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HOME CARE: A COLLECTION OF POEMS

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ABSTRACT

Home Care is a collection of poems dealing with origin, family, mortality, and growth. The collection is organized into three sections both thematically, and (near) chronologically, following a speaker's growth through adolescence, the illness and death of family members, and young adulthood. These sections create a narrative that invites the reader to move and grow with the speaker while investigating the ways family and origin affect the development of a sense of self and place in the larger world.

Home Care is set in rural America, particularly Appalachian Pennsylvania. Place occasionally emerges as the subject of poems in this collection, but region is predominantly expressed through colloquial syntax and diction native to the area.

The collection features quatrains, couplets, sonnets, and even a pantoum and prose poem. The multiple forms, subjects, and shifting diction and emotion aim to create an experience of change and confusion that ultimately becomes one of strengthening and growth.

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Spring Peepers

On our screened porch at dusk,
my sister and I listen
to curious croaks echoing
through the bare, budding woods.

“Spring peepers”
my father credits for the sounds,
dragging us by our
imagination, leading us

on an adventure
through the rapidly darkening
forest to find the alien
creatures in murky ponds and muddy

marshes. Self-camouflaging
like iguanas, they snatch up
children lured into the woods
by their strange song, my father laughs.

Tucked into my sleeping bag
I lay arms at sides, eyes wide open.
My sister’s knowing snickers mix
with the siren song

of the peepers,
tempting us beyond our porch
into the pitch-black night
to discover the truth

of the matter
hidden in my dad’s head:
his love of spinning tales
for us to get tangled up in.

I. How It Was

A Photo of My Mother Graduating From College

She smiles, draped in black, hand stretched
to the woman before her who stands more decorated,
more educated, but no larger. She doesn't seem tired –
standing straight, skin tanned – a few laugh lines
around her eyes, the hidden hints of dark circles.
The background shrinks away, dark,
as if hurdling her through time and space
and the last few years to *this* moment, on *this* stage,
in *this* gymnasium, college diploma in hand.

Now I see why she must've done it – gone back
to school at 37 with two kids, no husband,
a full-time job just to feed mouths that never
seemed satisfied. Now I see that it wasn't choice –
the mornings, the miles, the cheap black coffee
and second-hand clothes—it was necessity,
sacrifice. What I don't understand is how
she did it – long days at the office, in the classroom,
longer nights bent over books with my sister and me
asleep upstairs, punching numbers into calculators
doing the math for yesterday's homework, trying
to balance the barely-there budget
of an imaginary business, a not-so imaginary home.

Ex-Step Dad

Sitting at her desk she hears
the burping, sputtering
of a motorcycle going fast
up our street and she stops
for a second, her hands hover
over the keyboard she had just
been beating words out of
and she stands, takes long, half-composed
strides to the window, stations herself
behind the curtain—clutches it—
barely peaks out, afraid to be seen, maybe,
afraid to catch a glimpse of the man
who slammed his hand down in fists
when angry, who swore and spit, face red as fire,
who held our house hostage after she told him
to leave and not come back, forced us
to live on couches while he stayed
in the house that did not belong to him,
and when he left moved in down the street,
constantly passed, mouthed *you're dead*,
pointed his fingers like a gun.
Shot.

The bike passes. Her hands drop
the curtain, fall limp at her sides.
She shuffles back to her seat,
doesn't look at me,
doesn't say a word.

The Night We Almost Killed A Dog

Groping for some backseat-floor-fallen item,
my mother's hand finds the hard edges
of a fist-sized rock instead. She pulls it from its place
under the seat, my grip tightens on the wheel.
She brandishes it, shoves it into my line of sight,
my jaw tight, her questioning words ring in my head

just like the ringing that charged out of the woods
as my sister, best friend, and I stood as still
as the statue of John DuBois behind us. The dog—
I remember as all fur and teeth, bark and growl—
as we embraced and the tears started and the fear
collected in our pits and stomachs until we yelled
and the dog disappeared back into the trees,
its collar jingling through our blue-faced silence.
Hearts pounding, hands shaking, breathing
heavy, we armed ourselves with jagged rocks,
and turned, abandoning the statue, cigars,
and our plans for the night, and took the long way
back to the safety of the car.

