

fray.

frazzle: perhaps a blend of **fray** and obsolete *fazle* ‘ravel out’, of germanic origin. the word was originally east anglian dialect, with the meaning ‘tear or unravel’;

when my dad called me *frazzle* with all the tenderness in his heart
i emptied my pockets of worry, and breathed with him.

my mom said i wasn’t a frazzle. in the literal sense,
she wasn’t wrong.

to honors all of our hearts:

fray.

CONTENTS

FRAY	2
BLACK BOTTOM	3
ECHO AND NARCISSUS, A RE-TELLING ⅓	7
ALL RISE FOR THE HONORABLE SUN	10
THEY LIVE IN CONTEMPT	12
WILL THE DEFENDANT PLEASE RISE	13
ECHO AND NARCISSUS, A RE-TELLING ⅔	15
SEQUESTER	17
CARDBOARD KITCHEN	18
SOAK	23
ECHO, RE-TOLD	25

FRAY

when you were five, you loved pink. or so we think. we dressed you
 too pretty to keep dressing in potato sack sweaters and men's cl
 interest in doing. *i don't wanna be alone with her, she makes*
 must be magic shrouding
 puppet strings slack on
 wood-bolted joints

carved and crafted by
 the drunkest amateur puppeteer
*with much love
 and luck!*

i will myself to sit
 still on bathroom tiles,
 but my hands,
 not my hands,
 hold our cheeks,
 the grain, good
 wood, sanded,
 shaved.

*ack, you're too pretty to wear black all the time. i'll kill
 es. you'll have to get over that. what, you're gon
 a shop in the men's section now? no, i'm so sorry, i
 tier when your hair's down. you never wear you*

the ick creeps in,
 bad boogeyman,
 shadow of a vampire with cramped hands

plucking

the soul from body,
 me from it,
 the wick:
 burning,
 no flame to fuel it.

*so tired. what reason do you have to be tired? stop wearing
 and they kill me too? it doesn't feel so irrational somethin
 ed if you don't stop feeling sad. oh, okay. sorry. ya
 u shouldn't have to feel bad too. you're pre*

*the time? for you to love me? because i can try, but i am
 m scared to drive because what if i get pulled over
 just thought they were cool. listen, i'll feel ba*

you're gonna throw away a whole relationship over one bad thing? *i'm sorry, but what do i do with these bad feelings? can you teach me not to throw them away? you're so fucking sensitive. i'm sorry, they're just not comfortable, they're not me. why are you so rebellious? why won't you be sensitive there too. i'm just so tired. what reason do you have to be tired? you'll regret throwing those*

the ick creeps in,
mirror mirrored,
all frame, no soul
dead space

burrowed
between the second
and third rib.

she scratches
the wood,
splinters catching
beneath the nail,

but somehow,
everyone else sees
blood.

end. maybe i'm a little confused but i
 didn't mean to make you unfomrtable! if you give me another chance I can tone it down, I can – oh!
 to the dance? / nah. too black, dude. do you ever feel like your feelings aren't your own? is thi
 easy going. yo, you never talk about your feelings. i don't really feel anything anymore.
 i stopped talking to you because i'm prett
 ha! i thought you were so mean, you
 mic on? if you don't call me
 it means you don't care. I care! I do, but do we have to talk everyday? i'm so tired. you do
 sure you're in love with me. oh, i'm so sorry! i thought i was being a good friend, you're my best fri
 literally never smile! i was so afraid to talk to you this whole semester. oh. thanks. hey! you cou
 is our baby-fat face
 the same shape
 it was
 the last day we remember
 the days
 being days?
 yes,
 so they whisper,
 with dents and dimples
 we have loved
 more
 with every passing day.
 i wasn't asking you.
 but it's you!
 it's who?
 it's you! it's who!
 insistent. insist it,
 they do.
 though, for me,
 who is barely a who,
 there is only
 the who.
 n't love me at all. you're so
 ask one of those two black girls

BLACK BOTTOM

I.

we're born floating,
backs bared,
tits down,
sun smoldering
what's been brown,
wind drowning
whimpers of
the downed

water bobs bodies
near enough t'know
there is an us

 'less these some newly crafted buoys
 rafting to nowhere,
 grafting to impair
 our chance
 at unionization.

