Bitches of the Drought

LAUREN EGGERT-CROWE
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BOUGAINVILLEA

Fistfuls of brittle
pink crinoline fading
to beige on the patio, smashed

into curbs, confetti
after the parade, piled
up like leaves

for children, crinkling
streamers beneath
boots, or lacing

a dust devil. Wet
with rain, they will
clump against trash

bins, colorless-bound, but now
a selfless fuchsia froth,
a bloom of birthday

taffeta. Meddlesome
weeds, but who doesn't
love their unabashed

cascade, their constant
blossom? Neighbors, forgive
my transplant heart.
BITCHES OF THE DROUGHT

All night we dreamt of its garnets tumbling across our tongues.

We filled up our sinks and filled them again, and everything that passed through us was clear as singing bowls.

We stumbled about gummy-lipped apologies, our backs heavy with cucumbers. We wanted a polished mirror to walk on.

Each time we spoke, whole taxonomies of wishes flew out. Iceplant brats, every last one. This is what we discarded. This is the saltcedar dust of our shame.

If I say the sun made me do it, what then?
THINGS I HAVE BURNED INTENTIONALLY

Come June, we gathered our papers. Flung them in unmemorized. We children, we lit fires.

I have emptied my pockets
of matches. Singed the edges
of the singe-able.

I have carved little X's and forgotten
the gloss underneath: the damning

lines over and over.
Readied the ring.

A smile toothy with embers.
What hurts between.

When I said I was sorry, I was lying. But I gave you

the kindling to torch me with.

Watched our history
blaze up like a sentence.

If there was one moment
you wanted it,
that is enough
to pack the house
with coals.
Tinderstick hands. You curled and warped into the heat of your own desire.

And trust is an ashen thing, chalking up our mouths. I want to see it shame your forehead.

We knew our chemistry. Laid charred hands to the other's reactions. I said, *undo* and it wasn't. You made your bed.

The ethical words,  
I mean, the science of betrayal.

I have been gunning around that choice ever since, ever your electron.

To be wrong about the past is to bolt into it. Charts flying. The liberating jettison, the good riddance fuel of severance.

To strike the flint and let the evidence be consumed. Chapters crinkle out of their hissing heft.

Squander for squander.
What was left of these tests
in the forgiveness of the fire.

You remember it too, the rule
of matter: we rearrange
and bind ourselves
to the softest force that yields.
GET AS FAR OVER AS YOU CAN

Like how I met a woman who looked so much like another woman I kept staring, expecting her to grow a snaggletooth and lay claim to my wasteland

Like how we keep talking nobly about gentrification, but we aren't asking how can my body not be a poison?

Like how traffic is a bad sister

Like how I never learned to surf, only watched you slide your awkward torso into a wetsuit and walk around

Like how I am Facebook friends with four dead people

Like how I wait for the traffic to become some other kind of traffic

Like how I invited you to brunch so I could glare at you. Like how I've taken most of your gifts to Goodwill
EVERY BOY THINKS HE’S SOCRATES

and I am undone by the arguments
in memory. The smart people
say we have two selves. No word

on which of ours still loves
the other. One of these days, yours
will be the small cruelty I miss.

I am tired of saying, *well okay sure.*
I am reached all the way out. Holes
are unextraordinary, but you keep

glorifying the poking of them.
What is sex but the jabbing
of an old wound anyway? I cannot stop

writing declarative, transitive. I would like to deliver
cheap carnations to whoever sent you
the memo that said your job was to say, *actually, ok but actually—*
I CAME BACK

Saturday and I want to be doing what everybody else is doing: flying at your face with my hot pink claws. Put me in a music video. I could get used to this mansion rage.
I CAME BACK OUT OF BOREDOM

If someone wants me out with them in the bright possibilities, I will, yes. When I'm not working,

I drop ice cubes in my orchids and try not to stare at the flat flicker of other people's Saturdays. When I'm not working, I think about working. I would like to dig

into a delicious failure. I would like a dramatic gesture—song lyric tattoos.

Money is a mountain I can't decide on. Tunnel or climb?
I CAME BACK HUNGRY

Lord, make of
me a chapel
for a barefoot man
to fall into
on a thankless
night.
I CAME BACK WITH MY SPARRING GLOVES ON

But what does the science say?
How do you scrub it from the outside?
What is this doomsday arithmetic?
Are we like a patch of mint?
Will we claim and linger?
What am I permitted to desire?
Which crime would you choose?
Is this that kind of hole?
Who is your villain?
Will you tell me I am?
I CAME BACK IN THE BLUEST DRESS

Put on your fake empathy face when you listen
to my wants. This is the battle of letting go of black
metal, of the peas and the pod.