My mother, rock in hand, still waits
for my response. My eyes lift from the road
to the only witness from years ago – silent, stone,
stationed on a hill above the town. I mumble
an excuse, hands fumbling the wheel.
But I can still hear the ringing
of the bell collar, imagine the dog running
out of the woods and into the arms of its owner.
And cursed with age, reminders, and time
for reflection, my face flushes with guilt
at what we would have done.

Turning From Zoar

My sister and I walked
hand in hand through the darkness
toward home, laughing, leaving
our partners behind.

On we went,
our sandals slapping,
path lit only by faraway
lightning, sounds of destruction
rumbling around us. Knowing better
than to turn back, she glanced
over her shoulder, became a pillar
of waiting. I marched on
toward the solace of shelter,
the silence building
around me, emptiness
ahead frightening. And once
I knew she had become
barely visible, I turned

to run back, felt the swell
in my chest from the sight
of her, just for a second,
illuminated by lightning,
dwarfed by thunder,
before the darkness
consumed us.

Fishtail

I shouldn't have taken
my sister's car the back way—
her little V.W. bug bottoming out
on potholes deep enough to swallow
my leg. And I knew I shouldn't be going
that fast—tires spinning on dirt, kicking up
pebbles and dust – but I was trying to get there,
somewhere, I don't remember where, fast. And I knew
I should have slowed down for the hair pin turn, the last curve
before the main road where I'd hit pavement—regain control.
Skidding rear to the right, fishtailing, my hands jerking the wheel, my foot slamming
the brake, my eyes closing, the car straightening and jerking in the opposite direction,
my eyes half closed from dust and fear until I shimmied back to straight, eight
little inches from a tree. I let out a breath I hadn't known I held
and drove calmly, hands at ten and two to wherever
I was headed. I met my sister not a scratch
on her car or drop of sweat on my brow
and I vowed to myself never
to tell a soul.

How It Was

I didn't get invited to the party. Instead, I got a phone call, early in the morning, the drunken slur begging, *Please come pick me up. My ride got too drunk.* I put on shoes, woke my dad, told him I was leaving – 18 at 2 AM, no questions asked.

Go to the next town over

Turn at the light

Make sure you're not being followed

Stay on that road for fifteen miles

Turn left up the hill and cut the radio before the last house

The road will end but drive into the middle of the field.

You'll see us, she said. And I did.

I pulled up to a fire and opened my doors. My friend and her friend and some kid jumped in and we drove past the houses, down the hill, back to town, to the Wal-mart parking lot where they had left their cars. I took my friend to my house

where she slept. When I woke she lay sprawled on her stomach, on the mattress on the floor, mouth slightly open, drooling on my pillow – how she always slept— this was our friendship. I knew, and I knew that she knew, that I would gladly do it all again.

Something To Do With Our Hands

Excerpts from Zino Davidoff's *Guide to Cigar Etiquette*, 1967

A cigar's head should be clipped open and lit with an odorless flame.

We tore the foil from the outside. He cupped his hands around the flame of a gas station lighter and I inhaled and spun the cigar—inhaled and spun—and turned it around to check the light. A complete red circle glowed in the darkness. I took the lighter, returned the favor.

You should savor the cigar; appreciate it for the taste and the aroma. Smoke it slowly. Avoid too much puffing.

We took long drags to fill gaps in conversation, overdrew, filled the silence with sputtering coughs. I pulled my jacket tighter and turned my back to the wind. Smoke blew into his face. I refused to swallow my putrid saliva, turned to spit.

Let the cigar die a dignified death. After it's smoked half way, it will expire. Dispose of the dead cigar discreetly and quickly.

