



EPITHALAM- IUM

laura page

epithalamium

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contents

a bird in the hand	1
mud, bisque	2
paleo, basilica	3
jew's harp	4
ragamuffin	5
ghazal for lithia pond	6
epithalamium	7
juleps, an inventory	11
little sawyers	12
mouse heart	13
song, canto	14
to limn as fire does	15
coq a' lane	16
lady myths	17
chutzpah, a litter of sonnet	18
ouroboros / hourglass	19
sticky	20
x's and no's	21
scattershot	22

a bird in the hand

a bird in the hand
these hands yours
i once let a woman read my palm
there was a red-tailed hawk
gliding over
the fate line
another crossing 'T
at the girdle of venus
worth two
questions
how & when
two saplings bent
making a 'T
two ways to spell we
a bird in the hand
(two pulses spliced)
is worth two perfect
heart shaft wing beats
lashed applause
separate & searching
in the bush.

mud, bisque

i look up at the tulips, hanging in there.

their snipped ends have been given miniature, prosthetic
bulbs, a lot of clear
marbles in water, the vase. there's a pink salt lamp that is
easier for them
than sun. their bisque is taking a long time to freckle.

once, when i was very young,
i sat captivated by tulips like these
—and not like them at all.
i sat in front of the tv, studying
a porcelain doll under bright lights
on the shopping network, child bride,
holding little nipples white ones.
even though the petals
were made of something synthetic, they
muddied the hands and face
of the doll, blazing out purity,
white-hot chastity.

in their glass waist and hips, these tulips, snipped, are tight,
aching
to be muddied somehow, to be unpetalled slowly in real
traipsing time, laddered,
marbled down, tongue erasing freckles, finding salt, pink
bulb.

paleo, basilica

fact is we're finished
being basilicas now.
instead, cave wall glyphs.

we're anomalous,
we're buffaloes chasing rouge
men fleeing limestone

for a pale, lewd sun
to hand us a second chance
a primitive noon.

jew's harp

like if you could zip it and belt it:
this isn't a coup, a flock of crows.

you find him naked on the bent reed,
one note, one note.

if you could dress him in harmonics
it would be apology,

like you mean it this time.
like you haven't been saving up ballads, folk wolf.

like his sad. arpeggios
swallowed and spliced thrumming

akin to a fight and flight,
smoke signal hanging tooth and nail.

like if you hit his lips hard.
like if you could hide him, wishing,

wadded in one cheek. like an
ozark moon goes corn meal on the tongue

and bars cripple again in the glottis.
if you could hold him fast then slow,

like you were as here as a decade is gone,
mouth poised to be a cave.

ragamuffin

undressed there's a tailoring, a pretty
drape of our wringing and wrinkle.

ragamuffin,
the way i count up then down

during a jigsaw, up the tenements of
your vertebrae, down again.

erotic: the dead jay on the stoop, morning after,
something drop-stomach

about it, as if it were one of us fetal in
feathers, embalmed in blue.

your back arched is cat alfalfa.
straight it's high noon on table rock.

your back, even when it's to me it has a face.
its far-ness quickly becomes waist, a

beaked cinch of nearness
and we're ragamuffin again.

children and birds can both sing disease
ragamuffin, like

plumed up for sunday &
finding the road all mud, ragamuffin, like

mama said get lost already & we found
the creek—like swing-off, toe-hook,

tire-peel, rope-burn, ice-clench—and
going under felt clean like flight.

ghazal for lithia pond

the whole snow moon, the pleiades plié'd
in his rimless glasses and the pond

while i tried to parse a flirt, tried
to recall it ever effective, with or without a pond

or words, standing or sitting pigeon-toed. somehow
too wise, despite the allegro on the pond.

things skated, trying to be moon-ache, flaked,
eyelashes caked, and algae on the pond

all at once. he cracked a joke, eyeing
the swing sets. i followed his lead. the pond's

shimmy still in sight, i gripped the swing's chains,
aching, hoping for lift enough i'd land in the pond

if i were to let go at the right moment. his hand
on the small of my back, i pushed off,

trying to kick stars from my cold leather saddle,
trying to make snow of the dark on the pond.

