

# Thornwork

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Black  
Lawrence  
Press

*for Julia & Teddy,  
queens of ferocity, loyalty, & love*

*thank you for showing me  
new parts of my heart*

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I.

Falls, Winters

## Volta

Lightning like a fist to the face. Is this the morning of the imagination?

I dress in the dark & live in the dark. I employ a narrative

of fog & no absolution. Weather, like feelings, is scenery. Then the slow

climb. The shock wave of a pause. Everything on broken glass

is my heaven, until the weird day when I recognize

I might hold a candle for my species. *Language may not matter to you*

*if you've always been able to use it*, I think. In my head, my thoughts

take on affectations, this one a mixture of venom & a sweet

southern drawl. Like *bless your heart*. That's what I mean, but

a little less. The broken glass will be there. This chance at softness will not.

Pardon my need, pardon its need for a choir, a church, a can of gasoline.

## To Return to One Start

There were several spaces to lie down, but I chose, as always, a floor.  
Sandwiched my body between one cold & another.

The first man I thought I loved had eyes like the sky popping out of its  
frame.

Too bad his veins were the same.

Later he found me but it wasn't important, then, except to disrupt  
another man I was pretending with, a snail-ride to hell.

I can't tell you what's at stake until you listen.

When J turned his slow laugh towards me, I thought,  
*oh*. & for a long time, *oh* was good enough,

a little heavy & a little hungry on the tongue all at once.  
& for a long time, *oh* was good enough,

a little heavy & a little hungry on the tongue all at once.  
J understood my need for a really moveable sleep.

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J tattooed his own hands in middle school, disappeared for months,  
said *sorry, I was getting over meth, can we date again?*

I clocked his long fingernail. I nodded anyway.  
What's a loss besides an opportunity for repetition?

I can't tell you what's at stake until you know there's other.  
Later his pupils little birds so far gone the wings didn't even show.  
Later no wings, no wings. *Oh*.

---

& for a long time, *oh* was good enough,  
a little heavy & a little hungry on the tongue all at once.

I failed so many languages.  
J! What ideas, what flicker of body heat against mine in a park.

We were young & god, we weren't right.  
But how else could we be? Do tornadoes raise clear skies?

Do tornadoes raise up more than they destroy?

*This is the easier, softer way*, I was told,  
upon the entrance to an exit years later.  
J's ghost like sandpaper like fleas like sandpaper fleas on my tongue.  
No, he's still alive. Somewhere

I'm letting every J touch me, again, their barely lit bodies  
pressing hands all over. Somewhere I always will be,

even post-, even with a stake in survival.

This is how the world works:  
in every way it ever has, still.

*Oh*. Those rabbit pulses, those slow-murk pulses. *Oh*.

*Oh*. More.

## Small Failures

Once when  
I was seventeen  
&  
had the shakes,  
I  
looked up at  
the sun.

I didn't make  
that  
mistake again  
for years.

Sometimes I've used  
the  
first currency.

I've imagined time  
can pass.

I've made  
men real  
by touching  
them  
& briefly thought  
it would  
not  
kill us all.

## Eight Months Without

The sun on acid  
a day so hot it buries its young  
before they blink &  
me over here forgetting.

Forgetting so I can remember  
& keep forgetting.

The first man that laid hands  
on me was a perfect shadow. &  
the second & seventh & the tenth. What  
if I've had my fill? Is there  
such a thing? The sun still  
full of itself burnt so bright  
I turn cold—I am not  
asking for much, just to never  
live like I was. When I close

my eyes I feel like a scraped knee,  
broken skin forever at the moment  
it collides with dirt, awestruck  
& fresh.

## Saint Loss

Fall walks in on broken legs.  
Fall walks in on hunger. Leaves red  
as the throat of the girl who knows  
how to beg.

Says, *have you proved your worth today?*  
Says, *do you remember last year,*  
*the lace crossed tights, cold blue, the desperate men*  
*unrolling like a long storied tongue?* I—

I swaddle hell like a baby. Is there  
any other way? I hold it close, we coo—

## Wound Song

*You've got childbearing hips*, my rapist said.

Are we back to this? Am I still remembering?

The body a vessel for exchange as well as crime.

The body a vessel for the past as well as crime.

When I open my eyes to a new man, I have no idea how to judge.

Still keys between my fingers, the bleached moon a memory.

Hey. Can you hear me? *You've got childbearing hips*, my rapist said.

It's the last thing I remember after saying *No*.

## girl, as it had to be then

all of my dice scattered rolled lonely / once  
you pushed up against me in a motel shower,  
storm clouds unraveling into storm,  
my despair a last supper I kept attending against  
all odds / & if I'd known what to invoke,  
I might've / & if I'd known which plate to clean,  
I might've / later you & me both on a sort of  
cosmic inventory, it was how I'd always done it, but  
imagine how it feels to count / the years demanded  
a ceasefire but I kept hissing *wind wind wind*

## The Anatomy, Ripened

Each night a swallow of a previous

I have lain in the cardinal red

My hands pressure points—they remember  
their failures

The doorknobs they failed to reach  
The men they failed to push  
The flesh they failed to tear away (their  
own)

I never meant to be the bird opened  
Its feathers in every local mouth

*Shut the door* he said

Then he said then  
he said—they lined up  
like greedy marionettes  
All of us on this stage

Morning is such a questionable state  
For some of us it never comes

## Life Cycle of an Ideology

The girl, lying, light pricking her eyes like pine needles.

Scene one: Creating empathy. Scene one: Creating victimhood.

No. A falsity. A rock in the throat.

The girl, older, still singing the same song.

Is it rewarding? Is god in a language?

No. A falsity. A rock in the throat.

## broken bones

set blue set red set into twilight—I travel alone

I've asked to not travel but that doesn't work; I've asked to hang  
a wreath at a door, any  
door, but the wood collapses & the flowers trail into dust—

if you are listening, thing they call god,

if you are speechless, busy rubbing the earth soft-hearted  
& missing, & missing  
so many spots,

know my many questions for what they are.

## Seven Months Without

I meant to look for a solid patch, I meant

to inhabit moments without seeking a promise

they'll pass. But the holograms were getting

hungry, the ones I always fit into, & who

was I to judge? Elsewhere, I picked up

& left. I could almost hear my old self breathing,

smell her warm & spoiled path.

## Twenty-Eight

Throwing rocks at the stars saying *self don't be lonely*.

All the small things weighed easily as rain.

Half-committed to this moment & my values.

Half-aligned with the landscape's stark.

*Honey, step in, the water's fresh*, is a way to feel.

Someone suggested walking towards revealing

rather than persuasion. Somewhere, amidst all

the other words & the other minds, I am here,

tepid & shifting, but here.