Needed to be a ghost living inside your ghost. In those days,

I could have sworn we were two wet lungs

I believe everything asked of you was fair.
I CAME BACK WITH A PILE OF SUGAR TO GIVE MY FRENEMIES

when you called me, my lungs were two flayed rabbits
when you called me with the acidic chime I touched the lightning storm
when you called me, I froze
the slowest glacier when you called me
I dreamt of walking with you and your family when you called me
all of us in the same navy
sweatshirt when you called me
I dreamt of your kiss, when you called me and your question,
when you called me and her hair falling all over you,
when you called me
I CAME BACK TO CATCH MAD AIR

I laid down my arms for you. I wanted to be convinced. I wanted to be the grand villain of someone's life as if it would solve the summer. The summer was a barrel of peaches and indiscretion. I had lofty thoughts. Hold on tighter, come closer, I repent. She called me in the hurricane and I spoke with your voice because your voice was the supreme currency and I wanted to buy the whole country. I wanted to win the grace contest. In those days I could barely eat so I just swallowed.
I CAME BACK TO GET OUT OF THE RAIN, 
BUT INSIDE THE STORM SWUNG ITS PENDULUM

I was your second peg.

When you felled me like a domino, I gave you

thirteen hallelujahs. Too small to know I was wrong,

but you were the only mirror looping

above me. The weight of you, a planet.

You and your homemade gravity

giftwrapped like a treasure instead

of a sentence, of a shackle. I spun

and spun, but a planet I was not.

Meanwhile you had already graduated

to the sun, and I was fucked.

I looked upon my distorted

reflection and I called her sister.
I CAME BACK WITH EMERGENCY LOGIC

The problem was all the mirrors.

Blue mirrors, concave glass.

I was a freckle on a bitten lip.

I was your new wave sad eyes. I was a cupcake atop a gazelle. I shimmered and starved.

The problem was the sound of the mirrors bending forward and backward. That electronic light all up in our pituitaries, I can't even.

I was a mitten, and you were a desert to crack in.

You rendered me splat on the carpet; I said, yes please.

The problem was the doors. They were always open. I was a neon emergency.

You were a panic of silk.
I CAME BACK LOOKING FOR A FIGHT

Wasting my wishes, blowing eyelashes this way and that since

I was fifteen and spending my desire on red cars, spinning quarters. Half a life built up for this crockery--

Like the punchline: the joy of your body destroyed me. This is the battle of softening

into the girl I left behind on the platform the day your engine

steamed in with an arsenal of foreign films.
I CAME BACK TO SHAKE THE SAND OUT

Have I shown you enough
of my journey to flip your hands?

I have a net to unweave, as you have
debts. I said, let my body be a debt
to itself. Glorious
receptacle: I opened wide

for you, generous and dirty.
Even when you didn't want it,
you knew you could, like
when you wrapped me

close with a proprietary arm, but I was the one
who asked, is this okay?
Perhaps you entered me believing yourself to be an innocent bystander.

But sometimes I remember how you were the first to weigh your head against my hummingbird heart. The paralykiss. Remember what you asked for, what I promised you, what it cost me. I melted my body and molded it into a friend to give you on the droughtcraving nights when the ingénues wouldn't keep you.
You would never save me from my own
destruction with love, let's be real.
Though I have wanted you pummeled
into pumice on bluffs white as privilege,
I can't imagine you halting my hurricane
with forgiveness: the languidly wronged one.
Our economy of secrets needed invisible fingers
crossed behind the back. Say it was magic,
the way my wrists pulled toward your chest.
I swallowed your clicking reasons, made a lamb
of my wilderness, tampered down into the chatter
of shame. Absolve yourself and lather up
your logic. Let the good riddance feel good.
The heat of your loyalty could never sustain
my armies. I've crumpled enough, hair aflame.
CONFECTION

Like you, I searched for sweetness
in the wrongest places. Bit into

what made me sick, washed it
down with what made me sicker.

Girls walked on bricks to get here.
The sun warmed the sugar.

Girls left. The bricks cooled.
I furnished the table in a song

of lemon, and you fell
quieted. I said I wouldn’t, but that

meant yes. Noon
was a pastry that could scald

your fingers. Look: the light
is unassuming and lonely.

Across the street, they are selling
egg and flour. It is a fool’s errand.

I told the story with a wooden spoon
in my hand. Everything I said

embarrassed me. Mistook the salted
stone for the bakery; the kitchen-work,

for the kitchen itself. A lit oven awaits
the glass it will be given.
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