

Annihilation and Other Recipes with Oranges

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Verse for the Free Willed

and the moon just needs a
teeny
tiny
little
thing, consider it a favor.

Gratitude paid in errands,
the sun,
a sick bastard with
an Achilles heel for a penis,
it's hot,
Venus
isn't
melting, she's boiling—
the only thing left for you to do is evaporate.

The car insurance and car payments
both drink blue raspberry slushies,
their teeth

stained,

their lips,

they wave their frost-bitten tongues and wink.

Slate roofer, the one up there—

You!

Do copper nails taste better than steel?

What if I steal your ladder

just so I can touch the sky?

Pigeons

The pigeons in our rib cages explode out of our mouths,

every time we accidentally see each other.

They fly a few blocks away to shit on cars,

so we might as well talk while we awkwardly wait for them to return.

We'll just have to swallow them again later anyways.

“How much money,

if you had to guess,

do you think you've wasted

on wishing wells over the course of your life?”

Why do you keep staring at my hands?

The last time I saw you,

you grabbed one of my palms

and stared at it like you were trying to see my future.

I see Corinthians in these callouses.

You see immaturity in the coffee grounds left in my cup.

Theres something about you I don't like,

but I think that's why I miss you.

Yes, Chef

My life fits inside a sentence.

There aren't any hours in any days
that can't be represented with a noun and non-fantastic
verb, and maybe an adjective thrown in. Maybe icy
or starving or blue or dilated.

My nights are orange.

This cheese grater in my hand has created enough
orange zest to deserve a life sentence
in the museum of me. The grand opening will be delayed because I'll die late,
lying in my coffin dazed,
my families stare, the preacher stares, you stare: all icy,
even a cold reception is fantastic.

Shake the two liter, it explodes and the kitchen floor is Fanta sticking
to my shoes, now my soles are stained orange.

This is where I keep things I want to remember. I see

my middle school locker combination arguing with the living room sofa about sentience,
all the poems I've written about daisies
are laughing with the first room I ever got high in, the wallpaper dilated.

Every chef will die elated,
because it's the garnishes that make a meal fantastic.
The fryer baskets in heaven are made of ivory, its been days
since I've been able to scrub this orange
grease off of my hands, the only thing that counts is the sentiment.
Don't rub the lemon twist around the rim until you've added ice.

The frost moves like mold. Icy
spores move over my eyes and nose and ears. My pupils dilate
and I see nothing but fuzz and blur and haze. Is that a sentence?
If not, isn't that fantastic?

The palate of my restaurant is going to be orange,
with maybe a hint of lilac, like an easy day.

Dry rub the lion filet with daisy

petals, collect all the firewood you see,

and when the flames attract the birds and bugs, you catch them oohing,

de-feather and de-leg and dehead the dilated

blooms of parsley and basil, simmer and sear until fantastic.

I can't follow this recipe Chef. I need you to send hints

in the orange sunsets, once the day ends.

Make the stars whisper sentences I can't understand, and the icy

moon wink at me and maybe then I can die and believe I'm dead, un-fantastic.

Bic Breath

Breathing in fresh cancer,	lighting a new cigarette
with what is left of	an old one.
My burnt lungs,	still smoldering,
inside my chest.	Between my teeth,
reigniting	through my lips,
with every exhale	smoke sifts into the air.
Who needs oxygen?	Why should I quit?
If everything is	burning down,
turning to ash,	and going up in flames
regardless.	That doesn't seem so bad.

SILVER FILLINGS

Toga parties are life jackets for kids with rich parents.

Someone pours gold-flake

vodka from the bottle

straight into

your mouth.

You say it's the first thing you've tasted in years.

Swimming pools, skinny dipping, the smell of chlorine on skin.

The underwater LED / LSD / \$\$\$

lights make all

these straight white teeth

glow like they

have souls of their own. They smile.

I am tired of pretending that cocaine is a drug I could

realistically afford on my own.

I met you four hours ago,

your perfume smells like

lotus flower,

and all I need

is for you to

look at me

Liquid White

I can hear the

"wUh" / "wUh" / "wUh"

of my ceiling fan

negotiating the price of beef in the alleyway behind the restaurant / getting pissed off & punching
a wall

because we can only afford bone-in

///

oil slick sleek canvas / wet/

white / with the w & h sound emphasized /

"wUh" /

why is my canvas bleeding /

Chef?

why don't you just paint something over it / Chef?

It's Autum and the Trees are Naked Again

Dehead the flowers.

