



Bitches  
of the  
Drought

LAUREN EGGERT-CROWE

# **BITCHES OF THE DROUGHT**

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# BOUGAINVILLEA

Fistfuls of brittle  
pink crinoline fading  
to beige on the patio, smashed

into curbs, confetti  
after the parade, piled  
up like leaves

for children, crinkling  
streamers beneath  
boots, or lacing

a dust devil. Wet  
with rain, they will  
clump against trash

bins, colorless-bound, but now  
a selfless fuchsia froth,  
a bloom of birthday

taffeta. Meddlesome  
weeds, but who doesn't  
love their unabashed

cascade, their constant  
blossom? Neighbors, forgive  
my transplant heart.

## **BITCHES OF THE DROUGHT**

All night we dreamt of its garnets tumbling across our tongues.

We filled up our sinks and filled them  
again, and everything that passed through us was  
clear as singing bowls.

We stumbled about gummy-lipped apologies, our backs heavy  
with cucumbers. We wanted a polished mirror to walk on.

Each time we spoke, whole taxonomies of wishes flew out.  
Iceplant brats, every last one. This is what we discarded.  
This is the saltcedar dust  
of our shame.

If I say the sun made me do it, what then?

## THINGS I HAVE BURNED INTENTIONALLY

Come June, we gathered our papers. Flung them in  
unmemorized. We children, we lit fires.

I have emptied my pockets  
of matches. Singed the edges  
of the singe-able.

I have carved little X's and forgotten  
the gloss underneath: the damning  
lines over and over.  
Readied the ring.

A smile toothy with embers.  
What hurts between.

When I said I was sorry, I was  
lying. But I gave you  
the kindling to torch me with.

Watched our history  
blaze up like a sentence.

If there was one moment  
you wanted it,  
that is enough  
to pack the house  
with coals.

Tinderstick hands. You curled and warped  
into the heat of your own desire.

And trust is an ashen thing, chalking  
up our mouths. I want to see it  
shame your forehead.

We knew our chemistry. Laid charred hands  
to the other's reactions. I said, *undo*  
and it wasn't. You made your bed.

The ethical words,

I mean, the science

of betrayal.

I have been gunning around  
that choice ever since, ever your  
electron.

To be wrong about the past is to bolt  
into it. Charts flying. The liberating

jettison, the good riddance  
fuel of severance.

To strike the flint and let the evidence be

consumed. Chapters crinkle  
out of their hissing heft.

Squander for squander.

What was left of these tests  
in the forgiveness of the fire.

You remember it too, the rule  
of matter: we rearrange

and bind ourselves  
to the softest force that yields.

## GET AS FAR OVER AS YOU CAN

Like how I met a woman who looked  
so much like another woman I kept  
staring, expecting her to grow a snaggletooth  
and lay claim to my wasteland

Like how we keep talking nobly  
about gentrification, but we aren't  
asking how can my body not be a poison?

Like how traffic is a bad sister

Like how I never learned  
to surf, only watched you slide  
your awkward torso  
into a wetsuit and walk around

Like how I am Facebook  
friends with four dead people

Like how I wait for the traffic  
to become some other kind of traffic

Like how I invited you to brunch  
so I could glare at you. Like how  
I've taken most of your gifts  
to Goodwill

## EVERY BOY THINKS HE'S SOCRATES

and I am undone by the arguments  
in memory. The smart people  
say we have two selves. No word

on which of ours still loves  
the other. One of these days, yours  
will be the small cruelty I miss.

I am tired of saying, *well okay sure*.  
I am reached all the way out. Holes  
are unextraordinary, but you keep

glorifying the poking of them.  
What is sex but the jabbing  
of an old wound anyway? I cannot stop

writing declarative, transitive. I would like to deliver  
cheap carnations to whoever sent you  
the memo that said your job was to say, *actually, ok but actually—*

## **I CAME BACK**

Saturday and I want to be  
doing what everybody else

is doing: flying  
at your face with my hot  
pink claws. Put me in

a music video. I could  
get used to this  
mansion rage.

## I CAME BACK OUT OF BOREDOM

If someone wants me  
out with them in the bright

possibilities, I will, yes.  
When I'm not working,

I drop ice cubes in my orchids and try not to  
stare at the flat flicker of other people's

Saturdays. When I'm not working, I think  
about working. I would like to dig

into a delicious failure. I would  
like a dramatic gesture—song lyric tattoos.

Money is a mountain I can't  
decide on. Tunnel or climb?

## **I CAME BACK HUNGRY**

Lord, make of  
me a chapel  
for a barefoot man  
to fall into  
on a thankless  
night.

# I CAME BACK WITH MY SPARRING GLOVES ON

But what does the science say?

How do you scrub it from the outside?

What is this doomsday arithmetic?

Are we like a patch of mint?

Will we claim and linger?

What am I permitted to desire?

Which crime would you choose?

Is this that kind of hole?

Who is your villain?

Will you tell me I am?

