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It's still life

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Thesis

IT’S STILL LIFE

by

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my supportive partner, Michael Vandenburg.
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Exhaustion

In the bathroom parlor
   of my stain-glass
       pseudo-gothic
           revival church
there were two mirrors facing each other.

I would wait until the sermon
to pee. And then I’d stand in the parlor
and enjoy what in child’s time felt like days
and may have been eight minutes
of staring at myself
and my other self
and my other other self
But that kind of thing has messed with my head.
It is one thing to stare into the abyss for a minute or 8
but to stare infinitely into infinity
is just exhausting.

Age has replaced writing
   what I have learned
       with writing about
           whether learning is possible.
One suggestion of solipsism should have been enough.
But people keep telling me
   my brain is in a jar
       keep making me write
           I don’t know anything.
I’d like to know something again
   but the world has fallen away
and all there are are dueling mirrors
gold leaf flaking into frosted flakes
revealing grayblack metal beneath
the ornate    like the column half
greco roman    half iron cross beam
displayed by the college for the arts
signifying something too blunt to be
understood. wasn’t the cross made of wood?

breakfast cereal and a sinful child
a table sculpted in gold relief
not relieving any concerns
of andrew simon or soggy milk
grandma purchased a red twirly dress
to lure her to church in her sunday best
grandpa counting the sequins on her sash

trying to keep track: were there thirty?
she spun too fast for him to tally
was hers the dance of seven veils?
her legs were too thin her feet too curled
did blame rest in his genes or her heart?
the pastor’s water could provide a cure
while leaving his questions without answers

a congregation of healing hands
concealing the child’s unpolished feet
carpenter composed of iron
varnished cross looking down on aging
bodies curving in tan suits and ties
pastor slides his fingers on a gilt page
unknowingly wearing it back to plain

she takes off their hands and their red dress
dancing and limping in stained lightness
_she will suffer in sulfur lakes_
said someone shaking his hat and tie
_she’ll face first and second death_    so she
asked if they were naked in the garden
or if they were born in their sunday best
Mind   Body   Problem

Loathsome limbs on an X-marked ash: 
the nature of a hospital parking lot.

“...inverted champagne bottle calves” 
led to the doctor's purple sharpie

X imparting what skin the scalpel 
would cleave. The nurse could not find 

the veins. Neither could the anesthesiologist. 
The arms were covered in crayola colored 

bandaids before the needle found a place 
between knuckles. I was then wheeled 

away from an embrace to an all-white room 
I’d seen before. The blue men told me 


to stare at the ceiling where someone had hung 
a hotel quality drawing of a Hawaiian beach.

“Count backward from ten” so we can laugh 
when you don’t pass nine, the blue men said.

I did not dream of the palms. I did not 
dream of the tree in the parking lot.

Instead, I watched the operation.
Monster

The invalid is a parasite on society.
At a certain point it is indecent to go on living.
-Friedrich Nietzsche

1.
They call her sirenia
They imagine shipwrecks
She imagines sea shells or long hair
resting strategically over her breasts

2.
abnormal shape
as omen    portent    billboard
blackboard
advertizing awful deeds
monère    be warned    be instructed    be anyone
but not her    not me

I    I    I
I can use it in a sentence.
I am a monster.
I want to suck your social welfare.

I

N

D

E

C

E

N

T

I can use it in a sentence.
I am a monster.
I want to suck your social welfare.

go on gawking
our circus history permits it
from the days of Colloredo
Lazarus affirmed you and Joannes told you nothing
for your money
I can bare myself

