



# RIB-SPREADER

## H.S.F.B.

LOVE POEMS FOR THE MORBID,  
THE NARCISSISTIC, AND THE  
STRANGE

## 1. Riverbride

Suitors, they call from miles around  
to mouth at the salt-sea's daughter.  
And like chaff from wheat the skin sloughs off  
and floats like angels, pale in river water.

The sunfish lave the weary eyes,  
beneath the bleary slaughter; they are hungry.  
Hungering for that violent thing  
to dash these silent waters.

And crayfish creep beyond the tongue  
to gnaw at her insides, what she couldn't hide  
from the creeping things that rule the reeds  
in the dark and murky water.

And while the coywolf will watch jealously  
and pace the shoreline, and pant and keen,  
lurking and landlocked, lascivious  
a still and starving stalker—

Tender willow will kiss her softened bones.  
Kiss her hard and pin her there,  
her pelvis white and her ribs exposed,  
down in the bloody water.

They'll never let their girlchild go  
but they weren't the ones who caught her.

And not a sound she made, and for miles around  
not a soul alive to hear her.

Forever young, forever still,  
and no one dare go near her.  
For the earth it loves her body so,  
and the rock doves they so fear her.

But in the dark I've seen her rising,  
and the sighing loon her psalm.  
Seen muddy water crawl the curves of her  
and slick the ivy's open palm.

## 2. Baby Shower Flowers

Beauty thrums a steady beat  
like the sap-swell coursing in the limbs  
of a manchineel tree. And its canting  
is an ancient chant  
like *no, no, no* and *yes, yes, yes*  
or the hiss of the panther's back brushing  
up against the tall grass.  
Beauty lives in the piece of meat  
stuck in crooked smiles filled with crooked teeth.  
Beauty lives in the breath between  
*I want—*  
*Yes, oh God, I want—*  
*I want, I want—*  
To live.

### 3. June, 2017

It was so hot;  
sweltering June, beloved June.  
That savage fever.

It was sweltering, and the old sweat,  
and the new sweat, sticking.  
Three bodies face down on the uncovered mattress.

Three bodies.  
I hate to share my bed.

I can see the gnats in the window,  
the horseflies suckling,  
sticking close to my ankles.  
Stale in my day clothes,  
stuck in my breathing,  
I sleep, and forget the bright-and-vicious day.

I sleep,  
and shudder sigh no more,  
my face pressed to the breast of smothering June.

My first and only love.

#### 4. Polaris' Third Dispatch

Hunger I for simple hunger;  
To beg as a man, to simper on bent knee.  
Throat blistered, like a working man in summer,  
and fingers burnt in tress of fire, coiled deep.

Starving children run, sick-hearted, from the harvest games.  
But the sickly child in me, tongue to sweet, must sing.  
Sing, through queasy clench upon this wracked frame,  
Sing, to fill a homely, hollow thing.

For a foreign creature has caught me in its wind—  
inflamed the cancer in my body, lonesome long—  
and fastened there a binding tie, an illness twined.  
Taken my hitching gasp for a dumbstruck wedding song.

Now my driveling maw aches to spite me.  
To spite the crucible in me, where all things die.  
But lo the angel flickers, feeble, smoulders,  
pinned like a butterfly.

## 5. An Oral History of an Anxiety Attack

I've decided I have to stop calling Diana.  
It wasn't always such a love-lorn,  
long distance thing.  
There were times when I couldn't drown out,  
for my life,  
the siren's song she'd sing.  
Nor the thirst she thrust inside of me,  
pulverizing infant lungs.  
Pulling me, breathless, to an austere cheek  
to whisper, *child, run*.

I swear it: soon, I'll stop calling Diana.  
Next week I go back to therapy.  
And I'm not scared of heights  
and I'm not scared of dogs  
and I'm over her entropy.  
But by night I meander to the moonstruck lane,  
to the hole in the woods,  
to the shallow creek.  
My pillow transforms to the saintess's lap  
and her tears my faucet leak.

