

“Cut the ending. Revise the script. The man
of her dreams is a girl.”

— *Julie Anne Peters.*

Grit

by

silas denver melvin

for ki, always

Foreword

You are seventeen and how can life be so cruel and beautiful at the same time. The punk music pours out and sets you apart from the working man. You are eighteen and the polite transphobia from adult women is no longer keeping you hostage as you sob an earthquake in the passenger seat of your ex boyfriend's new car. You are nineteen and you told your therapist about your suicide plans while you show her your skinned knees. You are twenty and homosexual and panicked by your existence while you have ice cream for breakfast. You are a summer boy and you are beautiful.

Grit is a transgender coming of age story. There are no beautiful rainbows here, no whispers, but raw cries from somewhere primal. It is tender and powerful, heartbreaking and funny. It is a punch in the gut, a slam of the door and a beautiful collection of poetry by an author who has the courage to persevere.

Rebecca Rijdsdijk

Sunday Mornings at the River

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Old World

in the old world, before the body
 awoke and ruptured,
you followed your father shirtless
through the yard, grass bloody knees,
one of the men in your small cowboy
 boots and muddied hands.

in the old world: no chest budding.

you sat in steel sinks and blew
bubbles and your grandmother
laughed and told you not to get
 your dress socks dirty like that
again and you never listened.

in the old world, before you were told
what you are and aren't, you were a
sexless child. woodland scamperer.
 crooked teeth beaming and
singing and falling out on the floor
every week, it seemed. the only worry.

in the old world: cousins and uncles
and fresh tilled hay in the fields and a
hot supper in your too-big overalls
 and everyone laughed when you
said your boyish things.

you couldn't keep your shoes on.
you parroted words you heard
 from your father and kissed your
mother on the cheek like he did. you
had a body that belonged: to you

and in the world.

in the old world you weren't asked
'and what made you this way?'

now you are. you sit in the clinical
whiteness of the living room and open
your empty hands with no answer.
you are loud and ashamed.

you climb into the hayloft and dangle
your boots over the edge. the sun shines
in the same but you are displaced. there
is a fine plastic film between you
and what will be. the old world exists
only in disposable cameras.

in the old world: your mother takes
a glossy photo from its sleeve and says
'you are such a pretty thing.' and now:
*'you were. you were. you were. when
did this happen?'*

you aren't. there is nothing to return to.

you take your boots off and wait to hear
the drop.

The Apocalypse Will Never Be As Advertised

& of course, when it arrives, it is a dead bird
on the doorstep

we talked about it for so long we stopped believing
it would ever really happen

this can be applied to many things

what i mean is: the poor are business as
usual

(that business
being basic survival)

what i mean is: the rich are blood-hungry-bored
at the lack of a cinematic climax

they wanted so desperately to be slung from earth
in their gorgeous little rocket ships

to have reason to use them other than bragging rights

the rich say “oh i wish it was more. oh i wish
i was martyr.”

the poor say “next in line please” & go home to die

Three Definitions Of Crossdressing

i

to dress across / state lines / to clothe your crime / here
/ & be dragged by the hair / back / dress sloppy / dress
outlaw / to hollow out the body / like a bible / to hide
the gun inside / to be caught / & convicted / of
transexual worship

ii

when your mother finds / your chest piece in your ham-
per / & your damp mouth drools kerosene / lights the
couch / when you are sobbing your ugly / naked sorrow
/ when her hands / cannot touch you / you no longer
knight / your gallantry stripped raw / when you are
not son nor daughter / when she unnames your body /
when you cannot justify / your origin / when you say /
“i was only playing / a game / to see how it felt” / & the
lie lands heavy / like a marble / on the kitchen floor

iii

to be christened boy / in your boyfriend's jacket / to be
silhouetted in the shadow / of your sex / to have passing
strangers believe / your deception / to no longer deceive
/ to become your father's flesh / tanned hide hiding /
your hands / to not know where the lie stops / & the
truth erupts / ruptures / rakes you from / the bottom of
the lake / holier / than baptism

Metaphor For The Carwreck That Isn't A Carwreck At All

the gun: in the backseat on the floor & unsafetied
& sliding around when corners are turned

his mouth: an exit wound
his face all punched out with them,
like cookie-cutter bites,
the light seeping thru him in whistling lines

& what a sad thing:
to think him beautiful
for what cuts knives thru his gorgeous face

& you never thought a parking lot
could be both so orange & so empty
save for your little astronaut body
orbiting around the wreck

the car: crumpled firework fizzle
wasp paper burst open & leaking you out

the two of you: young & stupid & now
yolk bleeding into the pavement

you lay silent in the cold

he lay beside you & his hand finds your hand

his other hand finds the gun strewn aside &

he tucks it into his belt

without getting up &

& he rolls his head over to you

with a sickening slack &

the unmistakable crunch of gravel

& says

that's between the two of us

& man, ain't that a double meaning?

