

# In Life There Are Many Things

*P o e m s*

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“its not even time until it was”

—William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*



# CONTENTS

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Ending. . . . .                             | 1  |
| Neighborhood. . . . .                       | 3  |
| The Others. . . . .                         | 5  |
| Girl Before a Mirror. . . . .               | 7  |
| Narcissus. . . . .                          | 8  |
| Freeze Frame. . . . .                       | 10 |
| Monologue from the Wings. . . . .           | 12 |
| Murder Scene Diptych. . . . .               | 13 |
| Teen Wolf. . . . .                          | 15 |
| Notes for <i>Oedipus Rex</i> Essay. . . . . | 17 |
| Afterword to the Fall. . . . .              | 20 |
| In this poem, a goat's head. . . . .        | 21 |
| The Road to Rome. . . . .                   | 22 |
| L'Hôpital's Rule. . . . .                   | 23 |
| A View from the Bridge. . . . .             | 25 |
| Physical Education. . . . .                 | 27 |
| Notes for <i>Endgame</i> Essay. . . . .     | 28 |
| Wanting to Live. . . . .                    | 29 |
| Scheherazade. . . . .                       | 30 |
| Notes. . . . .                              | 32 |
| Acknowledgements. . . . .                   | 33 |



## ENDLING

Dark is a bathroom  
I go home to.  
I spend lots of time  
in bathrooms—

chasing thoughts with  
my tongue: it bends,  
makes a ring. In life,  
there are many things.

When I eat birds  
I spit them out; bees,  
I swallow. These are the rules.  
The sun is zero,

the moon a smaller  
zero—facts I memorize  
the sound of, like a song  
with no words. During recess,

I hum. I sit  
on the bench—I don't know  
how to play—  
I sit on one end and then

I slide to the other.  
In the cafeteria, I eat

oranges and their juice spurts  
like boys. That is what hands

are for: wiping mouths.  
I want to sing. I want to break  
something but I think  
that is a wrong thing to want.

These are the rules.  
They look funny  
from behind. I am terrible  
at staying where I am put.

In class, we learn about zero  
and the ocean  
and gravity, the string  
that ties them together—

a long string the air moves, like my hair  
when I play. I wish I had  
the biggest pair of scissors  
in the world. I have

so many questions, but  
I don't know  
how to catch them. I have  
this body—

residue—and I don't know what  
left it.



## THE OTHERS

1.

The pool drinks them  
and I am unswerving,  
I keep to tile edges.  
I've been

hateful lately.  
They are chlorinated.  
They are a party  
with pale legs  
I want to tear open.

2.

I keep to the edges of things.  
I think I am something  
primordial; I ooze.  
My bathing suit

bunches and stinks, the campus  
grows thick with goose shit.  
They are one big block  
of stinking yellow money.  
I am a block, a block.

3.

The pool drinks them  
with its greedy tile mouth.  
Beauty is a story  
for little kids

and I am big.  
No one should have to  
be born. The hallway tightens  
around them, either I can look  
or look away.

4.

We change out of bathing suits.  
I watch their pale legs and fingernails.  
They are sheets of blank paper  
I want to soak with ink.

I towel my hair, my clattering  
limbs, the evil places  
where my body folds. I watch  
the windows shudder and warp  
and the hallway tighten, tighten

## GIRL BEFORE A MIRROR

A sphinx is a woman made

of parts that are not woman:

lionheart, wings for skin,  
scales falling from the spine and city ruins.

Bomb-leveled.

Maybe that's the crossroads' riddle—  
how to shake your head and smile when you're standing  
in a crater,  
towers quivering, then

collapsing, pipes gurgling at your feet,  
bleeding out

your reflection. These things do have a way  
of getting under the skin. Making the blood whirl.

As if somewhere inside your body

you forgot to turn off the stove.

Your heartbeat: *And yet. And yet.*

Thick ridges

of scar tissue catching and releasing the light  
like glowing fish—in an abstract sense, you know

this is called a wrist,

mottled spider: a hand. Broad planes of flesh

retreating into a thicket of hair. Somewhere

your name.

## NARCISSUS

I perch upon the roof and send  
paper planes to the roof across  
the street—scrape the sky  
like a knee, streak of dried blood  
so close I want to lick it  
and swallow. I was born  
in this city, which means  
I do not know how to live  
in this city, this island  
of mirrors and windows  
mimicking mirrors, sending  
my own face back to me  
when I walk past. I was born here:  
I know what to do when the building  
burns, begins to choke  
with smoke, but I can't be sure  
my body knows how to jump.  
From my perch, it is easy to believe  
the city spread before me  
is no more than what a subway map  
makes easily navigable. I know  
where I am going and I know  
how I will get there, my hands  
buried in jacket pockets.  
Surround me with water  
I can't drink and other islands  
I can't touch—bridges stitching

a wet wound. At the river, I lean  
as far over the railing as my body will go  
to see my own face in green water.  
I want to shatter it and surface.

## AFTERWORD TO THE FALL

That round red sound drops ripe from your mouth,  
rouses the memory: a frantic gesture toward  
the thing on the table between us—how your laugh burst  
and scattered like shards of a teacup. *What else  
do you remember?* A sense of loss, maybe.  
Blooms bleeding out, layers of bright paint  
muddying, never dry. Someone was already repeating it—  
that sound. *And the thing on the table?*  
I want to look at the world without needing to take  
a bite from it, this wildness my mouth makes,  
chewing and chewing. I don't know  
what time it is. I don't remember what I saw,  
only what it came to mean. *Incessant grass.  
The smell of mud and rain.* You told me  
we are a story—one on the run from its author.  
*Tell it to me, then. Tell me again.*

## SCHEHERAZADE.

comes wave after wave after wave the derivative and harvest, the myrtle tops of sandstorms and milk glasses, apple, horse and song, list, listen, light leaks from the spaces between the bubbles—call it foam—tender pocket of *yes yes yes* call it flesh—eat tonight and you'll still have to eat tomorrow, eat tonight and it still won't be over—eat tonight: peaches bloom even in the dark, as wet as a girl—hands and feet, horse and song, the same hole bandaged over and over, not a wound but its absence—a sum of histories—the nights colliding like marbles, and if there is an end then it's too dark to see, if there is an end it's too bright to see, hands folding, unfolding, and you, Scheherazade!, milky goddess of recursion, best DJ in the city, you spin records, spin heads, cross legs and cross deserts, and always pause just moments before he



IAN JACOBS

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