Can you tell me just how long you’ll need
to look?
Geriatric Manual

bath tub once
an escape the size of a small swimming hole
with age has become as confined
as the eyes inside her porcelain doll
limbs bend
over themselves
to stuff within
its boundaries
floundering he tries
to keep her purple
fiberglass and polyester concoction
out of water in accordance with doctor's orders

depending on
  how impersonal
  he keeps his kitchen hands
  while they wrap around her thighs
  slather soap into her crevices
depending on
  in which crevices they rest
  from which they move away
  at a healthy pace

does the loofah dance across her body
  like tulle escaping the bride’s gown
  to enjoin itself with the clouds
  of adipose flesh
  pushing out around her belly and chest?
does the loofah lather then rinse
  alternating appropriately
  saving labia for last with a final speedy pass
  followed by a lukewarm pour of water
  as lukewarm as the church in laodicea
  ready to be spit out by her memory
  immediately after she exits the bath
or does the loofah linger
not at all precise
so unlike the medical cabinets
keeping each blanket
the proper temperature
to warm but never burn her

is his the touch of a kindly nurse
rubbing behind an old man’s ear
to increase his oxytocin
glad his member is no longer
so easily provoked
as to show the nurse
what it was in the man
he actually inspired

the girl in the tub is twenty-four
and her lover carries her body out the bathroom door
and onto a bed where it
she climbs on all fours
hanging purple fiberglass and foot
precisely over the edge
so as not to be smushed
as he carefully positions
himself between her legs
like a pointillist
balancing passion and precision
with each thrust
Still Composing Collective Matters

I’m sitting on the subway
reading an article that says people in cities
don’t help each other when it’s noisy.

I can only be aware of so many things.
Are you okay?

I drive down a famous highway
listening to music that rhymes sun
with fun and coast with most.
I drive to the coast with the most
cameos in movies. I stand crushed
by the weight of Tony Stark’s digitally
placed 3D mansion. A man paints flora
while wearing a smock in what I imagine
is Stark’s kitchen. He does not know the flora
he paints is invasive to these chaparral
headlands. I do not know this either.
I do not know the real estate agents
tried to convince people the promontory’s
name was pronounced duMAY. I do not know
that well before that the name was Dumetz
until a couple letters were left off a map.
I know the now name is ominous as I drag
my body down manmade steps. I am grateful
for altered landscapes as I squeeze my hands
into the wire diamonds of the fence and distribute
my weight enough to stop my ankles from bending
beneath me. Nature is farther from bodies like mine.
I stand crushed by the statue of liberty painted on
pictures of this beach and shown in the final scenes
so the audience would know the planet of the apes
was our own. But I do not smell apes or salt
as the ocean gets closer. I smell your mother.
There are maggots in your mother. But the model
does not notice as she poses on the pinnacles.
I do not notice the signs that say getting near you
will result in a 10,000 dollar fine. I do not
know you have the dirtiest mouth of any mammal
and a bite 10 times stronger than a pit bull. You
get up on your flippers and do a dance I have only
seen behind plate glass. The model finally notices
and asks, “Should we carry him back into the water?”
I do not know that you do not have enough body fat
to return to the ocean, but I still say no. I do not know
the unseasonably warm currents have made your food
source scarcer. I do not know you are washing up by
the hundreds. My wobbly legs lead me back up the trail
to the car. I am out of breath as I stumble past the painter.
“Are you ok?” he asks.
She'd Celebrate That

hands extend
lotioned
one on each side

she reaches out
willing her fingers
to possess softness
wishing olive oil sugar scrubs
had buffed their impurities
weeks before the event

heads bow
sugared eyes close
  obscuring their dilation
in a prayer of celebration
of pink and purple foiled
chocolate eggs
hunted
between
dutchman's breeches
  snow drops
  forsythia
  and mud

her skinny legs
  unable to support arms
  and stomach
  often mistaken as its own celebration of life
her skinny legs
had not bent down in dirt
had not bowed to hide
  sweet surprises for the young
to find in remembrance of ishtar or christ

but her head bows now with the rest
in celebration of a vacated sepulcher
in celebration of stone exchanged for flesh
in celebration of blood circulating and fresh

her hands rigid and cold
shake against lotioned palms
she must hold as the prayer
drones on about all that is good
cancer has not returned
rebirth is well-represented in the garden
safe travels brought the table all these hands
clasped together
believing without
wounds to touch

