

An abstract painting with a rich, textured background. The colors are a mix of vibrant greens, yellows, oranges, and reds, with some cooler tones of blue and purple. The brushstrokes are thick and expressive, creating a sense of movement and depth. The overall effect is a warm, energetic, and somewhat chaotic composition.

RED
CLAY
DAUGHTER

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Red Clay Daughter

Master of Fine Arts Thesis

School of the Museum of Fine Arts at Tufts University

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O YOU, DRAWN UP
FROM THE RED CLAY,

O, COME
YOU SINNER WHO PLEADS FOR INTERCESSION IN VAIN
YOUR BRUISED KNEES ARE FOR NOTHING
AND NO PARADISE AWAITS YOU

EAT THE HONEYSUCKLE
TAKE IT WITHIN YOUR
DECAYING BODY

PRAY & PRAY & PRAY
FOR YOUR DELIVERANCE THAT WILL NOT COME

RELISH IN THESE
SACCHARINE EVIL DELIGHTS
BEFORE THE SUN
BURNS YOUR ROTTING FLESH
FOREVER AND EVER

AMEN

A living sacrifice

Crying in the backyard in the thick air that lingers for 8 months
Cicadas lamenting
And a snake moving in the grass
Somewhere, always

I asked him if he loved Jesus and if he was saved.
When your 15 year old daughter looks at you the way I looked at him,
You'd say anything
Truth, lie, or other
To comfort her

I was too young for the knots in my stomach
And I spilled my guts at church camp cry nights with everyone else
I tried to be good
Pleading, prostrate, always

I don't cry myself to sleep like I did at 15
I still fear death at 24
and not waking up in my Boston apartment
But in hell
Or maybe heaven, if God wants to have a word with me first

I stopped pleading, I ask God questions with irreverence,
Sometimes we don't talk for a while
But I check in to see if He hates me

I think about going to the jewelry store down the street
To buy a little gold cross
To hang around my neck
I wonder if it will burn my skin
Or if I'll burst into hellfire
Or maybe I'll be fine and pay the bill when I pass on

I've paid my weight in suffering
If I've not earned the right to the cross
Then who has?

Omniscient

I imagine

He hovers the earth

And putting His hands on the dirty streets

He leans forward, down

Craning His neck between the brick buildings

To peek into my window now and then

I speak and know He hears

Though I'm unsure if He listens

Sometimes,

I get heart palpitations,

And I wonder if He's finally had enough of me

But they pass

And I thank Him

Fall on your knees for another day

Bless these bruised knees

Bless these bruised knees

Will you kiss them, Jesus, at the end of days?

Can you take them with you in the new kingdom come,

Or have I become the thing you came to destroy?

Offering no. 1

What a burden, the weight of it all
The unbearable possibility of errant arrows
Of hurting the ones you love
God, is this part of the fall?

I'll take the open arms and warm palms to dry my tears from the angels you send,
Lord,
Perhaps we are the small concessions for this perilous task of living

4 And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord." And they did so.

30 Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. 31 Israel saw the great power that the Lord used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.

Exodus 14:4, 30-31

What courage

What courage,

What folly!

To manifest these wretched ideas beneath the cold, searching light of day

When I've spent the years praying for deliverance from myself

God,

Did you harden my heart like pharaoh?

What creature am I now

A wicked, wanting thing who

knows of You but for all my reaching

Cannot touch you

15 For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. 16 Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good.

17 So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. 18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

24 Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

Romans 7:15-20, 24

Antithetical

I battle

Between the part of myself that wants revenge and blood for

The way things went

And the part that wants to forget

There's also someone close at hand,

Angel, demon, other

Trying to tell me it was never that bad, always

I don't think she was born here

At some point, she moved in

I want her evicted,

Exorcised

But she remains firmly rooted

I can't take you all with me the whole way

I run a thousand miles, but you follow me still

I'll put you to death myself

It's a troubling thing

To be aware of evil

And have sympathy for it

To mourn a way of life

And your own former self

Offering no. 2

Do you know

Everytime I hurt you I feel it too

I beg God to fix me

I think I understand the Holy Spirit

And pouring yourself out

What a comfort to think I could make my rotting insides disappear

And let something pure and perfect and whole

Fill up my hollow heart

Maybe then I could be good,

If my soul were gutted and gone

And I could be the presence you want and need

I would disappear completely if it meant loving you perfectly

Summoning Eve

I think of you often
Do you live in heaven above?
For a brief moment,
Did you revel in the knowledge
Wrung out by the taste of the fruit?