Pathetic Polite

questioned so i feel faggot & vicious. by that i mean,
sparrow boned & trying to bite. not be bit. my throat:
a highway. my antidepressants wanting to know who
drifted lanes, & why? somehow we always circle back
here, don't we? a man points between my legs & says
"what's that for?" & you know what? i'm so surprised,
i can't shape my shame into an answer on the spot.
laughter can be as hollow as a closet. i'm cornered, i'm
packing. i'm forever trying to prove myself & never
loving the outcome. bad science. bad behaviour. who
unclipped my leash? a freedom so large, it frightens
me. my changeling mouth. my gendered carapace. i feel
faggot & decadent. furious & depraved. there's a six-car
pile up in my gut. i'm choking on rhinestones. a man
points between my legs & says "what's that for?" & you
know what? i'm so pathetic-polite, i still give him head.
i'm begging, i'm busted. by that i mean: give me purpose
more than a footrest or a fetish.

Seventeen

we are 17 & we are burning daisies:
hot anger mouth & so unbelievably
tender. 17 is our multitudes. we contain
so many. we are 17 & waiting in line
for concerts. 17 is the mountains &
the water & the sun cutting curtains
into our bare legs in the grass. we are
17 & how unfair is the world. 17 is
so cruel & kind: 17 is our multitudes.
we are 17 & always touching, somehow,
hooked fingers & brushed knees. we
are 17 & how can there be so much of us?

the doors open & punk music pours
onto the streets, much to the horror
of every bystander trying to get to work.

Neurosis

there is a fire upstairs and you've
been putting it out with kerosene.

you hand people the fat droop
ing heads of dandelions and they
smile polite plastic. your finger
nails are caked with soot.

there is a fight upstairs and you've
been tossed in with your hands tied.
no one in town speaks your feral
tongue.

you ask for directions and sit at the
bus stop in the rain. the grease
puddles reflect your eyes but
nothing else.

there is a tornado in the attic and
everyone you tell says the weather
is nice today. you find bruises on
your knees and do not remember
how they materialized. you
wish you had the nerve to kiss
strangers or believe in love.

there is a dog upstairs and you've
been feeding it your fingers. it

only shows affection with teeth. you
look down at your knees. they are
split like ragged flags. you wish you
had better boots and a bucket of
kerosene.

you wish someone would tell you
how you ended up here.

Pissing Contest (Or An Interrogation On Behalf Of A Lover Who Is No Longer Mine)

do you believe in anarchy? do you
hate the system or just dress like
you do? do you worship crowley?
are you misled? have you begged
for forgiveness at the hand of our
beloved baphomet? is your blood
syruped? do you know the definition
of homosexuality? do you work for
the man because you want to
or because it pays rent? do you
smile at cops? when you kiss a
man which mouth do you use? is
your aesthetic performative? do
you protect children? do you know
who aton lavey is? could you recite
to me the eleven satanic rules of
the earth? have you read mayor
of castro street? are you from this
planet? have you heard of me
before? does the government
give you reason? are you medicated?
do you have faith in our troops?

have you shot a gun? is your
blood authentic? is your blood
authentic? is your blood authentic?
can you prove it to me?