but her hands aching
her fingers needing
to extend
as his body had been
extended by nails
placed to stretch him

her hands rigid waiting
as unforgiving as the wood
on which they laid him
known as the cross
on which they still display him
suffering for them
wood traded in the casts
for silver platinum gold or plastic

her hands posed in prayer on sunday
her hands cold
as the stone on which he was laid
her hands refuse her access
to the morning of the third day
friday’s physicality
thorns on head
nails in hands and feet
lance through side
friday’s physicality
remains her sunday reality
her belief hinges
on sight
on movement
on sound
on pain

blessed are they that do not shake at inopportune times
blessed are they that do not ache loudly
blessed are they that do not bend in improper places
blessed are they that have not seen
and yet have believed on sunday morning

as the prayer ends
she does not utter amen
denying the table’s mouths
unison affirmation
instead she opens and closes her hands
before obscuring them under the table
while the others pick up forks
and stab into ham
unaware of the wounds
they press into flesh
as they stab and chew

the cross hangs above them  vacant
for protestants focus on resurrection
she focuses on hands
trying to control her flesh
long enough to stop shaking
now that would call for celebration
II

Erasure
Dress Normal

The last time I went to the surgeon he wanted my toe.
I said no.
Before that, he asked if he could put me into a cage,
just my leg,
each bar of the cage would be pushed entirely through my calf
so it could
be periodically tightened. He called it a halo
and said don’t
be frightened, we guarantee you’ll be normal looking soon.
New Shoes
after Amy Lowell’s “Red Slippers”

Dad drove the impala nervous to the mall.
Only plastic bags were left to leaf the trees.
Greybrown leftovers of snow coated the lot:
where Burlington sold coats to keep each winter
from the body and cars passed on black rubber
tracks to the ground and J.C. Penny propped red
heels in a window display, taking eyes off
people’s feet. They were dreaming of stalactites
lovers, direction, rockets, and purchased polish.
I was looking down, imagining shoving
my left foot on a silver Brannock, sliding
to find its size—slide—And Dad is mad he says
about how slowly I lace the thick tan shoes.
“Walk heel—toe, not thud—thud.” And I am crying
about how the round brown shoes push on my toes.
And I don’t understand how blunt the shoes are,
even as metaphors. And I don’t fit in my father’s.
Down home decisions

carers discussing when to put down vegetables
were divided equally on acceptable practice.
what might be called compassionate ground?
places for cabbage raised without continual strain
on it or the one providing services
country grounds and no Extreme 4.
What is natural and when to intervene?
they were not always clear what they meant by severe
a wide range of thought about mercy
Clearly whose well being should be fostered?
seeking normal treatment of offspring in a very large grey area.
such decisions in this borderline were essentially subjective
first. They wanted to know the degree the measure the severity
whether the child was sufficiently handicapped to be allowed to die
New Parents

the sacred duty of parenthood
is to maximize the child’s potential
have they violated it?

Sharon and Candy
want to be better parents
so they say
they want children like themselves
babies by choice
their decision is roundly condemned

they say
they are choosing a friend
with five generations of deafness
so they can offer better guidance

but deafness prevents children
from getting to the sky

why would anybody
want to bring a disabled
child into the world

daughter Jehanne
does not want to wear a hearing aid
she wants speech therapy
she lives
Harilyn Rousso

legend of my birth
  baby in a hurry
  mother biting and scratching
  as nurses shut mother’s legs
  *Wait for the doctor ‘en route’* nurses said
  finally a sturdy baby emerged

exclusion
  first
date kiss sex
  at a later date
  than non- different peers
  not by choice

myth
  differently shaped bodies as
  childlike helpless incompetent asexual
  unable to perform adult

these girls
  pay the price
  $8,075 annual income (1987)

myth
  women with less visible impairments as
  bearing defective children
  unable to control their sex
  inadequate mothers

diagnosis
  *She should be immediately institutionalized* insisted a “pediatric expert”
  *Mild cerebral palsy. Raise her normal* said another
  no one in my family had ever been accused of normal
  I was not going to be the first
Horror movie monsters are born of mistaken doctors.
The antichrist often belongs to a blonde. I hide my claw
toes in the coiled strands of myself I have to pass on.
What about monsters who have children in the movies?
I can only think of spiders and their hordes of hideous progeny.
Que Sera Sera someone says until it’s time to see the genetic counselor.