Behead me and maybe I'll bloom.

I like having conversations with the worms

in the compost bin

because they explain the benefits of decomposing

and decay in a way

that makes it easier to breathe.

I feed them watermelon rinds and newspapers,

never the obituaries—

I want to let them believe there is meaning.

Pop!

ACT #1: The Numbers

Marcus died while operating an eighteen-wheeler going sixty-six miles per hour. After driving for a full twenty-four hours, the nineteen crushed Styrofoam coffee cups and three Red Bull Cans rattled as they shifted over the back floor mats.

His heart exploded inside of his chest.

Slumped forward on the steering wheel, he merged lanes and jerked the truck back in between the lines on the highway. “Keep it between the mustard and mayonnaise,” as his uncle had told him when he first learned to drive. His last thought.

He had been late to a drop off and needed to get his inventory to the distribution center by 3:00 PM that day. He died at noon, his least favorite time to drive. The west Texas sun always made the asphalt so hot it started to melt his tires. He hated the smell. The trucking company that Marcus worked for, *Challenger Transport*, paid him forty cents for every mile he drove. After dying, he made twenty-five cents before his truck plowed into the back of an SUV. A family of five turned into a family of three, with a three hundred grand medical bill, two funerals, and one file for divorce.

CALL CORNERSTONE SLATE ROOFING

It rained last night in Philly

& slate is smooth & slick & my shoes have foam soles.

The only thing to catch me would be two or three haphazardly placed snow guards,

that I know for a fact aren't nailed down

because we are genuinely scamming these homeowners.

I can climb up this ladder

with a five-gallon bucket / that weighs forty pounds / filled to the brim with rock.

I get paid three hundred

cash

next Friday

& I'll wake up at 4:30 AM on a Sunday so we can get to New Jersey by 10,

I'll leave when the sun goes down,

it's summer

so it isn't dark until 9 PM at least

///

There is an ache I don't understand but enjoy.

Sweet Tooth

The devil is in the garnishes
and the way you hold your fork.

We only ever let arsonists
operate the crème brûlée torch.

And the way you hold your fork
makes me want to cook desserts.

Operate the crème brûlée torch
and bake pastries after work.

I want to overcook desserts
because I love the way you sneer.

Burning pastries after work until
the soot on the ceiling starts to smear.

The way you sneer is sweet,
like vanilla ice cream in a coke.

The ceiling burnt away; the stars are smeared
and everything tastes like smoke.js

Vanilla ice cream in a coke,
Chilled glasses are devilish garnishes.
Why does everything taste like smoke?
Because we only ever let in arsonists.

Hound Dog

how do these cigarettes keep lighting themselves?

this pane of glass

between me and myself

is bulletproof

& stab-proof

& insult-proof & see-through.

-

i stole a book from a library

about a man who couldn't stop accidentally shoplifting,

& now i have a library full of stolen library books.

i always want to love them.

-

dearest honeysuckle bush,

why are you crying?

the cats sleep in the barn

because they've caught plenty of birds

& the birds sing in the morning

because you feed them.

you're doing amazing.

\

An Angry Letter to Corporate

To whom it may concern,
somebody put fish in the parking lot puddle,
the one by the handicap parking.
Iridescent rainbow trout jumping
into purses and single use plastic shopping bags,
I think you're supposed to make a wish.

-

A bowl full of tap water
/the coffin/
and a plastic bag containing the captive
/a goldfish/.

There's something to paying five dollars to throw three balls at a pyramid of milk bottles and
winning an already dead goldfish. A lesson from a preachy parent or perfect sibling.

-

I welded sheets of steel to the side of my shopping cart to make it waterproof.

-

Eventually, careless drivers and hungry shoppers wipe out the population. The tags
punched through every dorsal fin end up in landfills and oceans, there's something to that, I
think.

-

Sincerely, the fishy guy looking in people's car windows.

?

I can't stop watching your forearms flex

every time you talk with your hands.

I have no idea what you are saying.

The gold watch that

your tendons are stretching underneath

keeps catching the light,

and you fiddle with the silver rings you wear on each hand

like they don't already fit perfectly.

I want to kiss the tips of your fingers.

I want your fingertips to kiss down my spine.

I want to stand next to you in front of a mirror so

I can finally focus on something

that isn't me.

Pop!

ACT #2: The Best Family Road Trip In The History of Family Road Trips

“STOP KICKING ME—”

“Don’t kick your sister, Jeffery. We’re supposed to be having fun.”