In the dark place in my heart
Where I tuck away things
For nobody to find
I chant a hymn for you

2/11

I think one time I overslept

and I was supposed to meet Em at the Waffle House on Milledge Avenue.

I was dog tired but I still feel bad about it.

She's so forgiving.

Is YHWH this forgiving?

Would the God of the Bible I was taught be so graceful, and in so genuine a way?

"No Peyton! It's ok, it's ok! I'll see you in class!"

Riot

Who will feel
The sting of my unclipped nails
Tearing at their flesh

The grip of my work hewn hands
Laboring at the Word
Whose neck will bear the crushing of my depraved fingers

Against whom do I riot? The sky?
Or that humid brick building
With its scuffed, cracking walls
Wooden benches and stained red padding
Built by man for man

This rage must go somewhere, I cannot take it with me

7 For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. 8 Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.
9 You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

Romans 8:7-9

Eve, revisited

There exists a great profundity in my knowledge
Eve, is this what it was like?
Did you get the same damning feeling
When you tasted the fruit?

No,
Your knowledge,
The having it, the taking
Became sin,
I simply heard of another way to live
Which I knew was sin
So which of us is worse?

Is it wrong,
To turn your head and ask for more

Spirit, do you dwell within me?

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.

22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

Romans 1:18-19, 22-25

15 I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! 16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.

Revelation 3:15-16

August 28

How much of my life have I spent calling to you,
You hear, but do not listen,
For my heart is bitter and stony,

An inedible root.

There is no room for doubt or fear
Only a gaping hole, a great chasm that widens every passing day

I doubt myself and my heart
I lie awake at night staring out the backdoor thinking

God will do it. He'll take me in my sleep tonight

Work out your salvation with fear and trembling

I fantasize of cursing during supper

You do not know what walks among you
Smiles and nods at your stories,
a humor I lost the taste for somewhere along the way
While my throat holds a venom

You would look upon me in horror
Reprimand me if you could gather the courage

But I stay silent
Wicked woman that I am
I watch your faces and learn this dance
I beat my body into submission of this role
And when you look at me,
Will you see me for what I am?
Or will you relish in delight
Because it's you who you see looking back
We're all made in God's image

See how good I am

See how good I am?

See how you take and take

And even in my absence surreptitiously demand

I give more?

See how I rip out the flowers I grow in my chest, roots and all,

And I hold them out to you, crushing the stems in the grip of my bone white knuckles

While the mulch and sap and blood drip to the earth?

See how I catch a violent scream in my throat before it escapes and I sit perfectly still
with my legs crossed and my palms to heaven?

See how I give my body like Jesus did?

See how my offering is perpetual and never ending?

There's calluses on my feet,

My ribs are poking out

And my jeans are too big

All from this pilgrimage without a mecca

For you, beloved

I'll cut my flesh loose and build a fire

I'll cauterize the wound and leave the knife behind

Add it to the reliquary,

Let the faithful see my works and say

"It was not enough"

Offering no. 3

I lay in bed until the sheets feel musty
and I ask God if it's supposed to be this hard
How did Adam and Eve live for 900 years?
How did they bear this burden?

I'll hold these thoughts and other evil delights in my hands and place them on the shelf
in the secret room in my heart I don't tell anyone about

The Spirit peeks around the corner and pokes me with a stick from the threshold
I'll swat it away and say
"No, no, its better this way,
To bear it all alone and pray for a deliverance that won't come"

Table scraps

Bitter

I'm not bitter I'm still bleeding

It's all so fresh

It's just a mirage in the desert of my loneliness

I can't carry the weight of you anymore

Its breaking my bones

and my blood soaked feet leave imprints of sweat and sorrow in the dirt

And I can't tell now if you tended my wounds for love or for what my presence provided
you

I have died many times over so that I could move forward, and now I don't understand
why I kept choosing the tower card for you.

