

THE END OF DAUGHTER:
AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN VERSE

by

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A THESIS

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Title: THE END OF DAUGHTER:

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN VERSE

Approved: _____

Robert Hill Long

This is a coming-of-age memoir written in verse. It is the chronicle of a young girl's journey from a simple and innocent childhood in an eccentric California town through a tumultuous adolescence in Hawaii. This is the story of surviving a family that is torn asunder by divorce and addiction.

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Artistic Purpose: Reckoning

This is the story of my life... thus far. Why write a memoir at such a young age? In technical terms a memoir is an autobiography or biography of one's life—the story of one's memory. Although I am young, my memory is brimming with stories: dark, revelatory transitions in my life and small, trifling moments. This is my memory: a reckoning with a childhood interrupted, *my* coming-of-age.

The overall form of my autobiography is a montage: individual poems and sketches are loosely linked together to create a narrative. The first “chapter”, *Daughter*, begins in a marsh in Bolinas Bay, California. This is my early childhood—a happy, hippy family in a small, eccentric town. The second part, *The Last Hour*, chronicles my family's move to Maui, focusing on the terror of my mother's ten-year cocaine addiction and my peripheral adolescence in an otherwise paradise, Hawaii. Although many of my stories are dark or even sad, I try to convey a sense of underlying hope, humor, and love throughout. As mentioned before, this is a reckoning—it is about growing up, survival, learning to accept my past and forgive.

I choose to write in verse because I love writing poetry. As e.e. cummings said, “If a poet is anybody [s]he is somebody...who is obsessed by Making” (Norman 376). Inexplicably, I am

‘obsessed by Making’, driven to express, communicate, and create in some kind of musical form. I am enthralled with the rhythms and musicality of words. Poetry offers an imposed structure to contain this music, to give shape to emotion, imagination, and narrative. Because poetry is usually compact, depending on the boundaries of its chosen form, it is capable of a particular kind of density and urgency that lends itself well to emotional material.

Theme: “In bad times are good things” -Honduran Proverb

As a rite-of-passage story inherently this is about change and growth. As the title suggests, it is about an end, but it is also about a beginning, a development of self. As Caroline Heilburn states in Writing Women’s Lives, “Women come to writing, I believe, simultaneously with self-creation” (117). I believe this too. In a sense this project is a means of self-acceptance and its subsequent expression.

Although individual poems have different themes, I hope to convey as my overall intended theme, a sense really, that within suffering exists the possibility of hope and beauty. Or more graphically phrased by Kurt Vonnegut: “The most beautiful peonies I ever saw were grown out of pure cat excrement.” All of the incidents I write about were life-altering lessons for me that

taught me to grow, endure, fight, and even thrive. Ultimately I hope to communicate a positive message of survival, a phoenix's song to the ashes.

Although dealing with serious subject matter, I believe the general tone is not heavy; it is at times humorous and at times reflective to counter the gravity of the material. Many of the poems tend to lean more towards sarcasm than self-pity (see "Christmas Eve", "When the Cops Come", or "Cabo San Lucas" to mention a few). I believe this ironic undertone does not undermine the seriousness of the material; instead it keeps the piece from being too weighty or solemn.

Form

The framework for this piece is pretty basic. The poems are grouped into two sections or chapters distinguished by age and location, closing with a third section which is an epilogue. Each section is organized, although I take liberties, chronologically. The order of the whole body evolved quite naturally and although some of the poems seem awkwardly placed, I think the overall structure works.

As for individual poetic forms, I pursue many forms traditional and otherwise. Most of these poems are 'free-verse' in the sense that they have loose meter and irregular rhyme schemes.

Within each poem there is a conscious commitment to the music of the words and an incorporation of unobtrusive internal rhymes as well as consonance, assonance, and alliteration. I am particularly partial to rhyming couplets and haiku-esque endings. I like couplets not only for their musicality, but also for their sense of closure and stability. I feel the haiku achieves this as well.