We puffed and puffed until the flames burned our fingertips and it became impossible to grasp the tiny nub. We drew our last mouthfuls, casted the wasted cigars onto the ground, and stamped them out – crushed the strong odor of stale tobacco and tar into the pavement.

Wait at least fifteen minutes between cigars; anything less indicates obsessive behavior.

Reaching into his coat pocket, he held out two more. I took one; we unwrapped, lit up, and smoked. The parking lot

lights clicked off,
one by one.

Return

Her fingers fumble the necklace's clasp—
trying to free it from its safe spot—
by the whistle—around the neck of the coach.
Silence travels between them in clouds
of her hot breath that hang in the small space
that separates their faces. Her heart races,
cheeks flush, aware that he could turn his head
not even a few inches and kiss her.
She shouldn't be that close. But he never turns
and she releases the clasp. In a fog
of memory, thick and warm, she wonders
if she imagined it or if he feared
another accusation. Head in hands—
crazy, torn—she wishes he would've turned.

Friday Nights

Always the same routine –
kill the lights, turn the radio down,
hush your voice, your breathing,
as if the deer could hear it
all the way to West Virginia.
Shotgun grabs the spotlight,
plugs it into the cigarette lighter,
aims the beam of light across the fields,
glancing fallen stubs of corn stalks, barns,
out across the hills, carefully avoiding windows
of houses, shut off when cars pass, praying
they don't stop. You crawl like this
along miles of road, waiting for eyes
to flash, metallic orbs obscuring tawny face.
Yellow means a doe, orange a buck,
they tell you your first trip out. You lean
forward, unsure, silence
settling, breath a thin film
on the glass.

Love Teeth

The Koreans call wisdom teeth “Love Teeth” because they come during adolescence and hurt like a first love.

They come, as if out of nowhere,
edging their way into your life slowly.
First, a tingle, a hum, a buzz that radiates
through the body, settles in odd places:
the stomach, the tongue, the jaw.
Then, an ache. It spreads slowly
at first, infects the eyes, the brain,
the heart. They begin to scream
you can't live without me with a pang.
They give you a *take me away*
and you'll live with a hole,
a missing piece, for the rest of your life
kind of pain. Sometimes you let them
stay, their presence no more a hindrance
than their absence, but most times
you remove them, cut them out
of necessity when they start
to shift, jumble, crowd, demand
too much space—the process
never desired, never easy—
just a steady hand, drill,
some novacaine, a yank,
an ache worse than before.

II. Home Care

Birthday Pie

His heart had become misshapen—
tired from almost ninety years of pushing
blood. He refused the possible treatments.
The doctor said a year, tops.

My dad chose a pie over a cake three days
before Pop's ninetieth birthday, Pop was still
in the hospital after a trip to the ER. I think my dad
didn't want to jinx it, to be left with a birthday cake.

Three days later in my Nan and Pop's house
we sat at the tiny kitchen table, used mostly for snacks.
My dad didn't want to push our luck—or Pop—to make it
all the way from his bed to the dining room.

Silence hung like a heavy cloth over us,
the only noise the scrape of forks and Pop's stifled
wheezes. We ate our pie and left the table. A burden lifted
from our shoulders, so we talked and sat,

and relaxed on their couch, I leaned against my father –
tired – and as my eyes shut, I shut my mind to the thought
that one day, we'd gather around him in silence,
dish out pie, forget to sing.

Thanksgiving Dinner

Pizza had been the plan,
but we talked my dad into take-out turkey
from the church down the street.
We cracked the Styrofoam containers
as Pop made his way to the table, swollen feet
dragging alongside his walker, every breath
shallow and wheezy, sweating. We set the paper
plates around stacks of newspaper, medical charts,
orange containers full of little round pills
and pamphlets on how to take them. The white
plastic blood pressure monitor acting
as center piece, we helped ourselves
to the chunks of turkey, boxed mashed potatoes;
sat in a silence only broken by the sounds
of plastic utensils on paper until the wheeze
and drag of Pop exiting the room allowed us
to whisper freely and rapid-fire
on the obvious decline of his health.
Was it the smell of food, the bullets
released under our breath, or the heavy drag
of the walker, that woke Nan? Before we knew it
she sat at the table. We donned clean plates,
began the silence and the scraping once again.