“Livin’ easy, Lovin’ free, Season ticket on a one-way ride”

“Who can have fun going camping? Why are we—”

“Honey, don’t—”

“Who wants to spend the weekend in the woods?”

“Goin’ down, Party time, My friends are gonna be there too, yeah”

“I am excited for it.”

“Thank you, Sarah.”

“Shut up, Sarah.”

“Like a wheel, Gonna spin it, Nobody’s gonna mess me around”

“That is enough! I am sick of your attitude young man—”

“Your mother is right, Jeffery. Do I need to pull over?”

“Hey momma, Look at me, I’m on my way to the Promised Land, ow”

“Why don’t we play a game, Mr. Grumpy Pants?”

“The animal guessing game?”

“Sure, I’ll go first.”

“I’m on the highway to hell, On the highway to hell”

“Can I play?”

“No, only—”

“Of course you can Sarah.”

“Okay, does it live in the water?”

“No.”

“Does it—”

Cherries Jubilee

There is technique involved
when pitting cherries against themselves
that brings out a sweetness
that aches.
It tastes like January,
and someone you remember
when you want to waste an afternoon.
Edible flower petals
only make a good garnish
if you melt all the library books you've ever stolen
but never read
into the chocolate before you temper it.
It gives the flavors the illusion of depth.
The wait staff that serves you
doesn't understand,
but they embody the idea.

They have to get home before the ice cream melts
and becomes soup
on the tabletop.

The Separation

The pane of glass
between me and myself
is bulletproof & stab-proof
& insult-proof & see-through.
How do these cigarettes keep lighting themselves?
If the walls exist & right here exists
& so does over there,
if the only door out is invisible
then what else is there to do but
smudge the glass
until you can't see past it?

the lethargy the lethargy i'm rotting i'm rotting my eyelids glow red i have a crack in the ceiling that is my favorite it smells everything smells the garbage the fridge the sink me the flies aren't friends or nuances just flies that land on my arms and legs because they know i won't swat them away i won't wave them away i won't ask them politely to leave because they are alive my morning routine has been established wake up walk to the kitchen replace the paper filter in the machine press brew open the fridge the milk is expired fill the bottom half inch of a mug with expired milk fill until desired why is my coffee red i don't drink it pour it over the stacks of dirty dishes in the sink and let it drip down to the drain if it ever even reaches its destination go back to bed or at least lie in the bed full of stabbing dirt particles and sharp skin cells that pierce my back and my legs and my arms and stare at my favorite crack my sense of time is decaying the days are fusing together and the weeks no longer have a taste like there is a layer of fuzzy mold forming over my eyes and ears and eventually i wont be able to see through it i still get mail they slip it through the slot in the door and it falls to the pile that has formed on the floor maybe the correct word is heap i am trapped in here physically because the door hinges have rusted themselves unusable and the deadbolts haven't been touched in ages so they must not budge the dust oh my god the dust that's me eventually i will have to show the world my filth i can't stop looking at my fingernails they are too long they are dirty they need cleaned the dishes need washed and my bedsheets need washed but i cant wash the sheets or sweep or do the dishes until the crack in the ceiling is fixed and the flies need a new home and there is no WD40 under the sink just mildew so how can i fix the door and my legs need waved and my arms need to swat and the cobwebs on the curtains weigh too much for me to ever see any sunshine they just glow red and someone is knocking at the door what do they want i lie i lay i wait they knock again and

a bright red envelope slips through the slot and lands in the heap i hear them walk away i get up
and grab the red envelope open it open it i cry

The Smell of Indigo

It feels like the sky isn't
something separate from the air

I am breathing, like
there should be clouds
waiting in the rain
at the traffic lights
alongside the
cars idling.

-

Footsteps shlack on
the wet sidewalk and
people hold on to their
sleek black umbrellas
in the same way that
tourists listen
to their guides. The orange streetlights

make everything

look gold.

Golden Wood

You are my Lothlorian.

Sometimes I drink wine too fast
& think of you.

There are trains in Germany
covered in graffiti
& sore calves
& sweet sweat
& I don't like the way you think about most things.

Strawberry sunshine, look through your cheap blue
sunglasses
& complain about how your mom lives
in her Florida beach house, & you have to
sing to the plants.

Let me rest up in your city, before you let me float away down the Anduin.

I Had a Flying Dream / I Woke Up on the Sill

Gallons of fire

catapulting

over water.