I squish the sand between my toes  
and admire the virgin's bower.  
Shivered within her sacred spring, I weep.  
I weep for hours.  
And wear deep holes into my carpet,  
ranting and raving,  
on the line with Diana.

## 6. Crying At The Banks of the Tigris

I am doing what I can,  
just as much as I am able,  
but I am the son of the earth and the soil,  
the fetor and the clay.

Her ruin sticks in me like coffee grounds  
in a red ceramic swirl.

Weighs down my fist and hugs the stone,  
all her heavy-metal boneseekers.

*I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry baby.*

My baby's breath, my anima.

Whispering into the side of your face,  
tongue pressed to my impression there.

God lives in me, flushed red with rage,  
welling up with prophesy.

Would that the sweetness in your frame,  
your gorgeous, fragile body,  
burn a hole through this ciborium.

Redeem my bio-poison.

Now I'm running with your life.

Running wet into the eddies of the rock below.

Running far, far, far away,  
and farther from our father.

## 7. First Infatuation In The Clade Sauropsida

The doctor has told me not to worry, not to gnaw  
on my knuckles for fear for something so small.  
Just a headrush of vasopressin, nothing more.  
His opinion, and I disbelieve.

Because little, squirming things are made for eating raw,  
and their teeth tinker-toys to hang up on my wall.  
And I've never once, ever felt this way before  
for something that I couldn't cleave.

Still affliction, "affection", ensnares my claw.  
Paralyzed, bile rising with the stench of cortisol.  
But I pray it will wither away with misty morn,  
and set my starvation free.

## 8. Withered Foundation

There is love long tied to the cornerstone  
where bows of iris stretch from yellow grin.  
These are our bones, our crawlspace keepers,  
who wail and seethe to stretch our tender skin.

They say, *How much longer?*  
*Must my cheeks burn with smiling?*  
*Pulling pain from her is like pulling blood from a stone.*  
*And how much longer must I lie weak as a child beside her?*  
*Burden me no longer, mine*  
*from these ancient cobbles a home.*



## 9. Polaris' First Dispatch

All family is is time.  
Time enough to watch the ghostlight drain.  
And I am old, I've had enough of time  
to watch my family wax and wax and wane.

For once my brothers, all, were dancing,  
and from sweetling dawn we seraphecan came.  
Back in the days when laughter ruptured deepness,  
before the cooling of the macrophage.

But all family is, is time.  
In growth and play, we burn the elements.  
Hungry, jealous time, in kith,  
unraveled these, my vestments.

And there I came to know that death of light:  
Where goes the rapture follows emptiness.  
And though I persist an ancient rage,  
time has made aged my precious merriment.

So, in the sucking blackness,  
what greater yen but the marriage of our minds?  
Made an eater, my brothers are gone from me.  
So I have had enough of time.

## 10. Pragmatophobia

Buckshot sweetness, every touch.  
Where three fingers meet a forearm, calls the sting  
of a thousand teeny-tiny deaths.  
Little holes and spider bites.  
A brown recluse crawled out my mouth  
and I named him after you.

(Cruelty,  
its patter and hiss, its silk gyves.  
In the perfect world, I rot and you rot with me.  
Babies ungrown.  
A love, unrealized.  
Every night I'd kiss your eyes,  
care-and-color-shot)

(In the good world, I bite down and swallow.  
In the good world, I give up on this hollow.  
We'll bump shoulders up-and-down Fairview Street  
so long and hard as you'll let me follow.)

(And we'll pretend I never, ever dreamed  
of distending your bones for their marrow.  
Like a cowbird in love with his sister-shrike,  
or a sow salivating for her farrow.)

La douleur exquisite.  
Your name is the only patch  
on a skinned up, chewed up body  
still tender and clean.

