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ALL THINGS

IN SITU

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO

THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS

BY

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We Begin Here

Infallible vial of Follistim

“It’s really easy—just turn the dial until it reaches 150—
make sure you hear the ‘click’”

my belly gutlessly folds
as thorny spined needle
elbows its way past coat of
thinly rendered fat, lacking
in subcutaneous substance

“It’s nature—nothing you can do about it.”

I for one, would love to be in the room during
that conversation, where you tell the wind

to better manage her expectations next time
she tears through your town in a drunken rage
hell bent on razing it to its last rust dusted nail
at least she’s fair, won’t preserve what’s choice
for herself, but decimate it alongside the dilapidated

one down, left to go

one hope, egg: "Best case scenario"
unholster pre-loaded Ganirelix Acetate
hurts like a bitch—actually, is
a bitch I aim, shoot immediately draw back
pray no skin comes with on its way out.

Remember when you didn’t even want kids?

Until you did. **It** wasn’t supposed to
happen like this, but since
we’re all here, can you tell me
if you think **it** can pass—

after having passed through me?

Morning Run

Morning run traces the black
 mountain's outline, steady cadence
 beats its unmanicured brow.

fire in your legs, same color as the sky
 that's passed through two shades of red
 in the last five minutes. Morning entertainment

like the time you stood beneath a café awning
 waiting for rain to stop, a well-dressed
 couple across the street arguing

you barely make out the words:
 "Shut the fuck up!"
 Your coffee dizzy swirls, as

her brilliant clasped mannequin wrist
 shames his wilted soul with mock
 precision, finesse, lining of her coat

same color as the lavender bush currently
 giving you side eye from indigo periphery.
 A pleasant revelation, the feeling you get

sometimes, while standing in line at the grocery
 when you suddenly remember last night's dream
 where he faces you, smiles. When you still loved him

before you didn't. Your feet move faster at the warning
 shot: first light. You are seen—
 maple's glassy eye watches you

run back to your car.
 Driving again, you remember
 and then you don't.

Check All That Apply

The day I walked beneath
Spanish sun, prayed to God
for a sign leading to
myself and He
answered: clear sky, clouded
over in a gray instant, at

the end of what had already been a long day
when all I wanted was food, a bed
but instead found myself running
for cover into a patch of
chestnut trees, where crushed
buckeye carpets served to keep

my boots dry from flurried
pellets:

- ☐ *African American*
- ☐ *Asian*
- ☐ *Pacific Islander*

confusing flimsy Gore-Tex, the
only thing protecting a life I
somehow managed to stuff into
a 40-liter backpack. Yet, even

in that outdoor Pentecost, something
inside, told me the struggle
wasn't over. Next time I went to
the DMV, my pen would still
waver at those boxes, despite

freedom to breathe and
'*Check all that apply*'

Morning Devotional

I've awakened next to you
every morning for years, yet

still cannot see myself
in the photo of us

in Greece, hanging outside
my closet door. In it

I'm laughing and you've asked
why, I said

because you blended perfectly
with veined marble, inside skin

not designed to withstand heat
like mine. Perhaps

my shadow, dancing
among background of temple ruins

had managed to free itself
from pillars of unsaid words

which have tirelessly burned, died
in clumps of ash

on my tongue. Let them be
a eulogy, pamphlet

of swan songs, succeeding
what I hope will be

a graceful exit. For who
will love my rattled bones

when you are gone?

Cebu City

Mama was from here—now I am,
where streets buzz electric, air
plasters itself wet muslin cloth
thicker than vanilla sponge cake
soaked in simple syrup

jeepneys drag ass, bleat tinny horns,
nostrils brace against stale
Pall Mall's fresh San Miguel
mingled thick with
slick skin glaze, yellow dermis
white cotton shirts strain—
underarm seams threaten to
split.

Market day: pig's jugular trickle
stewed mud brown, strained,
served atop mountain of
land's main grain.
I tiptoe, hide-and-seek
past stalled chicken cluck
catch steady side-eye from
curious egg-yolk folk

I'm not *mestiza*,
with skin tinted
pale ginger.
I'm half mango-grown
tobacco seed sown
and I don't know
how many times I have to say it—
my daddy wasn't military.

