

HEARTACHE

She makes her debut at night, smashing
your windows with a paper machete
and a glass chainsaw, punching her fist
through hollow walls, squatting
on your landscape and taking a piss
while she does a few histrionic Hail Marys,
rolling her eyes in mockery at your wishes
and prayers and pleasant dreams. *This*,
she says, motioning to your entire life,
is all prop. She skips beside you
and giddily flings bags of garbage
across your path like an over-rehearsed
flower girl. Dreams are theatre, but her stench
is real and pervasive; you yearn
for a bath or a baptism. She instructs you
to *sit your silly self down* for her tap dance
and song. An emerald gemstoned gypsy,
delivering a prophesy: there's more clouds
in this crystal ball. She dons a mask of his face,
trots around you like a marionette
until you become knotted
in her strings, his strings, *his strings*, around
she twirls and you know this routine
is all about him, has always been about him,
you can't escape him. Even when the lights
dim, and you jolt awake, her encore
is the empty spot next to you in bed.
All day you try to forget her final lines
before the curtains of your eyelids lifted:
Hearts have no roots, she sighs,
they flake away, easy as petals.

GUARDIAN ANGEL

So much has passed between us we're practically cousins.
The kind you always know is in your life, but you only see
on special occasions. You always come to me
when you're a bit unhinged—that's your holiday. It happens
a few times a year, and because we're related, I'll tell you:
you've been a real twat to deal with. Are you surprised
that an angel uses such language? Every curse
is a note sent straight to heaven, and you and I
have a sort of abusive relationship. You thought heaven
was all diaphanous robes and golden glow,
but it's more like being that old waitress at an all night diner
in some no-man's town that no one visits, except
a few regulars who always ask for the same meal.
They request lottery winnings, weight loss, now
and then, something simple: sure, honey, your team can win
the game today. Do you remember the first thing you prayed
for? You were six. You'd seen the episode of Punky Brewster
where she does exercises to grow boobs, and you demanded
a plump bosom. Well, I delivered—double D's so voluptuous
you can barely sit up straight. You should've known
you could trust me then. Yes, it was me whispering
the answers to tests that you'd erase to fill in the wrong

bubble. You never listened. By your twenties, I was so ignored
that I grew bored, hiding car keys to make you crazy, tossing

favorable jewelry in gutters, taking sips of margaritas
when you were entranced by another strange man.

The best way I could rescue you was a tequila blackout.
Then you'd come back, crawling on your knees

to the toilet, pleading and promising everything
if I'd take the headache away, begging me to dismantle

your thoughts when you were letting them dismantle you.
I made sure you didn't puke in your hair or in public.

Whenever you thought you found true love, I wanted to toss
you away, break things off for good, but we're family so I'm stuck

with you. First, that silly marriage—dog, cat, house,
the whole shebang—it took a lot to get you out

of that one: I had to move your arms and legs
like a marionette to pack your belongings, trash

the love letters, pawn the ring. Then, that last one. I nicknamed
him raccoon man—his mask, the way he pilfered

you like garbage. I fed you nightmares and premonitions like pills.
Yes, it's me that gave you the names of the other women.

I was the nauseous feeling in your gut that woke
you in the middle of the night to call his dead phone.

I unmasked betrayals again and again,
while you cried for me, but kept dancing

with devils. Finally, I just had to possess
you, Exorcist-style. How'd you like my right hook

to his eye? That feeling you feel now, that woman
in you who just doesn't give a fuck, that's me, taking

the wheel for a little while. I'm in the little sleeping pills
you take. I'm giving you poems upon poems like a litter

of kittens you don't know what to do with, and *still*
you're asking how this is going to end. Good God,

stop fussing. It's not the apocalypse and I'm not
your fortune teller. Turn on the radio, they're playing

our song. Listen to my message in the lyrics:

This ain't no disco. This ain't no country club either.

PANIC ATTACK

My rabid dog heart

flings itself against my ribcage,
high pitched howling and growling and
snarling and panting while it rattles the bones,
imprisoned, falsely accused,
ready to tear someone
anyone
limb from limb.

It throws fits like a child

who I have to let scream
until exhaustion.

My no-better mind

contorts itself in deranged
yoga positions, flexes and stretches and twists and bends:
the Downward Facing Corpse,
the Half Lord of the Cow Face,
the Tripod Headstand Spinal Twist,
the Eye of the Needle in the Awkward Chair.

I sweat and gasp for breath, sometimes

cocoon myself in blankets,
trying to transform,
a swaddled infant no one rocked

to sleep. I pretend, I pray, I envision

piles of feathers plucked and bloodied
from angels wings or
shoddy rafts on drifting seas or
the vast and terrifying never-
endlessness

of the universe. Once it passes,

that mad mutt starts gnawing
one of my ribs, content for now.

THE BITCH

Guard dog, protector of the heart,
curled in sleep until
she hears the warning signs—
gravel crunching
under the foot of an intruder,
which sets her yanking
at her choke chain.

But you might say that bitch
is no recognizable creature;
she's a shape shifter,
who says *I love you*, then
No, I never loved you, or
Not like that, anyway.

She rises slowly,
her chest burning
like indigestion,
churning to the surface
of a swamp,
detecting all your insecurities
and bringing them to light—
You're too skinny,
not affectionate enough, you look
disheveled all the time, old even,
I can see all your wrinkles,
I faked every orgasm.

Cruel bitch, ignores
phone calls, leaves the light on
so you'll know she's home
but won't answer the door.

She's a predator,
flirts in front of you,
drags men home, says they make her happy

like you never will, but darling
when I come back to you again,
when I've denied you until I'm starved,
I'll emerge like a mermaid,
crawling out on my belly
spewing a language
you don't recognize, kissing you
with that tongue that was once
wrapped in barbed wire.