epithalamium

bride,

one day you'll stand at your kitchen sink and
there will be the honesty of fluorescence on chapped lips.
you won't be able to give him new eyes.
you'll be stuck with your pairs pocked with years
that some call freckles—pocks
that have fixed your bodies in sight long enough
to draw all the water out.
you may wish for a new kind of honesty, one that
looks at all the ways you've dried and cracked and
loved and let go and claps away cold, sings a kettle song,
bergamot
and oranges, that listens—just listens
to your igneous and frozen pipes, and is content.
but you'll still rebuke the LED buzzing
above that kitchen sink for showing you your age.
you'll still wish for new eyes.
this is allowed.

*

bride,

you'll think that's not the thing to call you—when
it's been a decade. you're a wife, not that blushing thing.

you'll think days must be the welter that they are because
there are

children and tenderness seems replaced by a reciprocity of
practical.

you'll think there's nothing about the house and the pillage
of small toys and orange rinds to catch and knock about in
your chest—

until the next time your two bodies dissolve folk song and
heat in circuits under your eyes, the two-ness will rise bride
again.

*

bride,

loneliness is a small gospel. apocryphal, between sheets and
between the stories of the lazy susan. peel away the tin of
its top.

acknowledge the canon.

*

bride,

a caught and freed butterfly bears fingerprints
where a child's digits pinched and smudged her symmetry.
and you—you've rubbed off on so many.
what residue powders like sugar the compliments that
pinched you? the slights?

at vows it's always a question whether, after the
exhilaration

of being held down and admired
you'll be freed again.

if you are
you'll spread. fly
handicapped colored sugar
his will be the only fingers you'll want to rub off on.

*

bride,

do conifers hate their particular chub, green,
the way you hate your inability

to subvert the trebles and the clefs ridden—
a scrum, tender, hillbilly?

how many flags
to middle age? but you're not there yet.

this is an epithalamium, supposed of the
wood in the fractals, the fat

of pine seed. what
science supposes monogamy?

the evolution to imagine it,
the folded in, the ever after. the old navy nuptials,
margaritaville

elopement notwithstanding
you'll have said

i do.
so do. despite the salt in the
deeper splinters.

juleps, an inventory

1. wicker
2. melon-green
3. latin: *julapium*
4. capitulations
5. heart, ft. mint.
6. seat of bird-home
7. cane
8. ice, sweat
9. grip, gripe
10. a basket, a bower
11. *gulāb*, from *gul* 'rose' + *āb* 'water'
12. leaf afloat, herb
13. alcohol // god.
14. 90° f.
15. tall glass
16. kudzu
17. cache, 4 roses
18. sitting adjacent
19. turbinado
20. *caput*, *capitulum*
21. 90 proof
22. honey stuck/unstuck
23. white tee
24. consent

little sawyers

let's go back to the crickets keening
in the grass. back to the
song they made that night
our hostages
sawing in the clover a
sawtooth, a gospel
on the ribbons of their knees
our
knees
ribboning hips
like glass threads on a mason jar
go back to the night
our torsos were
fluid quart containers.
we caught each other's hearts in cupped palms
lanterns waiting for some praise to
rob the crickets
steal the sawyers' song
and put it in our mouths.

mouse heart

in the rusty trap, a tuft of fur and mouse-heart,
beating, beating, thinking thinking. runt alien,
a chocolate of ontology in a smear of peanut butter.

in this rusted-out base of night, greedy, lonely,
how much beating can i bear in this thinking, being?
how like a delicate fat-smeared trap

is this mouse heart of mine in a clutch of
parts: language, memory, vice, little victories like a
holding bar against the coil. human dark, buttered, baited.

song, canto

song: ithaca, my oregon.

canto: waterlog

song: throne, wife, heir

canto: desire

song: what the man wants

canto: what the sirens want

song: the measure

canto: the creaking mast.

to limn as fire does

proximity to the licking, as it gathers
bright and sad fuels, hot forked tongues doing as i do, me
with a great peat of regret that i can offer neither you,
nor the grate— is enough, is
not enough.