## 11. Touch

I envy every animal grace.  
Mindless bite and mindless breath.  
And every time I watch the wolves and tigers in their cages  
I breathe deep the scent of rotting wood,  
honey sweet the aging flesh,  
and I ache  
to press my face up against the glass.  
To slip a hand through a hole in the chain-link fence  
and touch.

One time a dog threw up on me because I pet him too much.

## 12. May 12th

I call this feeling:  
all of my organs pull apart from themselves at once.  
And also:  
rattle of the earth beckons the tooth-tear-forth mountains born.  
And also:  
from my body emerges another, and it is like a wolf and a chain.

I must remember how the heart is a muscle.  
Something has gotten in through the capillaries  
and I feel its fingers in my veins.  
It shakes when I am breathing, waiting,  
to tear away the chamber door and make some room.

### 13. Acteon's Death

I tried to drink the sunshine deep  
but the trees called me a liar.  
The grass only grows to drag me down  
and the sky has caught on fire.

Nothing licked my neck in the terror time;  
Never sweat for the land and never took a wife.  
In your day they'd have fed me to crocodiles  
'cause I am not fit for life.

*But I caught the dew of your petrichor dread.  
Splattered blood for the ancient marriage bed.  
Pushed daisies up through the cobblestones,  
fever dreams through the holes in your head*

*of stranger limbs that were not there before.  
To replace the old, gone bent and sore.  
You've feared your hands, small and soft and unnurturing.  
No more, no more, no more.*

*Not if you chase me like a child through  
this bitten, battered wood.  
I would love you so much better than  
my brother ever could.*

#### 14. Polaris' Second Dispatch

I do not want to be seen anymore.  
I've no love for this land and passion bores me.  
So long I've bled my vital core  
which burns my skin, for it abhors me.

But unwilling, I am a traveler,  
leaving more and more upon each foreign place.  
What was my body beckons scavengers  
into the chasms left by my disgrace.

So here I'll stay, among these children gleaming  
whose heavy hearts breed zealous arrogance.  
And though I know so fierce a fire's fleeting  
I draw jealous pleasure from their countenance.

What is their light but the deceiver  
that seeks to turn them blind?  
And what is heat, ecstatic color,  
besides a hole to hide inside?

## 15. Dear Grandma,

I'm sorry for every time I yelled when I meant to hold my temper in my chest, like a delicate bird, and let it sigh into my ear.

And I'm sorry for all the times I let it thrash around inside of me, choking on its song until it bisected my heaving thorax in some perverted anti-surgery, and you had to watch me shove it back in again.

Watch me shake in the bathtub that you bought, sticky and gored as the day I was born, caressing the body you loved and I abide.

And I'm sorry for not crying, when I promised I wouldn't hold it in anymore. For salting out your hand on my cheek with a grimace of agonistic fear. I'm sorry for doing it when I quit the school play, and for doing it again right now.

I'm sorry for the countless nights I've failed to wash my hair, change my clothes, brush my teeth, or do my laundry. For every time I've masturbated and slept before washing my hands. I'm sorry for confessing to that in a public forum.

And I'm sorry for every time I ever said that I was glad you died, because if you'd lived maybe all that bad stuff wouldn't have happened to me. And then I'd be less fun to have at parties. I'm sorry for lying about being fun to have at parties.

Okay. That's it. I love you. See you later. Your death certificate's waiting on the bottom rung of the living-room shelf.

## 16. Dear God,

I need you to save me from flunking out of highschool.  
Maybe then I would love you more.  
And maybe I'd love you more if you stopped  
hiding in the bushes, in lightning storms and cherry-suns,  
like some peeping-tom-ephebophile.

Can't you just remember who you are  
when you see me in the mirror?  
And love me like I've been trying to  
since I first heard your name?

Not Elohim,  
Not Deus Pater,  
and not Ahura Mazda.

The alpha and the omega—  
the conquering lion—

Baby Girl Black.

