads locked together  
                    Swallowing Ornette           Tonguing pages of Morrison  
as if   her words could still time  
                    make everything okay. okay.

Disbanded molecules   Missed musk           Morrison's syncopated  
                                    cascading bass   thumping how  
she "*made him feel*           *so sad*           *and happy*   *he shot her*  
                    *just to keep*  
                                    *the feeling going.*"

House empty. Chair vacant. Books spread open on your desk.  
And you   still dead. Okay. Okay.

Ornette's horn wailing   jiving           every corner  
of what used to be—

Your office.   Your essence.   Orchids.

The hollow point bullet  
I purchased  
yesterday

## **The Year I Was Born**

You graduated high school.  
1967.

Year of the Beatles.  
Summer of love.

All those counter culture tropes.  
And this symbolic metaphysical alignment.

You joked that I never wanted to leave the womb.  
Thirty seven hours of my mother pushing and screaming

and wanting to die. Before the doctor decided  
to spare her my Nine pounds Twelve ounces: C-section.

You joked how I was angling right then to crawl back  
into that space where I could envision one day being safe.

Me — I yoked those eighteen years between us to a shame  
I hadn't yet named. Memorized the lyrics to its song and sang without knowing

*Loving a woman is bad enough.*  
*Loving a woman old enough to be your mother*

## Mapping Your Absence

This breathing thing.  
These lungs unwilling to exhale.  
This chest rattling frenzy.

Every weekend before  
your forehead and mine tilted  
over Sunday's Book Review. Blood-orange

sun cresting lake and walnut grove.  
Both of us asthmatic. Inhalers within reach.  
Breathing serious serious business.

I regurgitate the dust and phlegm  
of your last six months in the fanatical  
hope. that I might. somehow.

be able. to pinpoint.  
that place. where you. once lived.  
inside of me

## Six Months

*Ambulance ICU  
Nurses coming Nurses going  
Intubation Ventilator  
Tracheotomy Clear tubing  
Out and in of the dialysis machine.  
And the blood Always  
the blood.*

This attempt to put  
your last six months  
into words small  
tidy increments  
the fishbone lodged  
in my esophagus.

Silence—the chafing.  
And then the slow  
reveal that there are really  
no words. Are there

***This Anxious Equation, This Cutting***  
*We are the poor, bewildered quills,*  
*The little scissors and the grieving penknife.*  
--Guido Cavalcanti

This sharp throbbing  
This twisting  
mitochondrial DNA  
This wild wild unnamable!

I follow the course of the penknife  
as it zigzags anew  
segmenting blue  
black bruises  
my frozen  
thighs.

Confirm where and how  
the blade entered:  
the blood  
it left behind



### **What Your Hands Tell Me**

Sometimes the dream jostles and I awaken alone  
Drenched. Thighs flexed. Fists clenched.

Your papery hands whispering against my heartbeat.  
Once twice three times:  
*You are safe. You are safe. You are safe.*

Your voice moist    brackish

## Charley Horse Blues

Woke up screaming last night.      Mid—night.    *Charley horse.*  
The tightness in my left calf a balloon.

Like you so many times when I could do nothing      *Charley*  
   *horse* but coo “calm down baby calm  
   down baby” My fear trailing your wilderness tears and you  
caught up      unable to do anything but      keep screaming

*CharleyCharleyCharleyCharleyCharley*  
   *horse!*

This endless ride.  
This new understanding

## Penance of Lost Keys

Because all day I never looked beyond my computer screen  
I run out at six for Dominican chicken so tender each crisp bite  
reminds me just how my body surrendered  
to your darting tongue—*maduros*  
*pasteles*. This complicated joy.

Those long days of your shrouded body mute  
motionless. Chirping air pumping  
in and out of exhausted lungs. Whisper  
of the brain monitor—soothing almost. I watched  
and held your limp hand against my cheek

in the ICU of that hospital whose name I no longer allow  
my lips to shape into words.  
I was standing in a corner then.  
The wall keeping my legs vertical.  
I am standing in a corner now.

Waiting for the bus to take me to that little house  
in that little town Empty of you.

Posture perfect Head unbowed  
the homeless man harmonizes supplication.  
I hand him the brown bag its various containers.  
Those dark thighs. That breast.  
The sweet sweet plantains.