Yahoo Answers has a lot to say about *the ancestral fear of every mother for her child*. The mother of the groom has a lot to say about Wikipedia's
pictures of my feet or at least pictures of feet that look enough like mine
she knows what I’ve been disguising behind dollar store tights.

Even Erik of the Opera can have his mask removed with a google image search.
Though his differences lessen with each incarnation, I have a 50 percent chance
of having a child who feels the need to hide part of themself.
I have a 50 percent chance of having a child whose gait
relies on unique muscles, who creates a dance from the act of walking.
The counselor thinks I shouldn’t gamble.
Dance of the Seven Hospital Gowns

Cast of Characters

DOCTOR: A man wearing a white coat.

CAMERAMAN: A person with an old box camera and handheld flash. Face completely obscured by black sheet.

ATTENDANT: A man wearing scrubs.

PATIENT: A woman with a disability wearing a hospital gown, plain stockings, and institutional underwear.

AUDIENCE: Three bystanders holding smart phones.

OFFSTAGE: A commanding voice.

MAN: A confused man.

Setting: A theater. A single hospital bed sits center stage. A closed curtain is hung down center.

Enter CAMERAMAN. CAMERAMAN establishes location up right and does not move for the rest of the production.

Enter DOCTOR. DOCTOR opens curtain.

Enter AUDIENCE from house through curtain.

DOCTOR: (TO OFFSTAGE) Line?

OFFSTAGE: Tonight, fine citizens...

DOCTOR: No one would say that.
OFFSTAGE: According to the dramaturge it's accurate to the time period.

DOCTOR: What time period exactly? All we have is a curtain, a hospital bed, and an elderly camera.

OFFSTAGE: Get back on script.

Doctor: Tonight, fine citizens, you will see contorted bodies and the minds that match them. You will learn to identify dull-normals from their specific bodily signs. You will meet a patient afflicted with madness as well as a few feeble-minded females. To our best estimates, the feeble-minded make up 2.5 percent of the...

Enter ATTENDANT, carrying PATIENT, interrupting...

ATTENDANT: Make way! Stand back! Keep your voices quiet! I’ve brought the first patient.

PATIENT: Oh, you must be exhausted from carrying me, Jon. I’m well over the threshold now. Why don’t you just lay me on the bed?

DOCTOR: Attendant, put the patient on the bed. (To AUDIENCE) I will now field any questions you may have about this patient’s derangement.

DOCTOR crosses to AUDIENCE and they converse in dull tones.

PATIENT: I’m out of jokes. I’m cold. Do I have to do this in front of them? (Gestures to AUDIENCE) And that? (Gestures to CAMERAMAN)

ATTENDANT: Medicine needs you and...I don’t want to say this next part, but I can picture it there on the page...Medicine needs you and your funny little body. That (gestures to CAMERAMAN) is how he will teach people to
recognize what’s wrong with others experiencing your same symptoms. He needs the publicity and you need his help.

PATIENT: But I….

DOCTOR finishes his conversation with AUDIENCE and returns to ATTENDANT.

DOCTOR: Attendant, I believe I told you to place the patient on the bed. We need the rest of the supplies for the demonstration, and you have other patients to prepare.

ATTENDANT: (placing PATIENT on bed) Can I get you some water?

PATIENT: Surely there are more interesting things you can get me.

ATTENDANT: (exiting the stage) Water and heated blankets it is.

DOCTOR: The patient will now remove the gown and stockings.

PATIENT sexually rolls down stockings and removes gown revealing institutional undergarments.

(TO OFFSTAGE) Do I really have to be so clinical?