90 Years of Advice in a Moment—Last Words

A week before he died, Pop told me a story from years before – he ran into a former coworker at the mall. At that point, Pop only had one tooth left. His coworker didn't remember him or where he had parked his car – *mind had gone sour, died not long after*, Pop wheezed. I stared at the oxygen machine beside him, willed him to slip the nodules into his nose. Pop wished he would have spent more on his teeth – that would've saved his heart later on. His friend *had dying much better off*, he said. His airy chuckle cracked the room's thick air.

I wanted to laugh as tears stung my eyes, wanted to excuse this story, dementia, something mental, but Pop never lost his mind, stories always flowed from him like the benevolence said to flow from the God he didn't believe in. *Go to the dentist*, he urged, *it's worth the money*, then he lugged his walker through the bedroom door. I never saw him come out.

To My Father, After the Death of His

I stepped out of the darkness
and into the light of Nan's
(and Pop's) house not knowing
what to expect. Illuminated features
met me where months of shadow
had accumulated—your shaggy salt
and pepper hair cut into the short
buzz I remembered. Light bounced
off every freckle. The bags that hung
beneath your eyes after long nights
of care had cleared. Your face –
fuller – like you had finally eaten
a full meal. You wore jeans
and a T-shirt instead of my ripped up
track sweats and that dingy
gray crewneck you'd worn
the last three weeks –
a worrisome habit.
Your eyes – less red;
your breath – fewer sighs.
And as we sat on the couch you turned
to me and smiled. I smiled.

The Dirt

He doesn't want to live here, he thinks, as he scrubs
the sickness from the walls one Clorox wipe
at a time, gloved hands working to remove last year's loss—
left in mildewed cracks and cobwebbed corners –
from every room of the house. He doesn't want to live
here: his mother sitting in the living room, rereading
the same sections of the Sunday paper without realization,
the black, blue, yellow from last week's fall running down her face
like the mascara at a funeral, his brother in the basement,
back too bad to work, skulking around mumbling under his breath,
never joining them for dinner, father in the urn on the bookcase.
But somebody has to. He peels the blackened gloves from his hands,
snaps on a new pair and sends the vacuum into whirls of life.
His siblings say they should put her in a home, let the doctors
and nurses deal with the falls, the walker she leaves
in the corner of rooms, opting for the cane clutched in a hand
gnarled by a broken wrist, by a fall, let them wash and scrub
to keep the sickness at bay. He doesn't want to live here,
or clean like this, or be the responsible child out of six
that he knows he cannot not be.

Nan

She thinks she doesn't live here anymore.
Her thin-skin-draped bones barely
occupy the easy chair, when she says to me
"I don't see the mailman much since I'm never here anymore."

Her thin-skin-draped bones barely
hold together. She caresses the blue wrist cast—unfamiliar.
"I don't see the mailman much since I'm never here anymore."
I smile, nod. My stomach eats at itself. My face fails to

hold together. She caresses the blue wrist cast—unfamiliar.
"I can't wait to get this thing off. I broke it at the hospital. Convenient."
I smile, nod. My stomach eats at itself—my face fails to
come together to reveal that I know the real story.

"I can't wait to get this thing off. I broke it at the hospital. Convenient."
Her eyes gaze past me. Stuttering, my words can't
come together to reveal that I know the *real* story.
"I'll still be here a while. I'm going back to Sullivan County."

Her eyes gaze past me stuttering, my words
choke out— "I need to go." We hug, her frame small in my arms.
"I'll still be here a while. I'm going back to Sullivan County."
She thinks she doesn't live here anymore.