And when he asks *Was it good?*  
I smile a shy smile remembering  
your fingers waving the fragrance  
of your body and mine against my flared nostrils.  
It's only when my feet are anchored

to what passes in this town for a bus terminal  
that my fingers notice the empty space where car  
and house keys should have dangled  
from the messenger bag  
across my chest

### **Of What Use This Urn?**

I bask in your spectral body—  
Yearn to rub salt hard across plump  
Breasts Nascent birthmark.

Every day Bells toll your absence.  
My fingers fondling rosary beads of regret.

Tectonic plates  
Subsumed in ash.

The way your armpits  
used to smell

***Suicide You Murmur Is Not An Option***

You sent me into Marshall's today  
in that nagging way you now have  
of inhabiting my psyche.

"You know I hate shopping" I say aloud as if  
you are there in the passenger seat  
guiding the red Volvo into park.

Inside I make a point to look at everything. Shoes  
socks lingerie photo frames frying pans champagne  
flutes furniture jewelry. I settle in. Quiet  
questions. The frown I lugged in fading.

In the last aisle where one or two shelves  
of journals lie neglected I push away doubt  
and you show me just how much you understand  
what I need from you still. A trinity of embossed

purple journals. The largest bearing the dragonflies  
you so loved—your favorite proverb. The smallest  
the epigraph to your unfinished novel—the kind  
you used to carry in your Coach bag to church

so we could pass notes like furtive children.  
The last—the signature chime of Dr. Seuss.  
Each journal my favorite color. Each the only one  
of its kind there. No other purples. No other dragonflies.

No other Dr. Seuss quotes. Only You speaking to me.  
Beyond pews and pulpits and psychoanalysis.  
Your mischievous grin whispering  
outside space and time: *I love you.*

In that place where muscle and marrow meet  
I hear you declare—  
*All you gotta do in this life  
is stay black and die.*

*Keep living baby.  
That's your only job*

### Quickening

So many years in my office—  
Telephone's ring. Your voice.  
My face cranberry.    *What are you*

*wearing?* you'd ask    my heart stuttering  
as if you hadn't enjoyed  
dressing me    but hours before.

A year of you gone. Each morning  
your ghost murmurs  
aloud    how you love it still  
when I blush

### **The Architect's Spin**

The web straddles  
branches of a tree visible  
only from my perch on this slab  
of slate far from the city.

Silk strands so vast they echo  
their own refrains  
captivate wisteria's vines.

This compulsive  
engineering as much  
a mystery as the swirl  
of the wind.

All I really know is:  
The builder began with the first  
loop.     Kept going

### **This First Anniversary & Coltrane**

Death has stretched me wide  
open. Salvaged saxophones and trumpets

from severed bone. Disclosed just how  
hip and thigh swing supreme.

There is no way to shut the door  
on this vastness you've left behind.

Believe me  
I've tried



**In Your Absence: What I Now Know**

The shoreline    How it recedes

Pulsing stars    How they refuse to speak

Blaze of sunset    Then the fade

Days I tender the prick of a jagged blade  
against my carotid artery

Days I do not

### **Dark Night   Holy Night**

I place the turntable's arm  
against the ragged  
grooves of your dying  
and merengue  
your spectral body  
across my slippery floor

### Ode To The Armadillo

Little armored one—nine-banded, long-nosed  
*Azotochtli*. The Aztecs called you *Turtle Rabbit*  
immortalized your squat legs in terra cotta  
on temple walls crumbled  
by thousands of years.

I crouch. Place your favorite meal  
of fruit and mollusk  
a short distance from my feet.

Little armored brother. Collage  
of the living and the manufactured—  
rat pig camouflaged tank. Your shovel  
shaped snout stretches forward. Shadow  
Stranger Fear overcome by desire.

After: You saunter into your solitary  
burrow. Twist your stout frame  
until only the unarmored  
underside of your belly  
is visible. All soft pink skin and fur.

*Teach me how to be an armadillo*  
I whisper to you Turtle Rabbit.

Beneath the rough burn  
of an Albuquerque sun

## VITA

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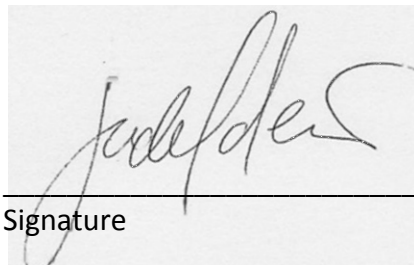
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