

Mouths Full

of Glass

in the

Abandoned

Bathroom

by

molly curtis



i. *When asked for two words:*

catastrophe and *unscathed*.

When asked for an object of interest

I gingerly procure

a fox's jawbone

from my pocket

and carve into your torso:

reverence in red across your chest,

regret, beneath your fourth rib.

I contemplate resurrections.

Though your body is thin

your beard is also thin—

too sparse for the face of a savior.

When asked to describe the path

that travels softly down your sternum

to your navel I speak in tongues.

Calm down.

Offer me the barbed hook

of your sunken eyes,

and I will reply that the tile floor

is deliciously soporific

and try to fall, satisfied,

into sleep.



ii. *You know of me*

that I count the tiles
in this room daily
and that area is determined
with letters. I have scrawled
entire alphabets onto the floor.
With them, were they not cemented,
I could spell *papaya* and *twilight*
and your name
many times
in a straight line.
But I know the way
they are arranged.
If you are straight-spined, supine,
with arms outstretched
you spell *heavenly*
from fingertip to fingertip,
eviscerate from your head to heels.
So you are circumferenced,
and the space between
your shoulder blades is the length,
exactly, of my tender-
bellied radius.



iii. *I know your temperament*

by the elasticity of your skin.

Today you are taut.

Today to lick

the soft insides of your wrists

is to fish blue veins,

to harvest thin fish

that flap beneath your surface.

When your skin is wet

they swim greenly,

close to the surface

to feed. And your sweat

is bitter as sea grass.

iv. *This road atlas, our blanket,*

is whiskey-wet. The roads
and mountain ranges run
together, smear into an inky lake.

We make plans to travel there.

I'm sure we could
get there, somehow,
given enough daylight.

It is summer, so we tear out pages.

I know we'll miss them when it's cold.

And we read the names of places
and we can rename places.

I have renamed you
three times, still, I am not satisfied.

The map shows a mountain in Montana
called *Bloody Dick*.

Don't worry love,
this is not one of your names.

We are immobilized here...
with nothing but the gesture
of shredding paper,
eroding paper landscapes
to pile the scraps into topography.



v. *You do not crumble*

the way bread crumbles
on the tongue.

Bloodletting should be gradual, yes
you have all of my permissions.

There is something of the dove
in me. One must bleed a body
deliberately, collecting the redness
in pools. Not out of chest or
neck. One should take sparingly
and only from the radial artery.

You have only yourself
to feed to me. Too slick, too like
a sea creature, you are firm.

I seek you with my teeth.

There is a fish called *bloodfin*.
and you too could have red fins—

You, too, freshwater
under this flickering light.



vi. *We live in a crooked building*

where all angles are askew.

Let's practice for our future
career as a pair of contortionists.

Bending into unthinkable, unnamable
shapes. Using the waterstained

walls. A world of voyeurs,

I know, and so imagine

a cul-de-sac crowd gathered

at warped little windows

and imagine loving them. Turn

to show yourself

amorously inside-out.

Today there is no touching.

And they love us back through

absent glass. We should stay

perilously close,

hunger artists of proximity.



vii. *Speaking of Caravaggio*

do you recall
how we saw
his self-portrait
in the young David
and Goliath's severed head?
His adolescent self gripping
his old scalp,
his old face waxy and sagging
off the hairline—
the point of connection for
the ivory hand of youth
and the bulging stare
of a bloated death head.
And like cherub-faced boys
and the monsters that grow up in them
or drip from their fingertips
might there be two of you as well
and two of me?
I am old bones dressed
in infant flesh,
or perhaps the other way around.
Either way an enclosure.
Dark within light or vice versa...



viii. *Do you remember mountains?*

I seem to recall a cliff.
On top of which once
the desire to edge out
silently like an empty summer
dress into the wind,
this seemed a natural impulse
until you described to me
my own body broken red
against rocks or tangled
limply in that old dead tree,
how it would look to you,
not at all like empty clothes.
Carrying bones in my pockets,
the brittle bones of small creatures,
I feel fortified.
This is not an empty gesture.
When you appear to me stronger
than my bone-filled
summer dress
I want to fill your pockets
with stone.



ix. *Taciturn, you burn beautifully*

issuing no volitional noises.

Flames chirp,

And they are orange like flowers
that are named after birds.

Maybe I should rename you
after something with talons.