# I CAME BACK IN THE BLUEST DRESS

Put on your fake empathy  
face when you listen

to my wants. This is the battle  
of letting go of black

metal, of the peas  
and the pod.

Needed to be a ghost living  
inside your ghost. In those days,

I could have sworn  
we were two wet lungs

I believe everything  
asked of you was fair.

# I CAME BACK WITH A PILE OF SUGAR TO GIVE MY FRENEMIES

when you called me, my lungs were two flayed rabbits

when you called me with the acidic chime I touched the lightning storm

when you called me, I froze

the slowest glacier when you called me

I dreamt of walking with you and your family                      when you called me

all of us in the same navy

sweatshirt              when you called me

I dreamt of your kiss, when you called me                      and your question,

when you called me                      and her hair falling all over you,

when you called me

## **I CAME BACK TO CATCH MAD AIR**

I laid down my arms for you. I wanted to be convinced. I wanted to be the grand villain of someone's life as if it would solve the summer. The summer was a barrel of peaches and indiscretion. I had lofty thoughts. Hold on tighter, come closer, I repent. She called me in the hurricane and I spoke with your voice because your voice was the supreme currency and I wanted to buy the whole country. I wanted to win the grace contest. In those days I could barely eat so I just swallowed.

# **I CAME BACK TO GET OUT OF THE RAIN, BUT INSIDE THE STORM SWUNG ITS PENDULUM**

I was your second peg.

When you felled me like a domino, I gave you  
thirteen hallelujahs. Too small to know I was wrong,  
but you were the only mirror looping  
above me. The weight of you, a planet.

You and your homemade gravity  
giftwrapped like a treasure instead  
of a sentence, of a shackle. I spun  
and spun, but a planet I was not.

Meanwhile you had already graduated  
to the sun, and I was fucked.

I looked upon my distorted  
reflection and I called her *sister*.

## I CAME BACK WITH EMERGENCY LOGIC

The problem was all the mirrors.

Blue mirrors, concave glass.

I was a freckle on a bitten lip.

I was your new wave sad eyes. I was a cupcake  
atop a gazelle. I shimmered and starved.

The problem was the sound of the mirrors bending  
forward and backward. That electronic light  
all up in our pituitaries, I can't even.

I was a mitten, and you were a desert to crack in.

You rendered me splat  
on the carpet; I said, *yes please*.

The problem was the doors. They were always  
open. I was a neon emergency.

You were a panic of silk.

## I CAME BACK LOOKING FOR A FIGHT

Wasting my wishes, blowing  
eyelashes this way and that since

I was fifteen and spending  
my desire on red cars, spinning

quarters. Half a life  
built up for this crockery--

Like the punchline: the joy of your body  
destroyed me.           This is the battle of softening

into the girl I left behind on the platform  
the day your engine

steamed in with an arsenal  
of foreign films.

## I CAME BACK TO SHAKE THE SAND OUT

Have I shown you enough  
of my journey to flip your hands?

I have a net to unweave, as you have  
debts. I said, let my body be a debt

to itself. Glorious  
receptacle: I opened wide

for you, generous and dirty.  
Even when you didn't want it,

you knew you could, like  
when you wrapped me

close with a proprietary arm, but I was the one  
who asked, *is this okay?*

## I CAME BACK ALL THE WAY, ALL THE WAY

Perhaps you entered me believing yourself  
to be an innocent bystander.

But sometimes I remember how you were the first  
to weigh your head against my hummingbird

heart. The paralykiss.  
Remember what you asked for, what

I promised you, what it cost me. I melted  
my body and molded it into a friend

to give you on the droughtcraving  
nights when the ingénues wouldn't keep you.

## XANDER

You would never save me from my own  
destruction with love, let's be real.  
Though I have wanted you pummeled  
into pumice on bluffs white as privilege,  
I can't imagine you halting my hurricane  
with forgiveness: the languidly wronged one.  
Our economy of secrets needed invisible fingers  
crossed behind the back. Say it was magic,  
the way my wrists pulled toward your chest.  
I swallowed your clicking reasons, made a lamb  
of my wilderness, tampered down into the chatter  
of shame. Absolve yourself and lather up  
your logic. Let the good riddance feel good.  
The heat of your loyalty could never sustain  
my armies. I've crumpled enough, hair aflame.

## CONFECTION

Like you, I searched for sweetness  
in the wrongest places. Bit into

what made me sick, washed it  
down with what made me sicker.

Girls walked on bricks to get here.  
The sun warmed the sugar.

Girls left. The bricks cooled.  
I furnished the table in a song

of lemon, and you fell  
quieted. I said I wouldn't, but that

meant yes. Noon  
was a pastry that could scald

your fingers. Look: the light  
is unassuming and lonely.

Across the street, they are selling  
egg and flour. It is a fool's errand.

I told the story with a wooden spoon  
in my hand. Everything I said

embarrassed me. Mistook the salted  
stone for the bakery; the kitchen-work,

for the kitchen itself. A lit oven awaits  
the glass it will be given.

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