Cat Lady

My father found him—frail,
skin slung loosely from bone
to bone after months
of barely eating
and the body's failure
to absorb nutrients—sandwiched
between toilet and heater.
No surprise—my father waited
to tell me until after
my trip home, approached me
in the kitchen, whispered the news
of our cat's passing. Probably
it would have taken me days
to notice his absence – he curled
under tables or my nan's chair,
both of them noiseless
and unmoving, joints too worn
and stiff to lift themselves.
Already such a year of loss:
I could not help but stare
at the skin, thin and breaking
on hands and arms, bruises
sprouted from a gentle touch,
the outline of bones, tendons,
the strain of the pieces
holding her together.

Ignored

He opens the door to silence and the salty smell of human waste. Ten hours of work plus the commute he takes by foot—partly to save money on gas, partly to have an excuse to leave the house an hour earlier than he needs to—he spends most of his day in motion, anyway: his morning run, running around to get ready for work while helping his mother navigate the house, making her morning poptart and coffee, making sure someone wakes to watch her while he's gone. Fifty and back home, he raised two kids of his own just to have three more: mother, two siblings—all with failing minds and bodies, but to different degrees. He sets his backpack down by the front door and follows the smell to his mother, who sits unaware of her wetness, odor, in the armchair. He reaches out to lift her from where she's sat, probably all day, without anyone caring to notice the smell or her need for a wash and change. He gets her walker and points her toward the bathroom, eyes averted from the dark wet circle on the back of her pink floral housecoat. He knocks—three quick taps—on his sister's door, asks if she can help their mother, still too embarrassed to go in and clean her himself. He grabs the chair cover, the crinkly white waterproof pad he bought at the store—its pack-mates, scattered on couches and armchairs, under the sheets of her bed—and throws it in the washer, saunters into the kitchen, past the refrigerator, grabs the cleaning supplies from under the sink.

Home Care

*It's better to have a dead mother
than one you have to take care of,*

Dad says after minutes of silence,
as we cross the street, hands fisted

in our pockets, as if the thought
had just occurred to him, but I knew

it had been consuming him
for the last two years. *I keep asking*

*myself when I'm gonna get to live
my life again.* And I nod my head,

not quite in agreement
or empathy. I stare at our shoes,

and their synchronized steps up the hill,
and I hope he doesn't mistake sympathy

stuck in my throat for silence, or silence
for agreement, for saying *After seeing you
struggle, I won't care for you.*

It's In The Way His Voice Cracks

when he says *leaky pipe*, how he looks
away from his sister, refuses to meet her eyes—
afraid that she will imagine what he's seen—
how he tells her that the bucket underneath
the pipe *needs emptied once a week*. The way
his brow furrow means *I have to go down there
once a week*; his hands shoved into pockets
means *I have to go down there
once a week, I can't stop thinking
about the pipe, cracked
under his weight; can't
stop feeling the cold, heart in my throat, choking
on breath; can't stop seeing the cord,
the toppled chair, and the gentle
swinging swinging swinging.*

His First Winter Run After

He runs along the frozen stream—
screws he forced through his shoes
from the inside out scrape and dig
into the ice that covers the trail.
Unafraid of falling, he stretches his legs
long, lets himself slip a little with every
step, regain balance and stumble again
and again just to stay engaged in core
and mind, to keep his thoughts from wandering.
Sharp left up the steepest trail to the peak,
his breath erupts in puffs of fog. No prints
in the snow means a winter of silence
for these woods. He breathes
it in—he can understand.

Degrees of Separation

The night after his surgery, she wondered
about the last time they had spent a night apart,
her body effortlessly curled on her half
of their bed. Was it a business trip years ago?
That period of separation in their early fifties?
She let herself drift into a cold, restless sleep,
waking in the morning, before the sun,
to fix her own coffee, play her sweeps,
the shuffle of her slippers on the cold
linoleum echoing through the house,
the TV cutting the silence as she reads
in his chair. Right as the clock strikes seven
she picks up the phone and dials. His voice
crackles through the landline; she can't help but smile.