Straight Boys And The Faggots That Forgive Them

so you return to the boy like a rejected
astronaut, make bounds around
him until the air is clear with intention and
you're both looking down the barrel of a short gun.
*let's forget the times before this. let's forget
the tragedy of my sex and your words and the
way your hands have gutted me so many
nights before. here: my pocket knife. here: my howling
sense of reason.* you set them out on the table like
a promise. a declaration. and he says he can't love
you, even with your guard down.

so you kiss and it only hurts when you stop to
really think about it, like sucking on a rotten
tooth just to feel the ache and satisfy the wince. he
makes a mess of your ribcage but you've come to
expect the clean up after, accustomed to
the ritual of grieving animals. *it doesn't make you a
faggot, if that makes you feel better. if you don't tell
anyone what we've been doing behind closed doors.
i'll relinquish that part of me if it keeps you here,
in this dirty bed, under these bleeding stars.*

he always touches you like he's worried what lies
under the skin, but he's got eyes the color of a good

question and at times you get so alone, it just
makes sense, so you allow him to bloodlet you in
 the basement and you make a nice weekend
project.

you don't love this boy and even then, before the
venom took root, you didn't really love him, just wanted
to know what kind of pink his gums were, and now
you know: disappointingly average, just like yours.

so you return to the boy and say *this is who i am. like
it or lump it, buster.* and he takes you into his hands the
same as always, unforgiving, and after it, he says
[]

cautious and joking-like, wants to get away with it,
 and maybe it's good, he's acknowledging the
bridges you're standing on together. you want to push
him
off, give him a lovers nudge, and maybe dive right in
after,
but you've left your knife on the table at his place
 and you'll be damned if his cousin comes
home

and pockets it. *here: my pitiful attempt to radiate.
here: my anger boiled down to mist. here: us, unmoving,
stagnant. baby, won't you please get me going?*

Eighteen

i am 18 & this means i never again will
be jailed in the guidance office with the
blistering hum of air conditioning &
the polite transphobia of adult women.
18 & life is so large with opportunities,
it looks more like rotting citrus. 18 &
i am still a sobbing earthquake in the
passenger seat of my ex boyfriend's
new car. 18 & i didn't go through with it.
all of us crying at graduation like
frenzied cicadas. all of us gripping each
other tight like the last day of high
school isn't just another day. i am 18
& directionless with my crazy. no taste
for punk. no anger left in bones not
yet old but somehow weighted with
an agony i cannot seem to shake. 18
& no more quizzes, no more classes,
no more answers to my childish questions.

Magic As A Metaphor For Nihilism

i only love magicians who share the secret of their magic with me because breaking a promise is a sort of new trust, too. like smashing open a robin's egg just to prove there was something feathered & vulnerable inside the whole time. a man puts fish in a blender in public & tells police it wasn't his fault that an observer pressed the button. dahmer tells police his only crime was bringing his loneliness into the world. i put my heart in your hand & i am only waiting for the unavoidable ache of a fist wringing out a wet cloth, as much purpose in the act as the methodical trigger finger checking the chamber. i only love magicians when they do not let me believe in miracles. magicians who do not show me the reconstruction of a baby bird or a woman in a box, but instead the hard truth that the same hand that makes an apple disappear can invent a knife with just as much ease.

Montage Of All The Times My Body Has Been A Virus Ending In A Black And White Silent Closeup Of My Undressing

i

his aborted hands curling away from me
like radiation burn. his polite cancer smile.
his drool a gasoline puddle gleaming
in the backseat. the camera pans up.
no soundtrack. no satisfaction. we are just two boys
idling.

ii

the girls' locker room but no 80s music.
the girls' locker room but no showerheads singing.
my single metamorphosis between boots & sneakers,
a cautious prey-animal smile. a bra strap drawn back
& my eyes tilt-a-whirl with sick confusion.
the dirty knowing here is not safe.
the fade to black on my backpack with its side pocket
holstering the one old spice stick my mom allows.

iii

too eager colour symbolism: black tile, black toilet lid,
my dysphoria sweatshirt also, unsurprisingly, black.

my quivering body a
cavity tooth behind the flimsy stall lock.
 whatever music they play in mcdonalds bathrooms
playing. my maleness sticking to my leg.
careful not to drop it. careful not to be caught
in the open. script reads:
[trembling hand finds faucet. half angel
scrubs cheap soap into his palms. half angel
 rips paper towels from dispenser.
he exits. god returns to him his lungs. he exhales.]

iv
the crushed purple hickey on my lower stomach
made even more purple by a filter post edit.
 his yawning indifference
while we watch traffic out the window.
include the framing: a coffee table between us,
his living room a stagnant mouth. separate cells.
he says 'next time?' i watch the traffic.
 the director doesn't call for a cut.
i pull my shirt down, i knife the bullet out
before i close the door behind me. it's all for show,
something to make the audience swell with a gasp.

v
here: my shirt. here: my belt buckle.
here: the dislocated armour in a shining heap.
if there was sound, it'd be metallic. a clink, a rattle.
 the scene is grey & black, no shocking slash

Grit

of pink, no red syrup pumped under the door.
a crop of hair. another crop of hair, in the obvious place.
 water runs steaming into the tub.
i step in with a deliberate stance: leg a spear.
credits roll through in reams.
my name, my name. you know the one.
 my name inked in white over my body.
simple. no infection. the one window casting a
square of what would be yellow light directly
 where i sit in the silent water.