The Bag Man of Oviedo

Two black bodies
in the Cathedral square
hers sits—his, dangles
replica bags from

both arms, sweaty crow-black
branches dangling faux
leather, gold. He stops
at each table with

gleaming limbs splayed
no one pays him mind
they 're too busy
looking at her

up and down
thumbing her open
with greedy eyes.
She sits, drinking

sweet vino tinto
squinting into winter sun
smiles, as if
she's one of them.

How exotic:

St. Louis Fair, 1904
ones like her
form a human looking glass
long before housewives

plague fantasy screens.
They act *natural*
while white-faces
behind shanty fences

watch how they live
watch if they really eat dogs.

The round faces
in Oviedo's Cathedral square
continue staring at her
then him, the bag man.

She waits.
A polite and rehearsed
refusal, ready on the tip
of her affable tongue

he skips her table.

Sundays at the Mission

I serve runny-ass grits, pasty bacon on The Row.
Outside, a gaunt dealer peddles death in powder form
as shadow folk cling to lifeless dumpsters in nearly every
alley off San Pedro St.

Hope comes here to die, a place of rank despondency
that wraps itself inside newspaper tombs of next
morning's headline: *Former Mid-Western*
Prom Queen Found Dead

wearing nothing but a paper clip necklace and
the brownness she was born with.
I didn't know her, but am willing to bet
that someone who's me asked for an extra plate of

greasy hash browns (knowing they're only allowed one)
did. I just wish she would've stood in my line
to wait for Styrofoam charity. Not because
there would've have been any meaningful conversation
or pretentious exchange of pleasantries between us, but at least

I would've seen her.

Monarch

My milkweed wings
slice between blue air
beardless sky, yet
even from up here
I can still hear mama:

“You would be so beautiful
if you didn’t have this nose.”

My daddy’s African nose

“Don’t worry, we’ll fix it
when you’re older.”

I tried, folded myself
down, into origami paper
gown, shut pill-fed eyes
under heel of that glimmering
butterfly blade.

Am I beautiful now?

mama examines:
(my born-again virgin nose)

“He should have taken more off.”

Becoming _____ on a Rooftop Café in Lugo

I survey Lugo from a plastic chair
sip brassy foam, watch
pinked air bloody sweaty sky eye.

Below, streets come alive
with pewter chatter, as
tongue-clack bounces
along ribboned cobblestone.

A rooftop conundrum
plays itself out
at the table across

from mine: two girls
shared plate of pulpo
all in situ, staring
past drinks unstirred, sweating.

Slowly, the one with eyelids painted
smoky paprika, slides her fingers
forward, inviting the other's

over, across
an existing color-line, between
pearly plates and the brown hand
reaching, the table's

bleached linen, a bright reminder
of its dislocation. Suddenly,
a joint-effort

of disapproving stares
from nearby tables
becomes too much to bear
causing a sudden break—

my coffee sighs.

Manifesto

You live straddling a fence between
two houses, hopping—one side, to
another, until choosing for that day.
Once on the ground you kneel, peek
through white-washed slats, observe

the lucky ones across the way, inside
a house in which everything and *one*, is
easily accounted for, traced back to their
original place. Perhaps inside that *Big Book*

on the large center table, you'd find
all their names; each one carefully written
in ethereal script, including those who
came before. What a privilege, tracing origins
steady fingers following a known path

from where one's kind and name began
to now, a testimony and living witness
that nobody had been scribbled
with reckless insouciance, along spine of

Scattered Kin and Bone.

About Sam

Dear Mom,

Now that you're gone, I think you should know: Sam was the first person who ever called me that word. I was 10 and you were at work.

You and he hadn't been together long, so how could you allow him and that stupid guitar he couldn't even play, move in so quickly—how did you not see,

I didn't want you to leave me with him that day? I cracked the window of our French-style door with a half-eaten Granny Smith. You were

leaving, already late for your shift at the hospital, your '76 burgundy Camaro drove away. How could you not know that day

was the beginning? Two years of his belt, hits, slaps that never missed, well past the day you found out and did nothing.