II.

leeches teethe our skin
with abandon,
the highfalutin among them
suckling teats, detaching **POP!**
like men slicking sticky fingers clean,
mouths
capsules of their carnage.

the lowbrow venture towards
the great plains:
sun-baked backs,
their charred flakes –
they strain to tongue terrain,
retching at the taste
of tempered skin

no matter!
don't worry!

they'll bite 'til somethin' sticks.
we won't feel it all right then,
courteous colossuses,

numbing the skin they siphon

III.

a body washes up,
ribs knocking
against land.

pairs of pruned hands
pull them ashore
with the same care
a god need give a man.

they make them a maypole,
dressing wounds in gauze,
body in fresh linen.

a grey haired woman
secures them
between her knees.

that's it, baby.

she massages their scalp,
combs fingers
through firming coils,
cornrows
with a patience
that would make all the tender-headed
jealous.

bless your heart.
try to open them eyes.
take however long you need.

IV.

a mass of black folks ring
the man-made shore
in shifts,

rippling water, fishing brethren
out of the cull,
and near.

we hold our breath
behind bark,
when city fishermen
descend
to milk their leeches.

V.
murky lakewater entrances
the recently saved.

funhouse mirror,
she says,
aphids in the nooks
of greying braids.

careful now,
'least 'til you learn
to soothe
those self-cannibalistic
compulsions.

VI.
with freckled hands,
she packs them a rucksack,
murmurs,

we're born,
kidnapped
and thrown,
souls scraped
and doused,
before we're old enough
to defend ourselves.

some may deem you
decorative blight,
indolent divinity,
something
in-between.

you are neither decorative,
indolent, nor blight
unless you so choose to be so.

the perception of us,
even among us,
is as consistent
as the shape of the water

i beg you,
be a rock in the river
soon as you know how.

maintain your brain,
stake yourself as your center.
do not descend
into the role
of supporting character.
a supporting character

she offers up the rucksack.

*maybe i should stay.
help out.*

maybe.
if you so choose
and choose
without fear.

until then,
the most revolutionary act
is to thrive.

NARCISSUS AND ECHO, A RE-TELLING ⅓

twenty-three, and echo has never
seen her own reflection.

having never seen her self,
echo never saw herself,
ne'er knew what,
whomst, from whence
nor wherefore the care for
her wellness stemmed.

i mean,
she is but a body in a ceremonial white dress,
 breasts and ass,
 hands, molded
by her mother, her mother and hers:
made for nurturing seeds
into men.

she is but a woman !
soon-to-be weary
light-rimmed
eyes
nature's mirror
for MAN's bettering !

but she has no man !
no one to see her seeing,
no one to see.

[friends don't count
in this economy]

should one see nothing,
and have nothing,
one becomes under-, over- -serving, -deserving –
lovers, all forms of lover,
becoming unbecoming,
a monolith of
hearts: yolk
down the forearms,
much too runny
to hold,

- parents
- dogs
- sometimes cats,
it's a case by case
thing

right?

by her lonesome,

the brown-bagged hearts of
family 'n' friends
leaking 'n' littered
along grassy troll trails,
she toes the sandy shore
just short
of teetering in 'til: MAN ! down the lake, MAN !
crouched and bare MAN !
eye-fucking water with weepy sockets
MAN ? reaching to comfort MAN !
the reflected volatile drowned.
man, humanoid and virile

she need not,
need more.

she decides then:
she loves him.

*who's there, says he
leave us be, repetitive slut.*

*fuck you.
fuck youFUCK YOU!*

*no one would love
a wretched cunt*

*like you
and should they?
i hope it burns.*

he smacks the lake,

beat.
he reaches
to comfort
WATER.

*fuck, i'm sorry,
angel, i'm so
sorry, i would
never. ever.
harm
you.
whispers he.*

who's there? echoes she

leave us be, repetitive slut

fuck you *fuck you!*

fuck you

no one would love

a wretched cunt

like you

and should they,

i hope it burns

echo recoils.

beat.

she reaches

to comfort

MAN.

fuck i'm sorry

angel

i'm so sorry.

i would never,

ever,

harm you,

whimpers she.

she need not

heed more.