## 17. 10:30 PM, trying to sleep, in tears

Tomorrow will be my homecoming day,  
when all the blood-sick dogs inside my heart  
be-still their fruitless wandering.  
Tomorrow no creature will reject me,  
and I will be their leper-king.

Tomorrow, the sun that streaks across my floor  
will be warmer than it was before.  
The world will become a mahogany box.  
And a mother-of-pearl lid, its sky.  
I could be still there, then, a little amber jewel,  
and smile for tomorrow again.

Because tomorrow, I won't mind the fact  
that all my glories die.  
No, tomorrow I won't despise the place  
where I rest when joy is down.  
I will be whole, and kneel at the gracious knee  
of a universal mother.  
Tomorrow, love will mean so much more  
than the killing word of silence.

But today I am shattered.  
A groaning thing.  
A night-beast in my covers.  
Today, I am sobbing,  
a spilling hunger.  
Split.  
Amoeba.  
Chimera.



## 18. an old man named desire and his cracked leather bible

an old man named desire and his cracked leather bible  
wraps my mouth around *i-love-you-so* in a  
something-grimace-smile

beats me how to want someone, or how to wait a while  
for my mother, for my manager, to clean up the seventh aisle

because there's bile and blood all over me,  
it's all too much, it won't stay inside  
and the smudge in the mirror's not the thing i should see  
but i've been told that it's wrong to hide

wrong to hide from the itch of pathology,  
break away from the call of self-help-mythology  
and it's wrong to make half hearted apology  
for the panic and the bite marks and the nervous ticks and the  
constant delusion that you're covered in bugs like a filthy animal  
except you are right now you are you can see the flea bites and  
you don't know how they got there except you do it's because  
you're disgusting your whole family is disgusting and what's so  
wrong about feeling like shit all of the fucking time all the  
fucking time every day

ology

i am so scared of being an artist because now everyone is in my  
business all the time and i can't even talk about how i hugged my  
friend two weeks ago and it was the best thing that's happened to  
me all year that rush of power and affection and longing and it  
wasn't even sexual but how can you even explain that to people

explain that i would have kissed her, gladly, just to feel the slow hot glide of her insides, her body heat and it wouldn't have to mean anything but *you like the way my hair smells, let's do this fucking thing* and no not the thing you're thinking of i'm talking about love

how do i explain that i'm not dead.

i'm not dead below the waste i'm not dead inside i'm not stagnant i'm not apathetic there are just some things i don't want to do and some things i try i'm just new and bad and saying a random guy in the street is attractive doesn't make me less gay and not wanting to have sex with my friends, with anybody, does not make me less gay and being scared when people yell at me does not make me less of a man or less of a woman or less of a daughter it just means i'm an animal and i'm scared

i'm so fucking scared. because i'm going to die.

ology

loveology

scientology

phonology

the-unmaking-of-words-doesn't-make-me-a-prodigy:

it's called spilloology now

because i haven't read enough books to know the real one yet

so this old man named desire's all the things i'll never be ever graceful in his aging, ancient body all in shift and i'll never leave this room for girls or gold or the technicolor sea

but i'll always know whose health i'm dealing with

because the norm is not normal, and the old man wants to eat  
licking crumbs out from the crevice of a bed without a sheet  
heart-hurricane hits my door in sisyphian self-defeat  
because it's mind over matter, and all the rest is maggot meat

### About The Author:

**Harper Black** is a they/them, a neeeeeerd, a devout Bloomingtonian, a creature far too short to be so mean, and sometimes even a writer. The ‘s’ and the ‘f’ are for them to know and for you to find out. They work tirelessly, everyday, to give the lesbian population in this town a bad rap.

You can talk to them at [\*\*hsfb1208@gmail.com\*\*](mailto:hsfb1208@gmail.com), tip them at [\*\*ko-fi.com/hsfbtown\*\*](https://ko-fi.com/hsfbtown), and find them at [\*\*hsfb.neocities.org\*\*](https://hsfb.neocities.org). Who has time to buy a domain in this economy?

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