There are a few poems in this collection that attempt traditional forms. I am fascinated crafting poems in traditional form because of the discipline and the constraints. I also am partial to rhymes and refrains. I notice whenever I start a poem with a ‘formal’ intention, the form tends to dissipate by the end of the poem. In most cases this dissolution is appropriate because it reflects the theme of the poem (i.e. the dissolution of innocence). For example, “When the Cops Come” starts as a rondeau. Although there is a rhyme pattern throughout, the rondeau quickly disintegrates by the second stanza and becomes a riddle in the third stanza, as though the form itself is consumed by its own puzzlement.

“Another of her Lovers” which I intended as a sonnet, ends up falling short (by one line, in fact). I do like the implicit bad fortune that is suggested by a thirteen-line sonnet. On-the-other-hand “The Arousing (him)” is a pretty law-abiding terza rima and I

think it is a good example of an effective and unobtrusive use of traditional form.

Influences

My influences range from Emily Dickinson to Cole Porter, Bob Marley to Louise Gluck. To a degree all language is borrowed, so I consider everything I have ever read or heard to be an influence. Given the nature of this project it should be no surprise that I am also drawn to ‘confessional’ poetry: Plath, Sexton, Olds, and others. With such women as my influences logically I would gravitate towards autobiography. As Heilburn notes of my predecessors, “Women found a frankly autobiographical ‘confessional’ mode for their poetry and discovered a form for their uninhibited autobiographical impulses” (Heilburn 63). I am indeed following such impulses...

In the realm of autobiographies, in verse or otherwise, I did not find anything that influenced the form of this project. I looked at all kinds of forms from ‘fictionalized’ autobiographies, narrative poetry, to obituaries in the newspaper. Most of my reading simply provided me with inspiration and perspective. One of the most exciting genres I discovered in my research was Japanese Poetic Diaries, many written by great haiku poets such as Basho and Issa. These ancient poetic diaries are mostly prose narratives about

traveling and nature, sometimes bordering on fiction, interspersed with haiku or other slightly longer poems. I kept this form in mind when working on my own poetic diary.

In addition, I read a lot of other haiku. I think haiku is a positive influence on my work. I love the immediacy and *seeming* simplicity of haiku. What distinguishes Haiku from other forms of poetry is not only its brevity, but its concern with details of the natural world. Haiku is almost always present tense. Through natural imagery it suggests not only a feeling or mood, but also the season, time of day, and/or location (Henderson 3). I think this is a great way to approach any form of poetry—even if it is not present tense, it should be immediate. More importantly, poetry should be more suggestive than explicit—evoking a feeling through specific details and imagery.

Process: Exorcism?

I tell these stories to share my own reckoning with pain, loss, and silence. The most difficult part of this process was the preparation, not the actual sweat and math of the poems, but the invisible courage to awaken and remember my life. In a sense, it was a decision to try to heal. It meant I had to cry at the opening of the wound and ultimately learn to forgive the wound for still bleeding. I had to be absolutely honest with myself so my poetry

would benefit from this shamelessness and thus be more intimate and true. This project is by no means an exorcism. An exorcism is meant to expel the devil, but I invite my demons in with open arms and words, I embrace them and thank them for making my life richer with pain.

Technique: “No verse is free”

I am a fiend for revision. Very rarely do poems just “happen”; more often revision is necessary to trim off the fat, especially those poems in traditional forms. All of these poems survived extensive facelifts. Some poems warranted only 10-15 revisions, while others transformed 40 plus times. Even amidst all this revision, very few of the poems are as perfect as I would like. For the purpose of completing I had to finally surrender and consider the poems complete. As John Crowe Ransome said, “A poem is never finished, it’s just abandoned”.

Another essential influence on my technique was the trained ear and eye of Robert Hill Long. He helped to strengthen these poems by focusing my lyricism with committed line breaks and stable stanzas. It is because of his guidance that I trimmed paragraphs into quatrains, tamed wandering lines into tercets.

References

Aitken, Robert. A Zen Wave: Basho's Haiku and Zen. Weatherhill:
New York, 1978.

This book proved itself most valuable. Aitken does a comprehensive study on selected Basho poems. Most importantly he includes excellent translations and explains a lot about the nature of haiku and the Japanese language.

Carter, Steven D., ed. Traditional Japanese Poetry: an Anthology.
Stanford Press: Stanford, 1991.

An extensive anthology with works spanning several styles as well as centuries.