OFFSTAGE: I don’t see anyone else in a clinician’s jacket.

DOCTOR removes the white coat.

FORMER DOCTOR walks offstage.

MAN walks on stage looking confused.

MAN puts on white coat.
MAN is now DOCTOR.

DOCTOR:  

(While rolling pointer down PATIENT’s back) 
Notice the arch of the back is like that of an elderly person suffering from dementia.

Camera flashes.

(While gesturing with pointer toward PATIENT’s eyes, one at a time) 
See the uneven eyes. Physiognomy is just beginning to show us the link between derangement of the mind and misalignment of the face.

PATIENT winks.

Camera flashes.

(While pointing at PATIENT’s hands and feet) 
Note the lack of control of the limbs. This shaking demonstrates the patient lacks the psychic capacity to restrain the physical form.

Camera flashes.

PATIENT stands and removes undergarments, smiling at AUDIENCE.

(DOCTOR clears throat and points to breasts and genitals.) 
Note... the breasts and vulva of the patient, demonstrating she is female.

Camera flashes.

(To Offstage) Attendant! 
(To AUDIENCE) As you can see from these obvious physical features, the patient is a...yes...well...the fact of this will be ever clearer in the following demonstration.

ATTENDANT enters with blanket, water, and a large syringe.
DOCTOR nods toward PATIENT.

ATTENDANT on seeing PATIENT drops water.

ATTENDANT: Oh dear, you must be cold. (To AUDIENCE) Look away! Look away! It will just be a second while I cover the patient.

Camera flashes.

ATTENDANT, with head turned away but periodically peeking, wraps PATIENT in blanket.

PATIENT: Why the syringe, Jon?

DOCTOR: Now the attendant will inject a calming fluid in the patient so that we can more freely observe the movements of the irregular body.

PATIENT: (Shrugging off blanket) You don’t need to do that to freely observe my body. (Begins dancing around ATTENDANT. ATTENDANT openly gazes.)

DOCTOR: (To ATTENDANT) Please restrain the patient. (To Audience) As you can see, the patient’s lack of psychic ability prevents the fluidity of motion a high-functioning moron or a common person possesses.

PATIENT runs hand down ATTENDANT’S arm to take syringe during dance.

PATIENT dances behind attendant, lifts his coat and injects him with the syringe.

ATTENDANT falls to the floor between PATIENT’s legs.

PATIENT continues dancing.

DOCTOR: The derangement of the patient can be seen by the movement of the eyes, as previously stated, and
the madness which afflicts her body can be seen in her present actions. Unfortunately, we will not be seeing any other patients tonight. This concludes the demonstration of feeblemindedness. Please exit the theater.

DOCTOR closes curtain and wheels it around, keeping it between AUDIENCE and PATIENT as AUDIENCE returns to the house.

ATTENDANT remains unmoving on the floor.

Doctor: Again, this concludes the presentation.

Camera flashes.

Spot from behind on PATIENT to project shadow dance. DOCTOR keeps moving curtain to obscure PATIENT.

PATIENT dances.

PATIENT continues dancing.

PATIENT is still dancing as main curtain closes.

FIN
III

Pictures of Stars
on a Glowing Screen
Elleh Toledot

apple’s first logo features newton sitting beneath a tree
as in his mythology an apple waits over him
an apple to conk the man with understanding
like the second blow to a sitcom character’s head

at an apple computer, a decade ago, sat a middleschooler
searching for understanding of her body
understanding she could gain without head injury
she searched by typing to strangers
strangers who asked her to articulate
what the body wore
what the body looked like
what the body wanted

apple’s later logo cuts the extraneous
leaving only the fruit
trading the origin of human’s understanding of gravity
for an even older story
serpents and power cords are almost indistinguishable
when the lights are off

his face glowing by the light of his screen
her face featured on the screen that lights his
how much more of herself would she put in the frame?