The Living Will

They chose her because they could trust her—the one who always visited for lunch, sat for hours, cleared the plates, returned their calls. They chose her because she listened to the family gossip, whispered behind hands, met eyes with understanding, shook her head in agreement. They chose her because they believed in her—granddaughter, proprietress of the will—to dole out their belongings to their daughter and her children, turn her back to their son, leave him and his children empty handed and ignored.

They didn't know she was a soft shell covering a softer interior, that every time she saw a picture of her uncle—retired, growing old, body beaten from years of fighting fires—or her cousins and their wives, their growing families of babies—that she would crack, expose more and more of her gentle white flesh until she decided that when they were cold and dead and underground they wouldn't care who ate from their good china or spent their money, that maybe some revisions wouldn't make them roll.

In A Parking Garage

When my mother calls to say
the tumor cut from around her
father's spine is not cancerous,
I stand at the pay station, searching my bag
for a ticket with one hand, the other pinning
the phone to my ear. And when she explains
the tumor on his kidney does not grow
through or within the organ, I slide
the found ticket into the labelled slot.
And when she starts to talk about how much time
and I hear her start to cry, I stare as the machine
counts up the hours that I have left
my car here, ticks them down to \$3.25. I let
my quiet comforts echo through the rows of cars
as I drop coins into the machine, pay
for my time, leave.

III. Toughening

Illusion

Why do I love
the magician's slight
of hand as he pulls
your card from his white
threadbare sleeve?
He aims to deceive,
to trick and steal
your smarts with his
sly, yellowing smile,
hares pulled from hats
and scarves from mouths.
Why do I adore
his gaudy get-up,
his made-up assistant?
Their exaggerated gestures
clutch my attention,
every reveal forces gasps
and vibrant applause.
I don't care that
his awkward paws reveal
flaws in his work:
wires and strings,
false bottoms, trick cards.
I love the sensation
of his shabby showmanship,
slipping tricks, tricking
eyes, stealing awe.

The Art of Ignoring Motherly Advice

My eyes prefer poetry in low light
to the harsh fluorescents of lab slides and scopes—
dance across pages, dim word to dim word, pick
out phrases and forms, not sickness and cells.

My ears favor voices with music
spilling from lips over scientific rhythms
of heart beats through stethoscopes—
listen for flow and tightness, but not
when someone takes a deep breath.

My mouth speaks poems,
not diagnoses—pauses with words
that do not end sentences, smiles
at line breaks and alliteration—
will never tell a family bad news.

I dissect stanzas and sentences
not cadavers, because I can't dissect that
look you give me when I talk about my work.

4 AM Has A Funny Feeling

when you're walking home
alone, on the edge
of the extra-wide sidewalk,
the shuffle of your shoes
in the fallen leaves the only sound,
and you shove your hands
deep into your pockets
to protect them from
the pins and needles,
pangs and aches of cold.
You think of others
at home in their beds, wonder
whether madness, pleasure,
or lack of sleep led
your legs the long way,
still you stop and stare
at every beautiful thing
you see: a tree in a place
you've never noticed
whose green and red
star-shaped leaves shade
a window with those thick
old-fashioned panes, imagine
the way the sun must illuminate
them, paint their colors
like stained glass
against the window, cast
a sigh of jealousy at those
who get to sit inside,
or the way coming down
off the hill you can see
the deserted streets
of downtown bob
and roll and rocket up
into another hill, or how
the breeze seems to shake

everything: the bushes,
the buildings, your body,
but noiselessly, which makes
you wonder as you wander
past darkened store fronts
that reflect you
how you are
lucky enough to be twenty-one
and deathly tired, walking
home after hours spent bent
over books and in front of screens,
knowing almost no sleep
will take place before tomorrow
starts and the cycle starts again,
but somehow still be sad
to see your apartment door.