Homesick

you try to wind down at night. disarm yourself.

 funny how the body will try to run
without you. involuntary organ thrumming.
walk circles trying to find home. radar eyes
pinging off the walls.

 of course you miss it.

longing is the follow up to change, to leaving.

at night, you sneak into the backyard.

you dig up your childhood dog.

he's just bones.

 he's just bones.

Let Dead Dogs Lie

it's sick of you to play with dead dogs
but you do it anyway

you say cmere boy one more game of fetch
you say a little decomposition never killed anybody

& he forgives you
dogs are like that
so loyal
dead dogs are just happy you're here

they don't know why you've been gone so long

can't let dead dogs lie
you whistle & he comes running

digs himself up out of his grave

you dug it for him
that place in the dirt

you say here boy & your boy is here

you put a bullet between his eyes

& here's the bullet

& jesus does he wag his tail

Nineteen

19 & i have only now told my therapist my suicide plans from high school, how i mapped it out like like a skinned knee & knew for certain it would never heal over shut & for my birthday this year: antidepressants & the dread of “i was not meant to live this long” & no one in the house says my name unless forced, as if a robbery, as if inviting ghosts.

19 & i am still not the man i was meant to be & staying stagnant. 19 & all i have is one pair of good jeans & a bike. we call this inheritance & i'm not sure what mine is worth other than maybe a plot in the earth. 19 & always crying in front of professionals, asking to be healed but never taking the advice, showing them skinned knees & being given a sad, pinched look in return. 19 & sitting still in the sun light, skin broken, medicated, & unsure.

Getaway Car

christ look at this murder scene
fantastic bloody body
gleaming in the front seat

bold enough to kill in broad daylight

let's go baby i wanna see us hit 100
i wanna hear the echo when we hit
rock bottom

shit we're leaving DNA everywhere
they got names for it all
trace & contact & exit wound
they'll dust for fingerprints
& find my whole arm in the trunk

can't find the lug wrench
left my belt somewhere
my knife: in you up to the hilt
like sex
like sex but not

misplace my mouth & you
give it back

sorry i kept you so long you

know how i feel about hostages

i say "get in the back, no funny stuff"
& i wish you'd ask if that means i love you

i want the chance to say no
wanna say bite the bullet & smile sweetheart
you look so good a blossom of scarlet
my walking mortuary
a graveyard where i bury my heart
but never the hatchet

let's get going baby let's get gone
town ain't big enough for the both of us
no more but was it ever? we always
kept it full, left the body weighted
in our stomachs

you get the gun, look so sleek with that
black neck jutting from your hip
i got the knife, the good rope
we can last all night we can
make this the best act yet

confess to murder & shriek with joy
& i'll lie & say it still gets my dick hard

maybe it does
hell, maybe it never did in the first place

In Response To 'When You Have Children'

& you know you've been looked at & named
as the sick & aching creature you are,
the gutter puppet, the transtrumed body,
but still: a smile & the coy, cocked start
of an argument

well when you have children...

& you think: *i will never be cruel enough to
be god i will never make this ditch something
hospitable i will never remove myself to make
more of this forever sick*

& isn't it funny how they go so fast from

*kid, you're a catalyst comet about to burn out
this is no way to live how can you live this way
there's got to be another*

*option there's got to be a remedy for all the you
you're showing me*

to

you're going to make a good dad (for certain)

& you roll your eyes & think which is it?