proximity to this consuming is
to warm over rain-choked retrospection merely.

if you'll have me, hot ash-mirror to your own bright
sadness,

i promise to be a real hearth, in time,
to harness a gutter to my fascia, to limn as fire does,
the unsayable things i did not do

and those i did.

coq a' lane

to say *look at that*—
and shake my head at you, as i've done,

to be the bug, leaning into the zap
as if it were a mirror,

the better to see my grin. to lean,
to preen something, primp against

a greening buzz, as you,
from safety,

say *move over a little*,
i need the light.

lady myths

eve saturates our myths, the link
between gaea and industrial nomads, avatars
of [im]permanence.
adam dug out a canoe, in lilith's amateur fiction,
scooped his daughters out. they scattered—
became a co-op of trembling
woods, lake-beds, exquisite religions, sacred germs—
excavations of ancient civilizations,
trapped literatures beneath their breasts.

chutzpah, a litter of sonnet

you're toeing all my edges, and i yours, both of us
wondering
how far we might fall if we put the rest of us out there.
our varied repertoires sing iambs, wastes of psalm, hymn,
but
the only evidence of it i can see is a garish modesty on my
patio, a puritanical
eating and garbing of morning, a litter
of sonnet: everything naked and unashamed past the edges,
patios just acres of the midwest, petrarchan in their failed
humanism.

ouroboros / hourglass

this morning it was ouroboros or an hourglass / a choice /
to swallow the loose ends of our / genesis / or pull a
ribbon of sand through a 10-o-clock bottleneck / exodus /
a choice between / renaming the braided animals of myself
for you or / walking the wet floor of a parted sea / i could
have named you *serpent* / become a diamond-back / eve /
henhouse / rattling / instead i shaped / our fall / became
the glass / walls / of the day.

sticky

after annie dillard

forget stardust, i said. think made of
things that break off looking to stick again.

if we stood motionless for a year,
this marble hanging space-offal would bury us in its

sticking: spider legs, leaf dander, eyelashes,
coat us gently if we stood like a pair of apollo's torsos—in

soot, spit, rug, scab,
algae, dung, latex, talcum.

for now, we move. all that sticks, a particular
arrangement of particles to our bones, each

others', to our dead. forget stardust.
think transit. think love.

x's and no's

i used to lay over you, like a crossbeam.
we were a happy x in a room full of y's.
[yes-men and women, snaking and necking]

when you arched your back because it hurt,
that funny little diamond where we touched
made a noise like a sticker being pulled up

and i heard the sky yelp another yes for you.
[it applied just enough pressure to realign your vertebrae]
i didn't want to let go.

i said, *what about the x's? what about our no's?*
and you kissed me, said
you can't say no forever.

scattershot

in this town, rough with cow parsnip
around the edges, with actual cows—
stop signs sometimes bleeding some
sky at various points in octagon—
i lived each of my 24 hours up to a point,
lived them one right after the
other, tried to feel each one as a poem,
your stock and blued metal,
an eclogue

with urban sprawl, i tried to write
an elegy. but the grammar rot
the lines breathed hot, hurried, hurt-burned,
hankering, yes, sometimes bored.
i bled sky at various points of my own geometry.

what if the scattershot is the poem,
you the rosewood and blue cornflower?
i still write over so many napkins
doodles of cows
and neo-aristotelian jams and heartbreak
and laughter

but no more attempted elegies.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the following publications where these poems were first published:

Crab Creek Review, “ragamuffin”

Cruel Garters, “paleo, basilica”

Gesture, “to limn as fire does”

Red Paint Hill, “mouse heart”

Tinderbox Poetry Journal, “jew’s harp”

Sundress Publications • Knoxville, TN

Copyright 2018 by Laura Page
ISBN: 978-1-939675-69-9
Published by Sundress Publications
www.sundresspublications.com

Editor: Stacey Balkun
Editorial Assistant: Macy French
Colophon: This book is set in Garamond
Cover Art: “Joan of Arc” by Francois Rude
Cover Design: Mariana Sierra
Book Design: Stacey Balkun