Toughening

Two thin layers against the cold, she tightens up the laces
on her worn out trail shoes—holes in the toes, sides
opened by months and miles of rocks—
her wide feet pounding pushing at the seams.
No time or concern for stretching, she takes off
up the path, tears this year's brown-gray leaves
that litter the ground. She doesn't stop to ease the cough,
her high-pitched asthmatic wheezes, or tightness
that has crept its way from her lungs to her throat,
that mirrors the tightness in her legs, the tired ache
in her feet, the pins and needles of painful cold
on her exposed face and hands. Ten more feet
to the burn line where the naked, stark-white trees—
decimated decades before, swallowed whole by hungry
flames—sway like ghosts on the crest of the mountain,
pale, rotting away from the inside out.
She remembers when she couldn't run half this trail
without a break, extra weight weighed
her lungs and life, heart and body forced into overdrive.
She turns at the line, refuses to rest or catch her breath,
sheds a layer, hops a fallen tree trunk,
sprints away from the sickly, ghoulish silhouettes
in the morning sun; the crunch of leaves and fungal
smell of fall reminds her that fragile things die first.

The Day You Left

I touched everything
that you had touched
systematically ran my hands
along door knobs and countertops
pressed palms to couch arms
and the gentle indentation
of your body in my bed
I gulped water from the glass
you left out on the counter
slid bare feet on the cold tile

Every Sunday I Go To Pray

take myself out deep
into the woods, the wilderness,
and stop.
I pause for a moment
then enter reverently into the house
of nature – my feet prudent yet prancing,
striding over fallen logs, rocks— watching
for frogs and bugs, careful
not to crunch them under my tread. I hum
along with my pounding heart,
my shallow breathing—in
through nose and out
through mouth—air thick
with humidity. I smile
at the trees, at the dirt, at the way
the sun makes patterns, hides rocks,
lets me trip and stumble, but wakens me
to the delicate balance of sight,
sound, smell. The saccharine scent
of the high grass and the deep earthy odors
of rotting leaves exaggerate the greens,
make the bird calls resound, the rustle
of the chipmunks' echo, carry down
the hill, over the trail, all the way
with me until next time,
until I am home.

Associations

The rain makes me think of you— only
because you said you missed it after seven years
in Southern California; you came North burnt
and coated in dust with an addiction
to lying. I guess L.A. will do that to a person –
let them sit at a bar and lie to every pretty girl
who occupies the next stool, wear a thousand
different faces, hats with the brim pulled low
enough to conceal the truth. You told me
you had missed the stars
the first time I met you, said you couldn't see them
through the city's layers of smog and glare of neon,
said you used to lie on the roof of your apartment,
head resting on arms, trying to remember
what stars went where. You told me you
had a doctorate, a small business,
a boxing championship, a pilot's license. I knew better
than to believe you, as we lay there pointing out fake
constellations. No shock
when my phone stopped ringing – I always called
out your lies with my razor tongue,
only kept you around
to keep me guessing.

Breaking

I've stopped taking my meds
she texts, late one night
and I pretend not to read
the words on your phone
as I lay next to you.
I push away
thoughts about the girl
and the medicine
and what she might do.
Nineteen with short dark hair,
freckles—she looks like me
but younger, more broken—
and I try not to judge
you as you put your phone down
and turn towards me,
so I close my eyes
and try to think that you know
her best, that I don't know her
at all, that she doesn't know
about me, and I try
to deny that I
am partly to blame.