[SPOILER ALERT!

heeding disillusion

the illusion]

ALL RISE FOR THE HONORABLE SUN

every woman
loves the sun:

poster boy
for lopsided smiles,
letterman stained
in layers of marlboros
and lavender

but she would rather: gather hand-fulls
of selfsame clam shells
shielded,
by a gilded parasol

every woman loves the sun:

his warmth
harnessed
for belly-down naps
on sandy blankets

and should she try
to harness
his warmth:

where they feel kissed,
 she feels burnt.
 where they laugh,
 she feels swords,
 nerves
 quarreling
 among themselves.

; therefore, says an ANBSGVRHY*,
she must:

*authoritative, never-before-seen grandmother
vicariously reliving her youth

(A) ebb and flow, slow
 the current, keep
 from sweeping
 the golden lab down river.

(B) see butterflies as a good sign,
 an exercise of the heart.

love blossoms (back) stronger
 where it hurts most

(C) borrow loops and ribbon
 sculpting tools

from the bin in the back
of mother's closet.
we will learn
to mold suns
together

(D) consider:

he is not the one.

yuks and snickers from the beach-bum babes*

bastards*

*aka the BBB

so she reimagines w – w – ~~warring~~ swords as
nervous j – joy, exchanges
swim trunks for
~~bikinis~~
like the BBB,
she shimmies
straps down her shoulders,
slathers herself
in sunscreen,
yielding
her body
to

his rays
burn her.

overlooked scum
at the bottom
of the oven.

what did you do?
they coo,
he would never
harm
you

without reason,

women love
the sun.

sunscreen encrusted
rashes crusted,
she must be loving
wrong.

WILL THE DEFENDANT PLEASE RISE

after morgan parker

your opening statement?

women love the sun, poster

boy for lopsided smiles,

pristine letterman spritzed

in marlboros and lavender

ENOUGH.

let the record reflect your

defendant swore off this sun, in

shade and nasa shirts, warmth

harnessed in the hearth on her

own

*that was not a swearing off, THAT is how
you ebb! ignore man to let man feel like
man, let man hunt and win, objection.*

speculation.

when - sustained, the defendant never purported to

ebb for the sun.

prosecutor, you may go on.

dearest defendant, what drew you to the sun? was it the way he looked through you until the day you realized he is not the center of the universe, like he so proudly proclaimed? in fact there is no center, no edge, objection [AGVRHY's chair scrapes lacquered wood] tangential leading question!

**AUTHORITATIVE GRANDMOTHER
VICARIOUSLY RELIVING HER YOUTH*

relevance?

sustained. [scoffed] endless universe... shit's a fish tank

let's revisit, then. the sun wouldn't mind you until you minded your sci-fi screenplay more. the sun lit your gold-rimmed parasol aflame, ridding shade in a tantrum-fueled bid for attention. the sun called you "dimples" because he couldn't remember your name but you giggled and swayed, thinking that was just the cutest thing. does any of this sound familiar to you? how 'bout somethin' recent? the sun forgets to text you but you tell him it's okay - you're not attached to your phone either, go off grid, king! the sun says you're not like other girls when you tell him you don't like seeing yourself in the mirror, and though its the most humorless thing you've heard, you scrunch that button nose and laugh in echoes. the sun likes embracing you between pockets of clouds on rainy days when you walk home from the art theatre. the sun says you're his favorite person in the world, but he doesn't say it like haha, love you bro! he says it like there's a candle-lit dinner between you, steaks and wine on pearl platters but there's no around to corroborate. the sun says he wants to spend more time with you when you're sitting on your bed, letting him show you his favorite U2 songs (U2 songs), but you know that if you don't call him, you won't talk. the sun asks you out, not on a date, but not-not on a date. the sun won't say it's not a date or not-not a date when you ask. and when you show up in the silky black dress you thrifted to "make him smile" him, the waitress compliments once, which is once more time than the sun does. the sun says he's surprised when you show up to his stand-up set; he only mentioned it once, that's really dope of you. the sun makes jokes alluding to your lack of self-worth and how easy you were to bag, but he doesn't say your name. it's driest set and you're the only audience member (fake) laughing at every "gotcha" joke, but someone's got to support him, right?

