



**Abstract**

This suite revisits a larger body of work I've written a decade ago and hidden since. Oftentimes, the works render the world absurd, moving the narratives away from a linear tangent, obscuring and diverting the reader from the truth. Coming back to them now, I am led to believe that youth is a season of risk: the necessary somersaults we take, the wounds that wait, the scars we keep.

**Keywords**

Trauma,  
scars, youth,  
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# SUSTAINED SCARS

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## SOMERSAULT

A painting on the wall walks out  
in the middle of a song. Ghosts are  
never obscure. Don't you like shaking

their hands? A man answers in Gaelic,  
his friend replies in French. It is 6 p.m.  
People walk like sunsets never existed.

Your complaints about hypertension  
and anemia, my complaints of jelly and  
brittle bones. Which one tells the truth?

Our sphinx refuses to believe  
mathematical equations, it reiterates:  
heart, heart. Heart in different accents.

Fits well in my palm. Fear develops  
in a matter of minutes. Might take willpower,  
as in aromatherapy. The citronella simmers.

More things begin to dismantle.  
Shirts and books gathering boxes. Windows  
into water. You switch the setting off, on

to the ocean. As in dreams, you walk toward  
the bluer part of its body. Meters like miles  
on stilts. Here, you stand eight-feet tall. Corals

forget color. Maybe if rivers weren't so lazy,  
they'd recall. Oh, here you are, forty-years-old.  
Looks like you haven't aged a day!

Dimensions mean so little once kites prove flight.  
Calcium tells you to sit straight. Mornings tell  
you to sleep in. Bottles aligned, a wonder for

orderly things. Confidence in clean spoons  
and the fluorescent, like hospital rooms.  
The secret? Diffusers do nothing for lungs,

candles won't bring back the disappeared.  
And if you keep on nudging phrases toward  
sentences, the spoken may stop making sense.

Strangers spell out nation—across, down.  
Newspaper smells like fish by night but  
that doesn't stop you from turning the page

to the obituary. You see our names written there,  
upside down answers for crossword.  
The first time woman X met her brother,

he was denied entry to her house.  
She calls it their aunt's mausoleum.  
She calls out her confusion about color.

Leaves escape then find the highest tree,  
highest building to fall from. Turn.  
Afterwards, a tremble, pushing body into

sublime, you say. This is the sublime:  
the term acrophobia was coined in 1887.  
Two steps back, one forward. You tip over.

At least notice how often hues are neglected.  
Let's speak about today's sepia—  
its difference from yesterday's tomorrow.

## MURMUR

Ever since the dog, Louie, decided to walk off into the neighbor's house, we took it upon ourselves to construct walls around the living room—ensuring space to define random smells and grace for the remaining dogs to gyrate with plates of spaghetti on their heads, believing true love can be found like the lady and the tramp.

Who would have thought it was all fiction, that arguments at the studio actually led artists to sketch and smudge until their art burned into what is now the scene where the well-bred dog and the one who came from the streets, smelling like rotten apples, share a strand of spaghetti.

The dogs who stayed behind were raised to make amends with carbon, trained to harvest organs in their sleep. On Mondays, they deliver packages containing magnesium from the nearby grocery.

You can see the fur brimming their lips coated with hunger, waiting for earthquakes to lull them back to sleep.

Picture salt flats, flamingos flailing about, discussing impermanence—how light affects advertising, its implications on society. The flamingos bow to each other, preen their feathers, stretch their necks like wounded giraffes from a gunfight they could have never survived.

Here's what I heard: in the early 1930s, the Japanese imperial army sent their finest dogs to sniff around operation rooms where thousands of sapphire stones were left to dry and inside: trees stuck in a blizzard, threatening to impale the tongues of those who dare to speak.

Your inner demon murmurs, squint to see how brittle the drywall is. Now, try peeling the paint off with both hands. Doesn't it feel like Christmas?