apples and tomatoes are challenging to distinguish
no matter the position of the lights
this is the official, although possibly-disingenuous reason
the company claims to have bitten the fruit

in this story of beginnings
any fruit will do
the original didn’t specify which kind
only that a bite need be taken

presently
she reenacts conversations she’s been having
with glowing faces and text boxes for a decade
the voice that moans to her picked its tone
after hearing something similar issue from computer speakers

she bites the woman’s thigh
with a gentleness
almost indistinguishable
from the manner
a woman once promised
she’d be bitten
a manner
first conveyed to her in text
on a glowing screen
there is a mason jar
not fruit not bowls not flowers not wine
filled with what looks like orange juice
sitting on a booklined desk as the sun shines
down in the small space between the neighboring
apartment building and the end of the window’s viewfinder
I call it sun but it’s the greywhite light of winter
the sun is somewhere
pinned into the firmament
behind it
they tell us
we must trust

the secret to the orange juice is the vodka
or the girl who put the vodka in the orange juice
now just still enough
as she wrestles with her comforter
to count as part of the picture I’m allowed to describe
there is no clock in the room or I could tell you the time
but time is told by opening computers or holding buttons
down long enough to wake up phones
she doesn’t wish to know time anyway as the liquid
she drank keeps her stomach company for awhile
she doesn’t wish to wake
up phones or self
even if the dreams go bad
they are some kind of escape
as long as the dreams are distinguishable from this
as long as the dreams kindly remind her of their relationship
yet inherent distance from everything
she can separate them off
pretend to suspend
disbelief
to comfort them in return for highlighting
their space through paled comparison

she grabbed the orange juice and the vodka at the party
to make it look like she was there to drink with everyone
she isn’t a sad drunk instead
drinking like she dreams
to see it from another perspective
to leave it and come back
   traveling without tangible distance
   without maps or at least google directions
   to articulate actual space
   no mileage number to cling to
   or mile markers to count
   but still further away

you have to be careful about things like liking to drink by yourself
   if only for the viewer’s sake
because they might try to stop you
   if you differ too much from the picture of regular
   they’ve been collaging in their mind
she’s fine around friends whose parents
tipped back many too many bottles
or who saw as much violence as she
somewhere other than a screen
they can differentiate the softness of her stomach
from the harshness of their lives

I’ve forgotten about the picture
I’m not very good at keeping life still
It’s probably because of how close I am to the girl
   asleep on the bed with her fluffy red curls
   shaping into spikes with the help of a pillow
I have the almost same now spikey puffy head
two hours later       about 45 degrees different     no more
I lean a little
sitting clicking on the bed
with the computer screen
open to reveal time

she couldn’t sleep forever
making this whole thing difficult to write
like drawing someone
who flails too much when they talk
or drawing yourself in a mirror and
trying not to draw yourself drawing
but rather doing something better and
she and I and we probably shouldn’t have told you about all this
   if we really want distance
she can’t be me
writing can’t be truth
and if it is
it needs to be someone else’s truth
which is good to know but not particularly relevant

when they take a Steven King novel and eliminate
the supernatural for the screen
as if it needs to be more real
than it already was
they’ve forgotten we all need to travel
they’ve forgotten they are we or
maybe they don’t watch what they make

I’m looking out the space
between the building and the molding of the window
where the lit grey sky is light enough to write by
hoping one time when the firmament spins the sun away
and the other side of the window is dark enough
to leave her reflected face for me
I won’t feel compelled to write
to further her
away from me
NightLife

once I stayed up all night asking questions
well actually I’ve been doing that every night
since I saw Doc nearly fall from the clock
since I realized movies time-travel life
are about death
every star in the sky is on its way to one
some are already gone but I don’t know it yet

this time though I wasn't seven
wasn’t alone in bed
watching soon-to-be dead
sky from window
I was twenty-two
and up asking you
you with a voice
across your card table
questions I’d compiled since Doc’s near death
questions you mostly responded to with questions
then in the midst of
whys and wheres and hows
we asked what in that moment
we were hoping for
we argued semantics for awhile
trying not to leave the ease of asking questions
for fumbling answers

you were going to make enough money
to raise kids comfortably enough
that they could go where you had gone
or somewhere else entirely
you would save questions for a few late nights
trust answers enough to function again
ignore ends
all for them as much as possible