*am i an acid burn bird wing swinging down
to earth inching into humanity*

*or the sainted virgin father ready to lasso
love into the innocence of medical debt?*

& it's all too tense & too bullshit
so you shrug off & smile & say
*i think the stork quit his job after he delivered
me*

Simple Things

inside me no medicine
no miracle cure

think an orange rind
think unthings
name: lost button
or chipped china
or even the boring
human anger

the animals that exist me
are good at being animals,
nothing more

god looks so plainly like me
i don't know what i expected

elvis died
& the sun still set like any other night

A Valentine's Day Spent Home, Alone

you wake up the same dysphoric body you always are
& kiss your wrists sweetly because no one else
is here to do it & you ask god for her blessing,
please, one day, here, to be loved & loving
& unbodied & she is quiet like she always is
& you send an e-valentine to the girl you want to
own a farm with & you say girl the same way sailors
name their boats because who can afford a gender
these days? & you take your medication with the syrup
from a can of oranges & your body is still your body
& really, there is no metaphor for that & you wash your
hair in the sink for the first time in many days
& you are thankful for even that kind of warmth

The Walk Home

bending our bodies into
paradise
& being beaten for it

here are the keys

here is the
mace the [] & [] &
god please get home
get gone
get safe

always running
always falling into arms
& praying for a soft
crash

the mummied panic of
undress & fleeing

here i am so naked
& wincing back from

even the safety of a well intentioned
smile

My Fear Of Commitment Pretending To Be A Poem

my heart as a dum dum bullet: fragmented & hollow
& each other adjective you would expect on impact. i
wrench love from me. serum. syrup. my raw hands red
wasps. a hive buzzing with something. with what i do
not want to name. elevator stopped, caught between
floors. my heart ejecting shells. my heart as an inkblot
making a mess. oh what a mess. my raw hands shaking
above the kitchen sink. i find myself slaughtered.
my heart begging to be fathered. my heart rejecting
authority. my heart as a dum dum bullet: a blossom,
a blossom. i wrench shrapnel from the small room.
suture. slick. oh what a mess.

The Boy

the boy smudged

the boy ruptured

the boy directionless & in motion

the boy an imitation

open & endless & aching
& aching & dissatisfied

the boy a raven wing

a bleeding bandage

a chest screaming

the boy within &
without

the boy unbodied

the boy a boy (but in halves
& in sometimes & in private
& painfully in public)

the boy smudged

the boy leaking onto the paper

the boy hidden

the boy a scraped knee &
asking 'why' in that way children do &
the boy unanswered & the boy
limping & the boy blaming god
& without god & without direction
& without answer

the boy a boy a boy an angel feather
a forsaken stone a quivering
animal a boy a boy a sexed prayer
a bloodletting a ritual

but a boy first & most of all

Extinction

i played hopscotch & named my own end.
leapfrogged right into the unspeakable.

i said “mom, im []”

& now she can only imagine me dead.

i reached in to the root & severed the bloodline.
don't expect children.

don't expect me to come up for air.

i see dinosaur bones & become them.

i'm only visiting, i'm only getting my footing, i'm
only trying to see how far this act can carry me

until im no longer worth the weight.

someone always knows.

can smell the meteorite in my marrow.

i swept myself empty while other kids yo-yo'd in their
driveways.

it's funny. how you know. how no one tells you.

you wake up in the night being hunted.

you hear a twig snap.

i said “man is the most dangerous game”

i said “my name ends with my body”

& pulled the pin before anyone

could even think to make my death valuable.

A Rare Opportunity For Prayer

beauty traced from finger tip
to phantom mouth.
 a lingering lineage
of bundled ache
i bring to the altar
 of your gender.
here where i pray.
here where i unvest
my explosives.
the two of us singing
 wouldn't it be nice
like funeral hymn.
the two of us
the two of us
 & so monumentally
unquestioned.

Punished Body

the body as the punishment & therefore
the punished,
in a desperate animal riot
ending in kitchen knives & throbbing remorse

a pissing contest never won anyone anything
cept for wet boots

what are you trying to prove here?
are these cards marked? are you counting?

by christ, carry mine burden
by bread, break me
make mine flesh
holy as flour, as fear,
as any glistening tooth

the body as the precipice
the body as the body
& the broken bones post-leap

what whining can you bring
that has not already been brought?
did you start the car? are you running?

go back to bed

Shiny Chrome

bright things, by nature, are deadly
as dog's teeth.

watch me cut myself gleaming,
 shrieking. polish
my inside until
every wretched organ
sings like chrome.

a knife gorgeous
in the glimmer of the blade.
 sharp edge of my wet hands.

i dangerous myself.
 unendanger myself.
wax this bear trap
so no one dare
step into the cave.