the sun says you're easy to talk to after he's detailed the top three traumas that have made him the Man He is Today, without ever asking why you're crying in your father's garden this morning. the sun says he'll always be there for you. the sun hides behind clouds when you text him you're sad after your father dies. the sun is too busy playing baseball with the buds, but if you're ever sad again he'll be around. the sun says he's emotionally unavailable on another 8am call, and you say you won't wait for him. even though he's not asking, even though deep down you know you'll be there, but you can't just SAY that. the sun stands you up for dinner again, then ghosts you. you don't bring it up. the sun calls you at 8am against his "better judgement." the sun says he's drinking his dad's whiskey and he can't get you out of his head. the sun hates himself this morning, so you try to convince him he's a star, using a baby voice you didn't even realize you had and, apparently, only use with him. the sun tells you it's cute when you watch the sky, just you and a picnic blanket in the park. there, you make the mistake of telling him you like him. the sun tells you he feels *something*, when you ask how he feels. and that must mean he likes you, he just isn't ready to say it. the sun tells you to call him tomorrow, but he sends you to voicemail when you do. the sun doesn't call you for months. the sun grovels on his knees on your porch, when you finally stop talking to him. the sun says he's sorry for the unspecified issues he's caused. you don't need or heed more, his parents never taught him how to love. would you say your parents taught you how to love, defend **BANG!** yourself or others in mind? **BANG!**

BANG! BANG!
irrelevant line of questioning.
is it?
surely, it is! *watch yourself,*
mhm. *prosecutor.*

the sun buys you drinks and you get drunk on the beach, sand scraping skin as you mold sandcastles by the water. he holds your hand. he calls you "dimples." because he still doesn't know your name. he says he's liked you since he met you. and, suddenly: you don't like the sun anymore, suddenly: butterflies feel more like sickness. the sun asks if he can fuck you on that beach and what, if anything, did you say? *it happens, she'll feel it again.*
you don't have to answer that!

I DON'T LIKE HOW YOU TREAT ME.

oh... dearest defendant. is it true: you knew, this whole time, exactly how he treated you, and you let it go? is it true you never liked him? **OBJECTION!**

BANG! is it true you found safety in validation? **BANG!**
BANG! **OBJECTION!** he rarely validates her **ORDER!**
so you admit it, too?
who are you? **ORDER!** is it true you don't know what you want? **BANG!** **BANG!**
who are you? what do you want? what do you need? **BANG!**
is it true you don't know who you are without the honorable sun? **BANG!**
what do you need? **BANG!** who are you? **ORDER!** who are you? what do you need?
who are you? **BANG!** who are you? **ORDER!** who are you?
BANG! who are you? **ORDER!** who are you?

is it true you only did what you thought you were supposed to do?

ECHO AND NARCISSUS, A RE-TELLING ⅔

unable to cradle the golden-haired man
held hostage
beneath lakewater,
narcissus cocoons himself,
at shore's edge,
disregarding the shit-starting

echo cocoons
burrowed
in the blackberry bushes
behind him,
bristled legs pulled
against her chest.

[with kate winslet's dramatics]:

[aside]:

[to all]:

if it is water that enraptures him,
land-based the golden-haired man,
could he not feel captured
by the tears she weeps?
wherefore and for him?

*

when their skin thins
and dim eyes hollow,
despite the slurs he casts,
echo picks him

bushels of blackberries
to keep him
well and fed.

but even she won't eat.
and how can she?

her lover of four hours in shambles,
how dare she be
unkind?

distressing, distressed,
man and mirror neglect
to tender their bodies,
withering apart
beneath the moonlight.

to water, he whispers:
my love, why,
do you ignore me?
do you

not see

i am dying for you?

*

when narcissus weeps,
what is left of him,
flesh turned yellow flower
by an intern of the Gods
she is fated to die,
as she was fated to love,
as such is the structure
of MAN'S MYTH.

having depleted her reserves,
soil set for the deathbed,
she need only be delivered.

echo kneels by his flower,
weeping in wait til' WOMAN,
shimmering in water,
draws the eyes.

to echo, she echoes
my love,
why do you ignore me?
do you not see
SEE
i am.
and i am dying
for you.

like narcissus,
she had never seen herself.

unlike narcissus,
she progresses
through the mirror stage.