Look at the bruises on my knees and relish in the consequences of what you've done

Sick

I feel ill in a way I cannot heal
My heart glows at a thing it cannot have
I cannot share these desires that burn upon my chest
Arrows in the ground
A debt to be paid rather than a life to be lived

I tried to be good

How many Sundays did I spend baking in the
yellow green light of the window above the pew

How many times did I sojourn through the heatwaves rising
on the asphalt in a Georgia summer
To cry out to you, *to you*

I sang the doxology
I took in the eucharist
I cried, Lord, I believe, help me in my unbelief
I gave you my nights and went to sleep with pains in my stomach and panic laying its
heavy, buzzing head on my chest

Should I have spent my whole life crawling on the ground at your feet begging for
healing from a sickness you gave me?

I think I understand the serpent now

I want to be soft and lovely

I want to be soft and lovely

But nobody ever taught me how

All I know how to do is grind my teeth

and white knuckle my way through the red clay and the hymns

I want to be soft and lovely

But I carry this wild animal who gnaws at my ribs

Trying to get out and wreak havoc on all I love and all I think I should want

(It doesn't know the difference)

Tenderly trace your fingers across my bleached bones

Piece me together when I crack

Even if my hand breaks because it's you I'm beating

Gauze my blistered skin and soak up my blood

Kiss my wounds, would you?

All I ever dreamed of was feeling safe

A DIFFERENT APPROACH

A NEW WAY OF LIVING

TESTIFY, MY SOUL,
MY BODY,

OF THE REVELATION YOU HAVE WITNESSED
OF SUFFERING ENDURED AT THE HANDS OF THE DISCIPLES

PANGS IN MY BRITTLE CHEST RATTLE IN MY BONES
MY HEART JUMPS AS I LAY PARALYZED BENEATH THE MOONLIGHT THAT
STREAMS ACROSS THE KUDZU
RED HOT HEAT SIMMERS IN MY DAMP CHEEKS

NO MORE, NO MORE SHALL WE FEAR

THE TABERNACLE I AM

MARK YOUR DOORS AND BLOCK THE THRESHOLD

A COLLECTION, I HAVE COME TO MAKE

Broken Mirror

I give love freely and without regret
I give it away in abundance
because no matter what I do
it keeps growing in my chest

You crush flowers in your hands
and wonder why the thorns make your palms bleed

Do you ever think about that?

Spell #2

Adoration. Prayer. Curses. Witchcraft
Your name in my mind, I see your face
I hope my body haunts you.

I want you to feel plagued
Your eyes have left a mark burned on my skin
The words and the things you did
and I don't wanna forget
I'll hold on to them as mementos, proof of things left unsaid

I don't want anything from you
other than
my spectre to follow you for all your days

Penance

You take, take, take

But for your greedy heart there is a price, my love

These memories and moments lodged in your heart,
only I have the power to expel

I who have come to collect demand a sacrifice carnal and great

The God of your old testament

A pound of flesh and not even your first born will satisfy

Desire consumes these famished eyes

Hellfire great and sparkling to douse the house in which you pray

And begging from your trembling lips a thousand times over

Watch your words as they fly to heaven and be strangled before your eyes

Dust to dust

Dust to dust

I lay down

And feel the weight of my body collapse

Becoming one with the grains of the earth

Loaning out pieces of myself to all who ask

They cast lots for my bleeding heart still beating in my outstretched palm

The only payment I receive

The acknowledgement of my kindness, my sacrifice

You're so good.

You tore this flesh with ease and greedy hands

Taking endlessly while nobody taught me to scream

Even now in my resentment

A thousand miles away

I feel guilty for even admitting these things to myself

I run all night, but the distance doesn't change the hurt I carry with me

This weight lives in me and I can't tell you

But neither can I set it down

Knowing you don't understand

So what do I do with all this violence?