Hybristophilia: the Pistol is for Lovers

ran the red light.
knew the odds
& did it anyway.
shrieked with joy.
whole town a
weighted body
just ready to float.
last kiss: asphalt. a rocket to the
mouth & there, the glimmering
piece of the side mirror shattered.
we, concrete angels, slipped out
& up & away
we went & it was still no better
than here.
hit the gas.
you always did
like it messy, quick,
whichever way you
could get it.
the court had our record.
clocked 110 & still, my
heart rate never exceeded
85. excite me, i said.
we had the gun in a violin case.
the case was closed.
we made snow angels of ourselves.

romantic, they'd call it in the morning.
like the lovers of pompeii .
the newspapers ain't know shit.
you revved, then idled, then weren't at all.

Hey Cowboy

when you were little, you used to
tell people you wanted to be a cowboy.
 someone always answered back
“you mean cowgirl” but you knew what
you meant. cowgirl never had the same
ring to it.

when you were little, you rode horses
& got scolded for being too impatient.
 you were too short to reach
the water pump & always got some on
your boots.

when you were little, you would
sit in the back of your grampa’s truck
& listen to him leave voicemails
 on your dad’s flip phone that
always started with “hey, cowboy...”

your father & his father spent years
not talking. the town wasn’t big enough
 for the both of them. that town became
two, then three, then a whole state of empty.

you wore your cowboy boots to school
freshman year even though

they were two sizes too big & you
hated the cut of jeans you had.

you wore your father's black leather
cowboy hat (the one that weighs a pound
& smells like diesel) when no one was
home & pretended to lasso maleness.

your grampa was a racecar driver & a carney.
he was short as you with fat hands & he
loved his eggs over easy.

you imagine having a son & calling him
"cowboy" over the phone even though
you never want children & never will.

cowboy is more a metaphor than a being
to you. someone chivalrous & handsome
who kisses their partner on the cheek
every morning & can lift bales by their twine
is a cowboy. an outlaw that plays cards
with anyone
& knows the importance of chickens.
a cowboy is all the men you were
afraid of when you were little
because you knew you wanted to grow
up to be like them & you knew
kids like you weren't supposed to
want to grow up to be cowboys.

now you are grown up, or maybe
not so much
grown up but rather, not little anymore
& maybe you're a cowboy. maybe
you should ask for a second opinion.

you can't afford the boots or hat
& you haven't ridden a horse in 13 years.
you wear all black every chance you get.
a johnny cash type cowboy, maybe. you try
to use your cowboy manners &
your friend's parents always say
you're a polite kid.

when you were in high school, your
english teacher said if she ever has a son,
she'd want him to be just like you
& you went home
& cried your cowboy tears.

now you are grown up, or maybe
not so much
grown up but rather lonely & trying
to make sense of things. maybe being
a cowboy is scarier than you thought
it would be.
maybe you always knew.
maybe you want someone to call you

on the phone & say “hey cowboy” &
really mean it.

maybe you should ask for a second opinion.

Twenty

it is your almost birthday. you are reading richard siken, which is to say you are homosexual & panicked by your existence. you have ice cream for breakfast & cry into the evening. you tell your mother *im sorry, ill pay you back. im sorry, ill clean up the mess.* you tell your mother *im sorry you spent all that time carbonating me inside yourself just for me to end up the way i am.* which is an apology for being homosexual & panicked. the other you is crouched in the corner. teeth grow in places you would not expect teeth to be. the other you is all bite because he knows you have nothing to mourn. it is your almost birthday. you're so polite with your sadness. you don't want to ruin this for anyone. you're good at that. your crumpled body. your anxiety vomited out like confetti. your eyes weeping like split oranges. you are going to be 20 & you are going to be a wailing asteroid for the rest of your life. 2 years ago you were supposed to be dead. you have outgrown your gender & your jeans. you tell your mother *im sorry, i love my sadness so immensely, i don't know who i am without it & what you mean is i have not come home without expecting someone else to be in my spot at the dinner table in so long, im not sure i was ever born to belong in the first place.*

Rejection Of The Idea That You're Made Special On Grounds Of Endangerment

my body: an autopsy. a split pink slab of ham.
no one attends the hearing. no one claims the
corpse dragged from the river & i am told this
is freeing: that being an endangered animal is
liberation. i tell mirrors in return "i am in dan
ger" & they do not answer me back. my body:
spilt milk on the kitchen table my mother
keeps trying to sop up with dish rags. a long
dead language never taught in school. an
alien crash site named radioactive, the fingers
all curling opposite like polarized magnets.
the geiger counters scream. i have misplaced
my mouth. i don't know what is being asked
of me. i wish i could find a coffin that fits. my
body: a field of poppies, blistering red and
of course, named

untouchable for that.