SEQUESTER

clumsy cousins rough house in the living room's corner.
 mother dearest and aunt pearl sit
 together, *one.* away from
 darling daughter, her spirit is here: knee touching knee.
 daughter's body is here: insulated propped by
 a cardboard couch in the essence of stomach
 spandex-tight, back forged memory— upright, a stick
 to assimilate with where she and her her family.
 aunt pearl's not-quite girl-friend pearly eyes have
 a way craft a curtained tent in of making daughter
 feel the living room, bare
 when pearl says decorating dusty baseboards *did you hear? —*
 mother dearest bites, with celestial paper lanterns. *hear what?*
cousin annie is —where they chant to *a fence hopper!*
 pearl's whispers are *hooked on a feeling,* pretending unwhispered,
 sympathy crooned yet they don't have three left feet hollowed by.
 her middle-school glee. even when they stumble, *well, did you?*
did you know? curtains collapsing mother dearest now
 wants to know if around them darling daughter knew
did you? the way parachutes always do, wants to know
were there signs? —where she watches her rebuild needs to know
why? home with un- *why would cousin annie*
hurt necessary tenderness, *her dearest*
mother speaking to it as if *like this?*
 darling daughter wrings it will listen to her, as if her chipped ring
 around her finger while it hears and understands how mother looks up
 to chipped ceilings necessary her substitute for
 the high heavens. its job is, to Stay. *her mother*
must be —where they nestle 'neath *devastated,*
 says darling daughter's amber curtains while mother dearest.
 darling daughter visits rain taps shingles in bursts, her body
 long enough to ask, black freckles lazed a barely whispered
why? into rounded constellations, aunt pearl screams
 for clumsy cousins to plump hands mold her as *stop hitting*
the damn piano, thoroughly as sculptors should *you hear me?*
 mother says, —where cotton-soft hair sticks *woman lying with*
woman is sin to the nape of her neck—where *ful, says, God did not*
intend / don't they bathe *make me start*
counting / did not in the scent of *will for / five.*
/ women to sleep sweet oranges—where *with / four.*
 daughter's chest turns breaths are warm enough viscous. *she'll*
go to hell, to warm them—where mother whispers
/ three. like all phases curtains collapse *(this—two— shall pass*
her mother must be devastated
again. they laugh
i can't stop this feeling
in chimes. in chimes.
deep inside of me
girl you just don't realize
what you do to me

THEY LIVE IN CONTEMPT

a lighthouse keeper's sweater blankets
her itchy bitsy teenie weenie bikini.

she collects marbled clam shells
beneath slivers of moonlight,
having become what we call
a newly turned beach-bum
vampire.

(clinically abbreviated: BBV
BBV or NTBBV).

supposedly, sharks swim towards shore
around now, it's quiet
aside from the bonfire
down the way.

when the night nears its end,
she sits on sand, reflecting
spinning web after web
around herself.

she stops
when her voice wavers,
when she's scraped keloids
and ransacked the wound beneath.

maybe it's simple,
but she's realized:
she hates
bikinis.

tonight, she retires
to a coffin lined in velvet.

tomorrow,
she'll wear salmon swim shorts.
and cry
when they don't slice her labia.
when they boxify hip curves
that needn't be hugged.

tomorrow, she'll do it again,
ebbing and flowing
with the tides
in pursuit
of personhood.

CARDBOARD KITCHEN

I.

there is crying from the closet, most nights.

but the fan drones on
its thrum glum,
i hum with the dulcet timbre of

she whimpers my name in hiccups,
reaching

through the gap between the floor and door,
i wedge wet towels, greyed tiles, cool
against my thighs.

i lay myself to rest, hum
with dulcet timbre of water
circling the drain for a moment's

II.

DOOF. DOOF ! DOOF.

she screams so raw
it wrings her

breathless,
it is me
who bangs wood bloody,
whimpering my name through pleas

III.

i find her
by peeling leather belts
and pristine skirts,
her old ballet shoes
and my clunky witch boots –
beneath shelves of luggage,
threatening

to smother.

can i come out now? oh.

my breath hitches.