I talk of my preoccupation
with the hawk who,

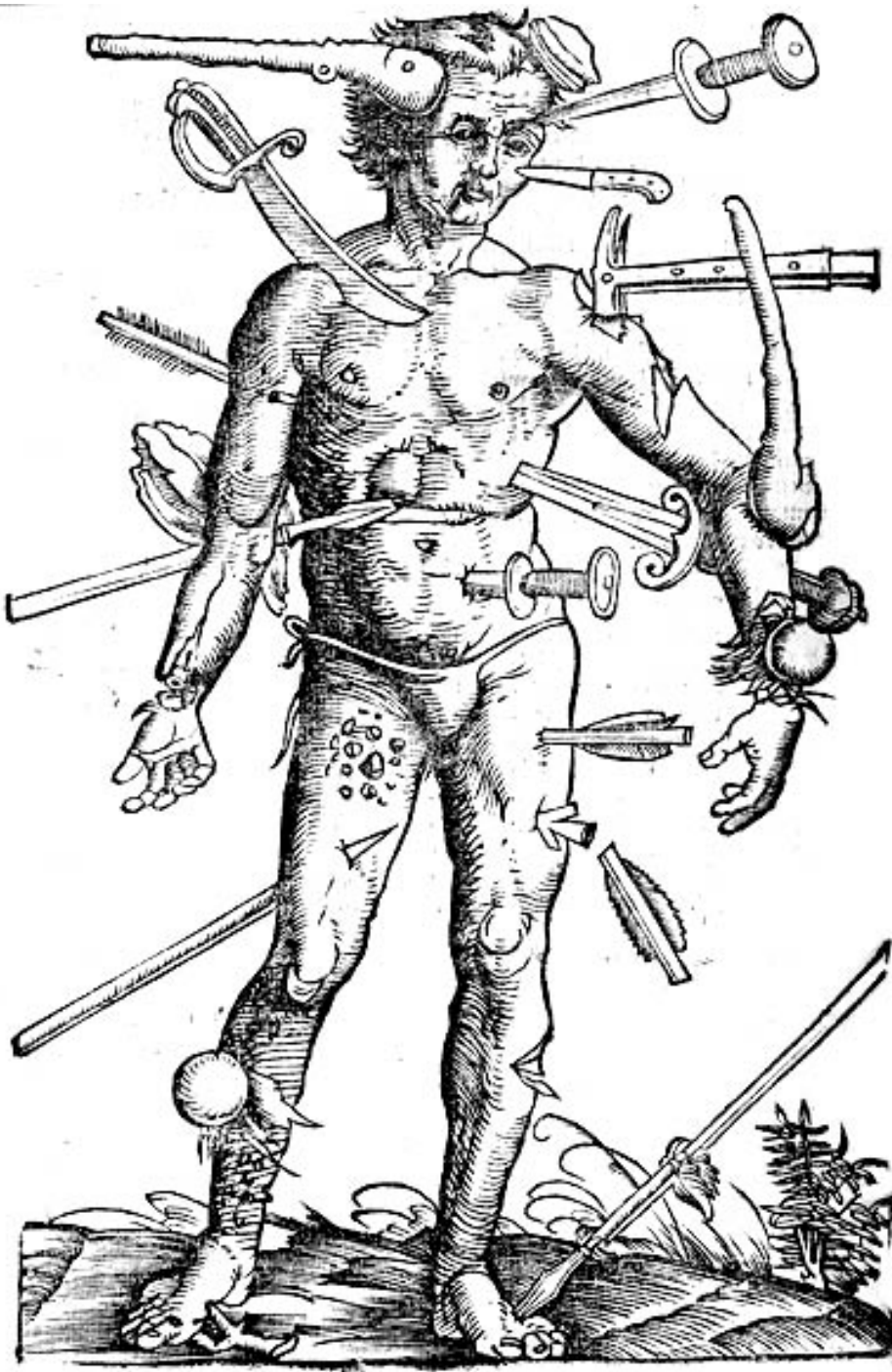
when mating flies

high above the blistering
surface of earth

to grab her partner

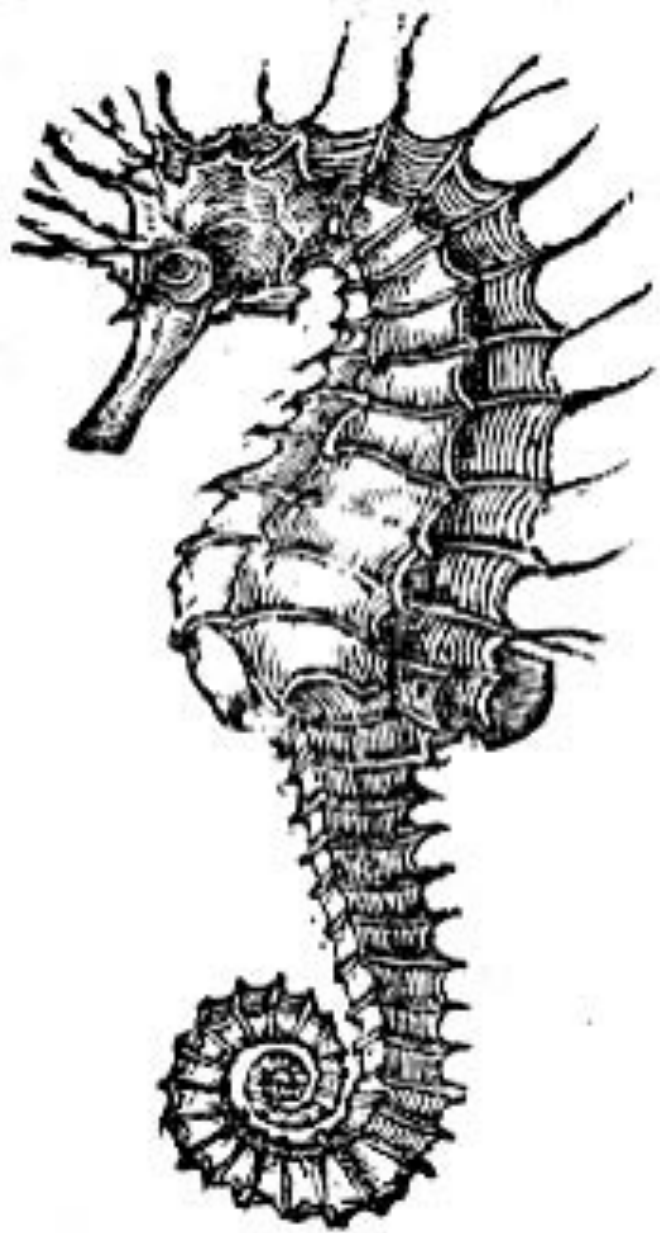
with sharp claws

for the frantic flutter
of a spiraling fall.



x. *I think often of your bones*

The shapes they make
under your olive-
flesh and how
they must taste,
how the marrow would
stick in between my teeth.
I have no use for utensils,
so put away your steak-
knife, please. This will not
resemble cadaver dissection
or even Thanksgiving.
What lasts here without us?
And what can outlast the pleasure
of making an offering?
or of taking something
that is not already
wholly yours...
I don't need this knife
but it would seem
at its sharpest,
poised
against your lovely throat
before any god or quaking
animal could intervene.



xi. Fish have many ribs

the thinnest of which
can be fashioned into needles
to inject you
directly into
my withered veins.

There is no sunlight today,
I am shrinking
against the stillness
of your frame.

Why is it so easy for you
to be liquid one moment
and stone the next?

This is an environment
in which many creatures
would dry up like birch bark
but you have hardened
into something less bendable,
and these sharp little bones
are nearly translucent
and breaking against
you like tired waves.



xii. *While you were making dust angels*

in those white particles
that descended from the ceiling
I was sketching with wet charcoal
your likeness onto my stomach.