## PORTRAIT

I've decided that the key to happiness  
Is allowing the sun to pass through windows,  
To create a lemon out of the idea of all rooms.  
My mother keeps an index card filled with  
References, mostly florists and photographers  
Who deal only with pictures in blue and red.  
The focus is on an unexpected detail,  
That single note reaching out for your heart.  
I want to know if morning will look different  
Without you, hold on to a piece of onion skin  
Because it connotes restraint or patience.  
I remember, on most days, we'd gather  
Words and scatter them all over the streets.  
Adverbs, adjectives, profanity, conjunctions—  
There were yes's and no's and arguments  
Loud enough that the neighbors began  
To write about us, about our doubts, about  
How we'd look at each other, and how still  
Our lips seemed through aubergine curtains,  
Our shadows admiring light for the first time.

## SUSTAINED SCARS

It begins with pinecones, small things rooted  
 In comfort. Break her legs, a man said. Break  
 Her legs then her arms. Doubles. They speak  
 In doubles—perhaps a speech disability.  
 You begin to choke then argue with gravity.  
 Easy. Remorse requires a defenseless heart.  
 The trick is in the width of your back, or how  
 Wide your wings can reach out. Remember that  
 Theory on attachments? Newer psychologists  
 Write words on a piece of paper: separation,  
 Locomotion, grief. Reports say local police  
 Assaulted a tent two miles away. What of grief?  
 A sack of vintage photographs reveal a woman:  
 She smiles in every one of them except for one  
 Where her arms are flailing, distraught, drunk.  
 The next pictures show a missing golden ring.  
 In the year 1992, reports say a life was stolen  
 And doctors could not retrieve it. You speak  
 In an auditorium, no audience. Nothing rings  
 Truer than sound, locking doors, shadows.  
 The only ransom paid is innocence. I was told  
 I mustn't crawl, learn to stand for twelve hours straight.  
 A spider gives birth to a hundred eggs, no names  
 But she recognizes every fang. Spiders forget in a  
 Span of 11 seconds. An old man finds all his cups  
 Shattered. He crouches down, picking pieces  
 Of china. In his hands are pieces of Spain.  
 Out his window is the house where there once lived  
 A family of three. He wonders about their dinners,  
 The scars the mother had sustained from chopping fruit.  
 It takes six months to learn intimacy, takes longer  
 To distinguish family from stranger. Some harder  
 Facts: Weeping grows instinctive, begins in the lungs.  
 Then, breathing gets stuck in syncopated gasps.  
 A practice known to many: grown men laugh  
 To listen to themselves weep. Now take heed.

Here are things to watch out for: a van waiting outside,  
Sirens turned off, thieves in disguise as gardeners.  
Once their homes have gone frail, they steal  
From doors, drowning the roses in splinters.

## SHARP CURVE

1.

If this were the last poem to be heard of corners, permit no room for inhibition.

Whenever my feet misalign, I distinguish your scent. A burning scent. I understand separation without a need to dissect the belly of a frog. Struggle, eyes morphing into two moons. The city collapses, sand dunes swell beneath. The image insists on recording how space has quivered upon your leave-taking. My arms are weak but Lord, grant me courage, give me reflexes to obey light. I've seen gloom in my mother's eyes, swallowed gloom spilling from her speech. A cat stance involves poise, pointed toes. A cat stands by an ocean where mermaids rest, resisting motion, refrains from causing a scene.



2.

Somewhere, there is a replica of an eye surrounded by alligators. The shape resembles an acorn. But enough of truth. Don't most acorns break into flowers while waiting for insects to mutilate them? The scene only renders itself morbid because things don't appear as in science fiction.

In the early millennium, intricacy was marketable. We believed in impermanence—slow days where children can drench their feet in rainwater, our thumbs circling over smooth porcelain teacups as though the cheek of a lover, afraid of ruining the moment.

3.

The spectator glides his fingers across a portrait painted just hours before. He tilts the canvas over to gain a better perspective. An object of interest might spring out from the picture. Sound tries to etch frequency on skin, makes love with small spaces, slithers, produces echoes in a city we call unforgiving. The spectator stands before the painting and dips his hand into a cup of sunrise, smears it all over his lips, chin, allows it to drip down his chest, to crevices where roses grow. He exits the room with his beloved, conversing in the private language of worms where description still holds resonance. He watches her waving at souls as they cross the bridge for their first and last time. Touching her lips to his, she reaches for the red string around her neck. Sets it on fire.