Did You Know

blue jays aren't really blue
but brown, a trick
they play
on the eyes:

light scattering
allows every color
to pass through
visible light, but

blue.
If you find one
of their feathers
place it
in water, watch—

it turns brown
See?
Even nature
knows it
pays to pass

Colorism on a Global Scale

Best part of living abroad, being gone—worst, coming back
here, where nothing with a soul grows higher than
the trampy sidewalk shrub outside our door, spitting
dewed kisses on fingers of passersby, before I make
my dogs piss it back down to size,
remind it of its place.

Sometimes while driving, I'll stare out my window, pretend
I'm at the aquarium, but the only dolphins swimming the
405, are stickered on VW's with sexed up surfboards
strapped atop, facing beachward.

Beaches here aren't like those in Greece, where string-covered
thighs invite fingers eager for kinky play among gods
temples, bougainvillea rain—a gorgeous dry pour, not
not like London's perpetual drizzle—absolute murder
on my hair:

Yes officer, it was a race-related hair crime.

The sound kicked pebbles make, dancing down Pavilion Street
their tap-soled rhythm clicking Morse code speak on doors
a stone's throw from Motcomb, where red-bottomed shoes
stick candy lacquered tongues 6-inches high

where employee with cheap smile, expensive suit, once told me I'd
“Need to leave a deposit” for shoes not in the store, but could be
for a small fee, brought over from Harvey Nic's on Sloane Street.
The manager comes out, recognizes me.

She apologizes—

Once, in South Africa, someone asked me
where I was from, said I looked different
from most ‘Coloured’ girls

Apparently, Coloured means Black, only not entirely—means
you’re not White, that you can be reminded, being not White—
as if shit-soothe stupid, ignorant of the obvious—the sidewalk
shrub, that, despite seeing me approach with my dogs, reaches to
nuzzle my fingers—as if it doesn’t know what’s coming next.

Karma

I still haven’t made it to visit you in that place
where you are now, where approaching cars cause
darkness and headlights to dance on ceilings you spend
hours staring at, waiting for a nurse’s meds call.
I’m curious: do you stand at the window in your room
these days? Perhaps what’s beyond it, too painful a reminder
we were just kids, when you called me that word
because of my darker skin. Tell me, Cousin
how long do you scratch at those memories
before they begin blurring? Ask your bathroom mirror
the only companion you have, maybe it will speak
like other voices in your head, remind you of when
we were kids, playing Red Rover and you acted like
you were going to call me over me, but never did.

A Day of Walking Through Cantabrian Redwood Forests

An 8-hour walking day, one
redwood forest after
another, until
every tree looks
the same.

Here, I am just
another, overlaid
with living bark, brown
as owl feather passing
through, a pastured horse's

marbled eye follows
unremittingly, seeing
if it can connect the
sloshing syllables being

formed by the
half-full water
bottle dangling from
my hip, which answers
back. Normally, I'd stay

and chat along, but
am not in any mood
for such palavering today.
Instead, I lose

myself in the walk, a

ritual observed by yet
another group of majestic
red trunks, a pulpit
covered over with dust
and fern, allowing me

to pass as one of them.

The Day Black Lives Matter Graffiti Held Church in Spain



On foot into Cantabria
my boots are stopped
in their dusted tracks.

Even all the way out here.

I stared at the black
limb-like band, splayed
against mute-white background
knew—

despite weight on my back
burned up thighs, a hot
shower still four hours
away, there was no rushing

past this mountain's
daily sermon, hastily
scribbled on its overlaid underbelly.
I accepted the offer

of momentary sanctuary
walked carefully, made sure
to 'yes', 'amen' the entire way through.
At the end, I pulled sun-warmed chocolate

from the left side pouch of my pack
to celebrate divine revelation, realization
at this mountain's message that rang
loud and clear:

America, the world is watching.

Passing Folklore in Castroverde, Spain



A one-eyed creature named Juancana
'The Fierce' once lived here
part woman, bear and goat.