*one. we still bite our nails.
you don't paint 'em anymore?*

wasn't f – for me. *as long as you're happy. two?*

*two. your shoulders carry grief
only gods should feel.
three?*

you found barry.

*she squeezes him,
did nana throw him out? four.*

your hair bobbles unraveled.

she smiles.

five?

she smiles wider,
failing to soften it enough
to hide
the goofy lazy eye.

or maybe she doesn't want to.
maybe they haven't made fun of it yet.

*we got muscles.
are we knights now?
you're always collecting armor*

III.

she wraps my fingers
in bear band-aids,

dragging boxes from the garage,

cutting cardboard
with scissors
i didn't give her.

she doesn't ask
if she can sleep
in my bed tonight.

she doesn't ask
if i'll play with her
or why i won't
gift her the time
i so freely give
to the baristas
wanting only
to do their jobs

she knows
i hate her.

well,
she knew before
i knew
that i didn't hate
her,
but the puppet strings
we couldn't see,
we could've been,
a home.
we could've made
the body
our home
instead of a home
desolate
only to us.

*oh my god, what a neat tattoo!
what's the backstory,
the foreword? the prologue?
do you imagine an epilogue
for yourself?*

i'm sure she'd say:

we were too young to know

but she's selfish
with her kid wisdom.

IV.
i try
to sever
the last sinew
tethering us

i say
it's to spare her
from neglect.

she lets me play pretend,
most nights.
but tonight,

it's to spare you.

i'm sorry?

*no one taught you
how to be
the well
we draw love from.*

we aren't a we

*and you think:
lightning should fry you
for not knowing
before you need*

*so you'll say: it's for me
but when have you ever
asked me
what i need?*

what do you need?

just try.

just see me.

spare us.

not me.

she hands me
a cardboard plate
from her fully renovated
cardboard kitchen
chicken a la mode
she bows.
compliments.

V.

we sit beneath the moonlight
in front of our cardboard tv.

i secure her shoulders
between my knees.
and comb, my fingers
through her hair,
weaving,
golden strands
in the nooks of her braids.

i don't call her sensitive
when she winces.
i tell her i'm sorry,
i slick her scalp with gel,
and distract her,
with re-tellings
of our least favorite
myths.

SOAK

when the ick creeps in,
the skin,
trapping confession:

run the water,
plug the tub,
soak:
in lavender,
in epsom,

soak,
in those awful, artificial
blueberry-scented bubbles,

soak,
in gentle chirrup
and nuzzled headbutts
from mora, the tabby:
the new homeowner.

soak,
in your sisters' offkey rendition
of *curtis!*
you were supposed to love me!
and in breathless laughter
when they sing
with too much conviction.

soak,
in phone calls with your cousin,
where you'll "joke"
about the single brain cell
shared between you.

soak,
in your mom's sunny smile,
in the excitement she holds,
when she says she's been gifted
a biscuit recipe

from the heavens.

soak,
in your dad's bitten-back laughter
and your fake argument
re: who cleaned the kitchen last (you)
and how you should take his day too.

take the spacesuit off,
darling,
steer the zipper
down the spine,
pin the skin
alongside sinews
on the clothesline.

soak, the organs
in the kitchen sink,
the bones,
in the bucket
beside the washing machine.

just soak.

i'll tender the heart
for your return.

ECHO, RE-TOLD

echo floats in lakewater,
soothing dirt-scraped knees,
soaking
the yolk-stained dress
her mother made her wear,

*should suitors linger
wherever you may!*

okay, mom.

[dismissive hand wave]

as she dries in the sun,
hair a coiling cloud, body
cradled in a bed of cattails,
 she picks at stitches
 until they fray,
 until the lace binding her in:
 gives out.

 she takes a breath,
 holding humidity
 in her belly
 instead of tension
 in her chest.

dimples dent, smile flickering,
sly and content on brown lips.

echo is fated to thrive.

*

bare,
she toes the troll trails home
gathering
the brow-bagged hearts
of family 'n' friends.