There's something

cascading

in my pillowcase.

Transcending temperate forests

like a Superman dream,

fist out in front of me,

sure.

Pop!

ACT #3: Martha

The breeze that came in through the window was a gift from God. It made the curtains turn into sails, and the setting sunlight made everything feel pure and holy. The air conditioner had stopped working the day before, and Martha was grateful for the reprieve. Two box fans circulated hot stuffy air throughout the apartment, and there she was — sweating, sprawled on the living room sofa. The TV was playing reruns of a show she didn't know the name of, and she didn't have to. She was only watching it with her eyes; her mind was elsewhere. It was impossible to be present in the heat.

She couldn't stop thinking about the argument. The way her husband had slammed his palms on their kitchen table.

“What do you want me to do, Martha? I don't understand. You complain cause we're poor, so I go and work my ass off. Then you complain because I am away working my ass—”

“That's not what this is Marcus, you know that. Don't act like you're out there sweating under the sun. You drive a truck. There is a fucking air conditioner blasting in your face all hours of the day.”

He had stared at her. A cup of coffee steamed in front of them both. Untouched. The vapor trails left little spirals in the air.

After a ten-count, he answered. “What do you want me to do, Martha?”

“I want you to...” She caught herself laughing for the first time in a year. “I want you to have a life again. I want you to be. You're not Marcus anymore, you know that right? You're a

robot. You have wires in your chest and oil in your joints and you need to be plugged into an outlet—”

“WHAT DOES THAT MEAN MARTHA?”

That was two days ago. He had left that night. He had to drive across the state into New Mexico for a drop-off. The air conditioner had rattled its last breath the following day, and Martha called him. He hadn’t answered. So, she sat and watched reruns and sweat, letting her mind replay the argument over in her mind. She remembered it fondly. That was the first fight they’d had since college, and she thought they finally had hope. Something to hold on to. Couples that made it work fought. It’s the ones that didn’t that ended up splitting.

The phone rang in the kitchen. She let it ring twice before she stood, feeling the cool breeze from the window on her skin. Rounding the couch, the floor changed from carpet to tile underneath her bare feet.

“Hello?”

Simmer / Sear / Serve

I'm tired of watching onions
caramelize themselves
when they just want to be sweet.

The devil is in the details,
in the garnishes,
in the beef.

There is a boy I used to know
that bakes bread instead of speaking.

Sourdough conversations,
his voice flakes,
and then we eat.

There are people I haven't seen in years
that I want to meet,
and then we'll eat.

Lethargic

When I was
a kid I
could tell who

was walking
up the stairs
in our house

by only
listening
to footsteps.

I always
wonder right
before I

fall asleep
if you were
here would I

be the same
or something
different.

I don't know
which me I
would like more.

I lived next
door to a
nursing home.

I'd catch a
curtain fall
back in place

while I played
in the yard
by myself.

Cigarettes:

(To be read top to bottom and bottom to top)

in the air
 like smoke
 I just want my thoughts to disperse
 another poem
 about _____
 I can't write
 one
 without having
 Newport prose
 or
 odes to Marlboro
 I can't recite these
 stanzas without coughing
 I can't read
 smoldering
 pieces of notebook paper
 stained black with ash
 paragraphs that are
 clogged with tar and
 lines that are
 stale and yellow
 I'm so tired of writing these
 poems about _____

For Jasmine

the Terrible Man

is dancing

and it's still beautiful,

regardless of

context or past deeds.

the Terrible Man is a terrible father,

but a wonderful best friend.

there was a woman on the bus

with frizzy hair and eyebags,

i fell in love with her.

she had two kids, we dated for two months, she was seven years older than me.

she was a horrible pet owner, but an amazing mother,

and so sweet when she wanted to be.

the Terrible Man goes on bar crawls every weekend.

he is a terrible drunk, but the bartenders love him

because he tips well

and doesn't flirt with the drink runners.

i was surprised last night

when i looked in the mirror

and saw how wide my eyes are.

i stuck my tongue out as far as it would reach

and tried writing my name in the fog my breath created.

it tasted Terrible.

Suga Suga

I'm really sorry. I'm never going to
tell you that because everyone
you've ever known has fallen in love
with you and I think it's the way
your hair frizzes into curls around
your temples and I am just going to
pretend I don't think about you
everyday and I guess I'm lucky to
exist in your sphere at all.

...

Dearest honeysuckle bush,

why are you crying?

Don't you know that everyone loves
you?

Why is that a bad thing?