YOU CAN'T KEEP
ASKING ME TO
CARRY YOU LIKE
THIS
YOU CAN'T KEEP
ASKING ME TO
CARRY YOU LIKE
THIS YOU CAN'T
KEEP ASKING ME TO
CARRY YOU LIKE
THIS
YOU CAN'T KEEP
ASKING ME TO
CARRY YOU LIKE
THISARRY YOU LIKE
THIS
YOU CAN'T KEEP
ASKING ME TO
CARRY YOU LIKE
THISKING ME TO
CARRY YOU LIKE
THIS YOU YOU CAN'T
CAN'T CAN'T CARRY
YOU CAN'T ASK ME
ME ME MEYOU
CAN'T KEEP ASKING
ME TO CARRY YOU
LIKE THISYOU CAN'T
FAIR NOT FAIR KEEP

ASKING ME TO
CARRY YOU LIKE THI
IT ISN'T FAIR I CAN'T
CARRY YOU
ANYMORE IT ISN'T
FAIR I CAN'T CARRY
YOU LIKE THIS ON
MY KNEES CARRY
YOU I CAN'T IT ISN'T
FAIR IT ISN'T FAIR IT
ISN'T FAIR IS IT FAIR
IT ISN'T
FAIRANYMORE IT
ISN'T FAIR I CAN'T
CARRY YOU LIKE
THIS ON MY KNEES
CARRY YOU I CAN'T
IT ISN'T FAIR IT ISN'T
I CAN'T CARRY YOU
YOU YOU YOU YOU
CARRY IT I CAN'T
BLEEDING KNEES
ARE BLEEDING IN
THE I CAN'T CARRY
YOU LIKE THIS
ANYMORE GET OFF
ME GET OFF ME GET
OFF ME GET OFF ME
ON MY ON ME ON ME

YOU'RE ON ME GET
OFF OFF OFF OFF
WHEN IS IT MY TURN
MY TURN HOPE
HOPE HOPE WHEN IS
IT MY TURN TO
HAVE HOPE WHEN IS
IT YOU CARRY YOU
CARRY YOU CARRY I
WALK I WALK I
CRAWL I DRAG I SINK
I SCREAM SCREAM
SCREAM I P R A Y
SILENCE
SILENCESILENCESILE
NCE ADORATION
BELOVED MY BACK
IS BREAKING CAN
YOU HEAR CAN YOU
HEAR CAN YOU
HEAR THE CRACK OF
MY SPINE AND THE
MOANING OF MY
BONES MY KNEES MY
KNEES MY FEET MY
HANDS WHEN IS IT
MY TURNWHEN
WHENIT IS MY TURN
WHENISITMYTURNW

*When is it my turn
to hope?*

When is it my turn to rest?

I think it's time we stitch these wounds

*Yes, hold my hand dear sisters, beloved ghosts and
the foundation that holds this place*

BY A DROUGHT OF CANDLE LIGHT DID WE GROW THIS WAY, GROANING
AND STRAINING TOWARD THE DISTANT HOPE OF SOMEDAY, SOMEDAY

HOPE IS NOT A DISTANT DREAM
HOPE IS WHAT WE'VE CHOSEN EVERY MORNING SINCE THE DAWN

GIVE ME YOUR LEG AND I SHALL STITCH YOUR THIGH, ICE MY FINGERS
FROM THE BURNS

NO MORE SHALL WE OOZE AND BLEED OUT THERE IN THE RED CLAY,
WAITING FOR THE COPPERHEADS AND CARRION BIRDS TO FEAST ON OUR
WARM CORPSES

AS GOD COMMANDED ADAM, AND JESUS COMMANDED LAZARUS BEFORE
YOU,

RISE, BREATHE, WALK
BEAR YOUR SKIN TO THE SUN AND WATCH THE LIGHT BATHE YOUR PALE
FLESH ABUNDANTLY

A LAUREL WREATH OF KUDZU AND HONEYSUCKLE THAT ONCE TIED THIS
BEATEN BODY TO THE EARTH

UNLATCH THE BROKEN GATE AND SEE HOW LOVE ABOUNDS IN THE BIG
WIDE WORLD

Reader,

I want to thank you for your time and attention. I hope you gleaned something meaningful from this collection of writing. It was sprung out of hardship, dirt, tears, and the love of people I cherish. I am grateful for the hands that have held me and those whom I've had the honor of holding as well. You have given me hope from the simple act of being.

With love

Peyton Michelle

Works Cited

The ESV Single Column Journaling Bible. Crossway, 2011