After Night Rain

My toes curl in my shoes
at the edge of the muddy trail,
heart beats out the rhythm
of anticipation, I inhale the fog-thick air
and take off. My feet pound divots
into the soft ground, the foggy air reflects
golden beams of morning sun—
brightening the greens and browns and hiding
the twists and turns I know lie up ahead.
The difference a few days can make—fog
reshaping a trail into unrecognizable terrain—
sends tingles down my spine, raises goosebumps
on my body. The intoxicating cocktail of the jamais-vu
and the rustle and snap of my feet kicking debris
on the trail from last night's storm spooks me
into picking up the pace, two-stepping rocks
and roots, brushing by ferns that lean, dust
my legs with dew, shock me with cold.
Still surrounded by fog, no need to look
down, I lock my eyes on a spot of light and a gap
in the trees that means the end of the trail, and I sprint.
Gasping in the humid air, I stumble free from the forest,
rest hands on knees, face towards the ground,
then I feel it—sun beating on the back of my neck—
and I lift my head: the view from the top
familiar, unchanged.

Mourning Dove

Your wing, broken—a tiny protrusion of bone,
specks of blood, ruffled feathers. I gave
what I could—nest, seed, gentle touch
on the head, mid back. I let you follow me
around the yard despite your damage,
little body bobbing, appearing
above grass, disappearing
below. Night, I tucked you
into the homemade nest,
bundle of twigs, scraps of newsprint,
placed it high to protect
against neighborhood cats, foolishly hoped
rest beget health. Morning I found
you, crushed to the concrete, crumpled,
ripped and raw. In my hands, your body
bloody and broken, I understood
that sometimes a quick snap
of the neck means compassion.

ACADEMIC VITA

Academic Vita of Kate Wright kuw152@psu.edu

The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA
B.A. Honors in English
Areas of Concentration: Creative Writing
Minor: Philosophy
Honors Thesis in English
Home Care: A Collection of Poems
Thesis Supervisor: Julia Spicher Kasdorf

AWARDS/SCHOLARSHIPS

Schreyer Honors College Gall Trustee Scholarship	2016-2017
Joyce and Ted Eisenberg Fund for Research and Writing	2016
Mathew Mehelcic Poetry Award	2016
James Cranage Award in Poetry	2016/2015
Academy of American Poets/ Leonard Steinberg Poetry Award	2015

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

The Pennsylvania State University Graduate Teaching Assistant – “Rhetoric and Composition”	2016-2017
Wrote lesson plans, instructed and met with students, graded	

RELATED EXPERIENCE

L Brands, Inc., Victoria’s Secret, State College, PA Sales Support Generalist/TAP Manager	June 2013 – Present
Create and maintain visual displays, process shipments, lead processing teams/open/close/manage selling teams during holiday and when managers are on Paid Time Off	

The Center for American Literary Studies, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA Spring Symposium Student Organizer	2016-2017
Choose and invite speakers, write short biographies, help select forum topics, assign speakers to forums	

Creative Writing Department, The Pennsylvania State University,
University Park, PA

Mary E. Rolling Reading Series Intern

2015-2016

Write press releases, conduct interviews with visiting writers,
edit interviews

Creative Writing Department, The Pennsylvania State
University Park, PA

First Book Festival Student Organizer

Spring 2014

Write press releases, organize travel for and meet with authors,
introduce authors at readings, promote community open mic

PUBLICATIONS AND PAPERS

"The Dirt," "The Art of Ignoring Motherly Advice." "Toughening"

Poems published in *Kalliope*,
Penn State's Creative Writing Publication

2016

"Bromelain", "Letter to a Memory," "The Mechanics of Inspiration"

Poems published in *Kalliope*,
Penn State's Creative Writing Publication

2015

"Illusion"

Selected for the Academy of American Poets/Steinberg
Poetry Prize by poet Marilyn Nelson,
Published on the Academy of American Poets website:
<https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/illusion>

2015

"Spring Peepers"

Poem published in *Kalliope*,
Penn State's Creative Writing Publication

2014

LANGUAGES

English – native language

French – speak, read, and write with basic competence

MEMBERSHIPS

Phi Beta Kappa National Honor Society

Academy of American Poets

Association of Writers and Writing Programs

Schreyer Honors College

Paterno Fellows Program