Outlaw Tradition

a man kissed another man & someone bore witness & it became outlawed. a man killed another man & it became tradition. a man killed 10 men & his hands became a country. a man killed another man & the rest followed: a long history of hysteria, a lineage of killing under false honor, a river leading to lines like “it’s just nature. man is a wolf to man.” & men stopped kissing their lovers to hold a gun.

a man kissed another man & someone bore witness & suddenly: a vanishing act, an endangered species fleeing. a man kissed another man & his mouth turned into a secret. the rest followed: a long history of finding ways to hide, a river leading to lines like “it’s just not natural. for man to lie with man.” & men got clever in where they could run to.

a man killed another man & someone bore witness & thought “i could do that.” & it became tradition & the man became a country & the rest is history.

When did You know You were Trans?

you wake up one morning & your mattress is on fire.
your body is a wild animal, howling under the sheets.
(who let you in? who left the back door open
last night?)

you wake up one morning & owe the world everything.
your quarters fall out of your pockets & roll into
storm drains. you win the lottery &
go into debt. you ask someone for the time
& they tell you you're wasting it.

you wake up one morning & it is the day of your
execution & you slept like a lamb. your body is
still a writhing mess of eels.
you don't have control over it: the way your
body snaps shut on whoever tries to
touch you with rosy pink fingers. it
wasn't like this before. you just woke up one morning
& knew something had changed.

(who let you in? who left the back door open last night?)

Summer Boy

roll my gender around heavy in my hand
like a peach pit.
hold useless a wrench
as if this will heal me
or declare me broken.
sweat into my baseball cap
in summer, roll my sleeves. wear
my daddy's jacket, his jeans, as if
this will cultivate
an acceptance.
man at the gas station calls me dude
then second guesses.
i'm melting my gender into the sidewalk.
kick it into storm drains & bury
myself in the
front garden.
i am trying new ways to be man
but trying harder to not care.
not make myself into an abstract.
into aerosol.
got better at basketball,
learned when to say sick or bro or fuck,
but what does that mean anyway?
which magic eye god is watching
me?
& how long can i fool her for?

The Stubborn And Artless Act Of Coming Out

name a surgery. medical name. simple terms. name a gender. nameless. say it into the dark of a parked car. say it into the silent gleam of a bathroom mirror. say “transsexuality.” say “hormone replacement therapy.” name a part of the body that isn’t buried. simple terms. say it with your throat closed. say it when they shift into park and the car cools to dead. name a cause. a lineage to trace this sick. name a childhood trauma. name a family member held at gunpoint. say “anyone is to blame but me.” say “i never asked for this.” ask for more. name yourself for the first time in your whole life and wait for the audience to gasp in horror when the monster walks out

alive.

Backdrop Made Beautiful By Pity

the whole of my heart is an infinite cauldron of honey,
for you. remove myself to make room. to house you
with these bones as tired as blue ocean. im a good
beggar. have the teeth for it. knelt to you for my
knighting. waiting, a trembling dog, for you to name me
beloved or beheaded. the weight of the world in your
yes, in your hurricane decision. no sugar runs over. i
clean my mouth after every kiss. i clean my wounds like
ritual. this cauldron of honey, where flies sink & drown.
this brittle collection of limbs ive cuddled for you to
make a bed out of. my loathing made small & menial
in the shadow of your love. dwarfed by the hands you
cast over me. your hands, touching me, that could
smother any fire, could clench quick as a snake strike.
your hands polishing me until i bleed honey into the
mattress.