You are my Vitruvian Man,

a palm is the width

of four fingers

a foot is the length

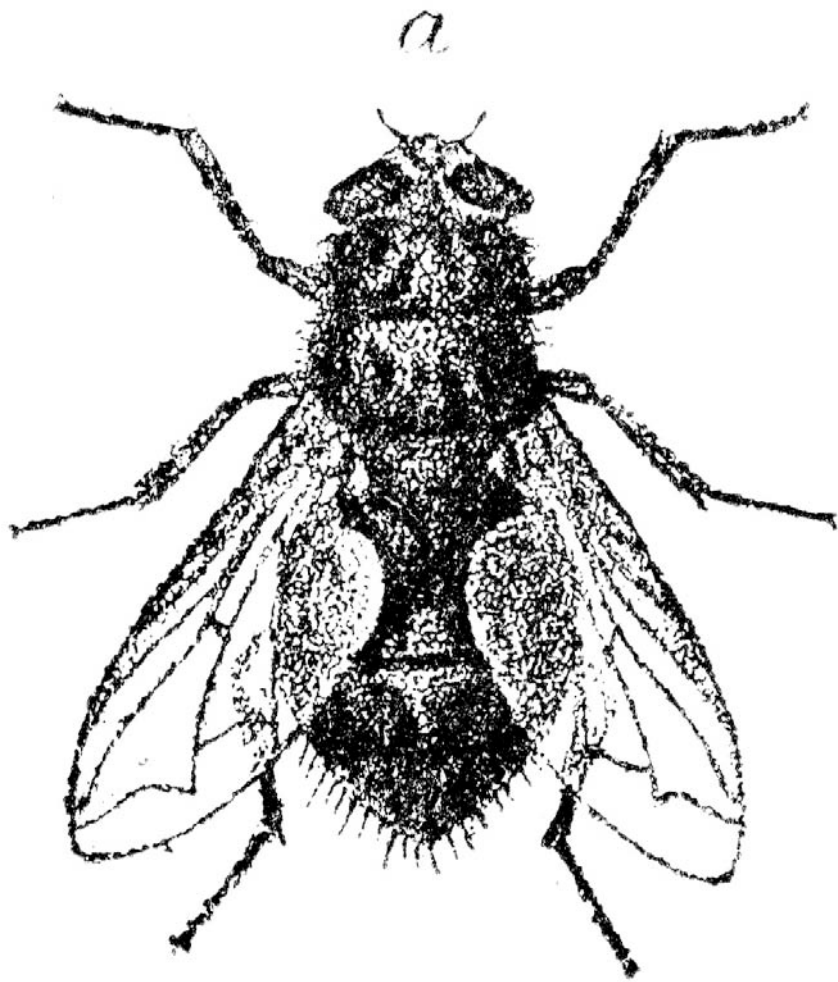
of four palms

The length of a man's horizon,
the one that stretches
from hand to hand,
however masked
in hard-packed ceiling dust
is always equal to his height,
Vitruvius said. But your
longitudes are not
so easily measured.

So stand up

in a cloud of dust to demolish
the image I have rendered.

Do this by pressing your body,
all of its dimensions,
against me.



xiii. *The sound of rain today*

is not cleansing,
is not lullaby,
is a million insects dying
and crashing all at once
into the tired
spires of our roof.
Tonight there will be many funerals
above our heads.
So fold paper
into roses, roll scribbled
condolences
into miniature scrolls,
you can tie them
with strands of my hair.
You gather a certain
tenderness from these
deaths, I know,
not because you show me,
but because of that cracked shell
you only yesterday
tattooed onto your forearm
with the discarded
rib of a sunfish...
to stand guard over
your radial artery.
And these deaths affect me
like the descent of blood
from my head rushing downward
when I stand
to move my body
closer to yours.



xiv. *I imagine you are mimicking*

the expression on my face, I can't
tell how I feel until you look at me,
as if my face were carved out of marble.
It's in the eyes, but mine
I think are blue,
or used to be blue, and yours
are the green of a moss that grows
only in the wettest forest.
Now I have no way of decoding you.
We used to stand on the edge
of stone and water,
the larger bodies of our particular world,
now I have only
your borders...
surfaces which to my tongue
seem like laying
on a shivering beach
braiding grass and seashells
into sea-wet hair.
I want to not
be so acquainted
with your edges,
I want to not
say
take my skin, for warmth,
take fistfuls of me, dear...
over and over
until my voice breaks,
seeing on your face
only the shadow
of my own mouth moving.



xv. *Your look is a hunting*

knife thrown over your shoulder,
but I am supposed
to possess all sharpness here.
When did you learn to take
without seeming to take,
without even the look of taking,
with only a silent,
slowly spread smile?
You must be plotting
against me. Just sitting
there all day, cross-legged,
only your eyelashes moving
to flutter away the amoebic swirls
that form in your vision
from staring so long
at my face.
I can't remember
if it happened
or if I dreamt it, finding
the box full of images of us
buried under the floorboards,
but vividly I can see
us buried under floorboards.
I can't ask you.
I can't recall what it was like
when I wanted always
to touch you,
but never to make it hurt.