*

once I asked a group of people to write
four hopes four fears
down on paper without names
I began sticking them to my body thinking
I would symbolically carry all their burdens for them
connecting me to empathy enough that I could touch
I didn’t see anything on the papers that hadn’t been mine
in idea before I began sticking them to myself in failed hope
symbolism could be held

I reach across the table that had been a place for questions
make you pull each empty paper from my body
I left them on after the experiment
hoping meaning is directly proportionate to time elapsed
you put each some where
I won’t have to think about
we press in
collapsing the folding legs
of a table we built Babel on
before God can get around to it
we don’t remember
ever projecting
purpose on the table
as our mouths opened wide
to touch flesh instead of make words
with all your talk of children
you grab a durex from your pocket pretty fast

when you’re done
you will forget to pull out
we will forget we can put the table back up between us
that its legs are meant to exist or not exist when we please
we will want to believe ends are more than symbols
so we will just stay there on the floor
we will have become one
like the preacher told us we would
we will die there
maybe they’ll bury us together
certainly they’ll write an article about our decaying form
we will get a little death notice in the paper
maybe someone will even take a picture
in our end we will become someone else’s idea
Preservation and Progress

I sent a picture of my legs to New York
He needed to see me so things don’t /get stagnant/
I know it’s no longer just a picture
of my legs
I took one night
those legs are me

He hears me mention that I’m changing into my pajamas
so sees my hand running down those legs
the ones covered in brown tights in the picture in forever

I change into pajamas but am still
   wearing brown tights with tennis shoes
I tell him I’m naked and am still
   wearing brown tights with tennis shoes
on the pink sheets that won’t need to be changed ever

or maybe he imagines that
   like doug funny
I have a dresser
full of identical brown tights
a closet
full of tennis shoes each with the same saturation in any light
   but that doesn’t solve the problem of the bed
   I never get off in his mind
how does this get him off?

two legs brown tights a mildly suggestive hand
he knows what my face looks like
from other pictures he has had longer and the video chat
that I laugh but won’t strip on

goofy faces and smiles aren’t how he wants to take me
so I send him legs and crop out goofy face
that doesn’t understand how
to contrive sexy

I read cosmo all day hoping
I’d see it on their faces
they taught me how to be blank
so he can fill in a new experience
each time he imagines with the picture
the face
    is a new face
    whatever face
    he wants
he wants a manikin that
most fashions will fit on
whose body won’t go out
of fashion until the next flop
between curves and ribs
hits a generation far from now
    a generation that will never hit him

cosmo taught me just fine
    this isn’t to insult the reading material
but no matter how well I know something
that well doesn’t translate into doing it

18 pictures later
I had communicated
what it was like to try to look
    not goofy
but rather sexy
all the while knowing
I really need to not look goofy
    but rather
    sexy

so things won’t /get stagnant/
while taking pictures with the intent of making
space he can progress in

still
I gave him
    a pair of browntight legs
    a suggestive hand
    a pink-sheeted bed
and he texted back

/I love you/
Notes

**Mon•ster** opens with a quote from Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Twilight of the Idols*.

**Dress Normal**’s title is the text of a GAP advertisement that was displayed by the Boston University East T-stop in the fall of 2014.

The source text of **Down Home** is “Abortion and Euthanasia of Down’s Syndrome Children— The Parent’s View” published in *The Journal of Medical Ethics* 1983 by Billie Shepperdson.

The source text of **New Parents** is David Teather’s article “Lesbian Couple Have Deaf Baby by Choice” published in *The Guardian*.

The source texts of **Harilyn Rousso** are her article “Disability” in *The Reader’s Companion to U.S. Women’s History* and “Birth, Mine” published on ducts.org