Packing

put in an eggshell & pull away
 a peacock. little disappearing
act of a body. hipbone pornography.
put in your hand & it comes away
burned. screaming red. holy as
 stigmata. put your mouth
to my mouth and what happens?
what magic trick comes next?
 (are you really who you say
you are? how can i be sure?)
put in a bundle of cigarettes & pull
away a peeled orange, segmented.
lean in & let go. what is left of
your softness?

deceit, deceit, deceit.

Window Half Open

you say birth name like
i was ever born at all
i came out the window
god left half open
always been half frenzied
& half toothed
this is to say: everything
started with a loss
i exited my mother & so
the light ate the dark
like paint
i was born the day of my
grandparents' wedding
my grandfather died
before i ever told him i
was a man
the window's half open &
a leg dangles out & i name
it my own
are you listening?
god hums like a firefly
i'm caught in the bug screen
you say bodied & i ask for
proof who's to say any of
this is happening? when do
the end credits roll?
who's to say strawberry

is better than vanilla?
a wind cuts through
my body my body
leaks open
open the window the
window is there
still there i'm getting too big
& too snap-jointed to fit thru
these days
but i've always been half coward
& double dared
& sometimes you miss the
unbeginning the before it all
so with a window like this
(half open) the only option
is to play outlaw

About the Author

Silas Denver Melvin is a trans masculine poet born and raised in Southern New Hampshire. His poetry has been published with Sunday Mornings at The River, Visio, SCAB, Scorpion, among many other literary outlets. Grit is his first collection of poems. Find him and his work on Instagram @sweatermuppet.

About the Publisher

Sunday Mornings at the River is a quarterly poetry anthology founded by Rebecca Rijdsdijk in 2012. Sunday Mornings believes in people power, they believe that everyone has the right to be heard, especially the people that are pushed into the shadows by the popular media outlets. Their mission is to try and amplify those voices by providing a platform for poets, and building a community, both online and offline.

Sunday Mornings at the River are an independent and inclusive publisher dedicated to knocking down doors and emancipating makers to publish their poetry books without the need for a big bag of money.

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Praise for Grit

Grit opens with a quiet devastation reserved for transcendent realms of human experience—the act of becoming in a world that is not prepared for your existence. Silas’ words dart in and out like a scalpel revealing layers of flesh that have been given-or taken-by lovers, parents, cruelty, and fate. If you could hold what it means to be an outsider in your hand, and kiss all of its wounds you would begin to understand *Grit*. But know that holding Silas, in this volume, is to be laid out in a field of snow dressed in black, with blood dripping from the corner of your mouth, laughing.

— Sean Felix, author of *Did You Even Know I Was Here?*

In *Grit*, Melvin takes us by the shoulders on an open-heart journey of self-discovery and transformation through the clouded lens of gender.

The story begins with *Old World*: “in the old world, before the body / awoke and ruptured” ... “in the old world: no chest budding.” This is an invitation to travel back to that moment in our own pasts when we were innocent. A time before the unforgiving trip wires and relentless bear traps of the world began to dig into our skin. The last line leaves our breath suspended on the page: “you take your boots off and wait to hear the drop.” Melvin does not pad the fall and waits with compassion for us to find new footing.

In *Getaway Car*, Melvin reminds us of the violence of finding

our identities in the midst of an emotional car crash, tangled up with young love: “christ look at this murder scene fantastic bloody body gleaming in the front seat ... let’s go baby i wanna see us hit 100 / i wanna hear the echo when we hit / rock bottom” Melvin gifts us a writing style that is visceral narrative of love and loss – of a lover, of a self, a dream – unapologetic, gluttonous. “misplace my mouth & you give it back / sorry i kept you so long you.”

Near the end *The Boy* reads like a fervent prayer, a confession, an absolution. “the boy smudged / the boy ruptured / the boy directionless & in motion / the boy an imitation ... the boy a boy a boy an angel feather a forsaken stone a quivering animal a boy a boy a sexed prayer a bloodletting a ritual.” This collection is more than a narrative of questioning and becoming – it is a holy manuscript for anyone who has felt outcasted or unloved or different. Melvin expertly brings us back to the western grit metaphor as to a dusty mirror that leaves us asking, are we cowboy or are we outlaw.

“but i’ve always been half coward / & double dared / & sometimes you miss the / unbeginning the before it all / so with a window like this / (half open) the only option / is to play outlaw.”

— Sarah Herrin, author of *The Oceanography of Her and One Thousand Questions (And No Good Answers)*.

Grit

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