He hated kids, had a temper and
enjoyed startling passersby by
pissing on them. A single drop

on the head caused
irreversible baldness.
And here I am, wondering

if being mixed
with three different things
ever triggered an identity struggle

clearly something was going on
how else do you explain
a life of pissing, passing?

Did he really think
nobody would notice
those boldened pronouns in his story?

Hair by Karen

I got my hair did in Pamplona
as one does, when walking the Camino.

It had been carefully styled into a topknot prior to
arriving at the salon—sleek and high, as if tied

by the midnight of some ethereal hand. Once in
my chair, I loosed, let it hang like crawling black ivy

“Wow—it’s so long!” Karen is swift in conducting
her obligatory inspection—beginning at the roots, of course.

I can barely care. My calves are still in uproar
threatening violence from a 4-hour trek

through the Pyrenees two days ago, so,
whatever. “Yeah.”

“Where are you from?”
“California.”

“But where are you *originally* from?”
“I was born in Los Angeles.”

“Ah. ...and your parents—were they born in California too?”
(sigh) “My mom was Asian, and my dad’s Black.”

“Ah! Yes, Asian—now I see. Beautiful. The Asians have beautiful hair.”

Co-Parenting

We wanted to be The Incredibles
some Halloweens back: me, my
husband and his two daughters,

who told me to wear my hair
straight, to match their chestnut silk
two shades lighter than their mama’s

crow black, which my husband tells me
she gets from her mama, who’s full Japanese.

Imagine my surprise
next time they
come over, say
they’re no longer want to be
Incredible, but I could pass
as Michelle Obama.

Cancel Culture in Nature

Tree-eyes watch, never stare, like
‘What are *you* doing here?’”

The eagle shares his air, offering me as much
as my lungs can take, in breath I catch,

throw back into the wind’s waiting arms.
I witness a murder in progress, a thin

taupe coyote stalks an unassuming hare, unaware
that he is being watched—who hunts to eat, not

simply because he can. You, fern, are not
green and you, lily, are not white, for any other

reason than these were the labels attached to you
against your will. Pondering the soil, who is

not brown, but black from maple sap, I
see a cloud of dust kicked up, signaling

the taupe-led surge, then still—
coyote's light and nimble brownness

hunched, busy with the has-been hare.

Mama Africa- (Noble Villa) Portugalete, Spain



A two- hour walk out of Bilbao
I'm searching
for a coffee shop, when
I see her: mother

two little ones, the older
looks ready to stray.

She walks, balancing
black nightshade, cow peas
and okra on her head

looking tired
and the kids, as if
they've had enough
travel to last a lifetime.

I hope they'll be happy
in this noble town
the coffee's good
it's not too crowded.
On my way out

I walk across the street
to where she is, because
I have to know. She
sees me and I say:

"Excuse me, Mama
I don't mean to bother, but
out of curiosity
I was wondering:

where's dad?"

Jose Hierro, by Gema Soldevilla— Santander Bay, Cantabria Spain



He claimed he wasn't
that type of poet, a

seer, but look at his
eye, how it follows

every passerby, a
sinner on the broad

path to destruction.
The poet, reborn

a sidewalk prophet
the voice calling out

to prepare the way
in this cosmopolitan

wilderness. The sea
his true love, home

behind him, ripples
reverberating his

message from its
watery pulpit, with

soft echo from the
cloud choir, its

salted hallelujah chorus
filling the air.

Shading in The Outlines

The wind is in a mood today
I can tell

the way she's sweeping
violet fragments of velvet has-beens

into my right earlobe, which is
growing increasingly annoyed, but

I'm tired today will let her be. Here,
let me

color your world
shades of pulped indigo

smashed against pigment sky.
I'll tell you stories of Anansi,

witchy gardens, where silk spined serpents
entice in rudimentary speak, chant

curses in tribal tongue, before
placing them in pickling jars

beneath oozing dirt to
wait out the Winter. If you'll

let me, I'll stain the pale from
your frozen iris

eyes stiffer than dead field cane
(You still don't understand)

I'm not asking for permission
only recognition, of my

right to claim space
nooks history books

have darkly erased so
let me.