Dacey, Phillips, and David Jauss. Strong Measures: Contemporary
American Poetry in Traditional Forms. Harper Collins:
New York, 1986.

An essential resource! Not only does this book have a thorough glossary with definitions of forms, but as an anthology it also provides inspiring and innovative examples of modern poetry in traditional form.

Finch, Anne, ed. A Formal Feeling Comes: Poems in Form by
Contemporary Women. Story Line Press: Brownsville,
1994.

Like Strong Measures this book has a lot of great examples of poetry in traditional form. As the title indicates this is a trove of terrific modern poetry by women.

Heilburn, Carolyn G. Writing a Woman's Life.
WW Norton Co.: New York, 1988.

An interesting survey of modern female poets. Part biography and partly a study of style and influences.

Henderson, Harold G. An Introduction to Haiku.

Doubleday Co.: New York, 1958.

A lot more generic than Aitken's book with some annoying rhymed translations
Overall this text provides a solid overview of Haiku poets other than Basho.

Holman, Hugh. A Handbook to Literature. The Odyssey Press:

Indianapolis, 1978.

Merely a reference book to help me keep my literary terms straight.

Norman, Charles, ed. Poets on Poetry. Collier Books: New

York, 1962.

An interesting and enjoyable collection of essays by poets from Matthew Arnold
to Wallace Stevens. Besides the essays that I site, I particularly enjoyed the
Pound essays.

Influences (Ideas in form and genre)

Carson, Anne. Autobiography of Red: A Novel in Verse. Alfred

A. Knopf: New York, 1992.

This book is very clever structurally and stylistically. Long, loosely versed
poems make up the chapters of this modern and somewhat satirical epic.

Inez, Colette. Family Life. Story Line Press: Brownsville,

1992.

A very sweet, solid collection of poems about her family and growing up

Maso, Carole. Ava. Dalkey Archive Press: Normal, 1993.

I would put this novel in the category of ‘fictional’ autobiography and/or poetic prose. Actually it is a difficult book to characterize. Because of its short, un-indented paragraphs and refrain-like repeating images, this novel achieves a poetic sense all its own.

Merwin, W.S. The Folding Cliffs. Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 1998.

The sub-title to this beautiful book is “A Narrative of 19th Century Hawaii”. This is his re-telling of a Hawaiian folk tale: part myth and part history. Merwin ‘s mastering command of language carries this whole breathtaking story without one comma or period throughout.

Miner, Earl, ed. Japaese Poetic Diaires. University of California Press: Berkeley, 1969.

This is a very enthralling anthology including a wealth of different authors’ excerpts from diaries, pillow books, and travel diaries. Very fascinating.

Olds, Sharon. The Father. Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 1992.

This is a very dark collection of poetry about how much Sharon Olds hated her father. I found this book a little too intense.

Inspiration

Lamott, Anne. Bird by Bird. Anchor Books: New York, 1995.

Dillard, Annie. The Writing Life. Harper & Row: New York,
1989.

These books are filed under inspiration because they both worked as forms of encouragement. These books are great to have around for a little guidance and sagely writing advice.

*This hour I tell things in confidence.
I might not tell everybody but I will tell you.*

Walt Whitman

Daughter

Bolinas, California

Home is a swamp
and a slow stalk for crickets.
Egret has no regrets.

*

It is not important that Bolinas already sank into the Pacific:
one morning, stolen by fog. The townspeople tore
down the county signs, “Bolinas 2 miles”,
used them as rafts or sails, left nothing
but the Stinson lagoon and some swollen sea-lions.
By morning, the coast had no memory.
All of California will soon slip into the sea—it is no matter—
the redwoods are too heavy, the last hippies bought Mercedes.

*

6 a.m.
an owl’s shadow passes through eucalyptus leaves

My small life—
stolen by fog
—still life.

Mornings

Sometimes I'd walk in on them in the morning
(I didn't know he ever went inside—I thought—it was just
brass Squeak—Pressed—and rubbing—Daddy on top of Mommy)

Sometimes I'd walk in on them in the morning
and she'd be squeezing smalls squares of his back,
pinching blackheads he could never reach. Laughing.

The fog off the lagoon is perfect in the morning—
slow and salty and cold. Minnows wakes before the herons
and keep the water still.

Harvest

What could it have meant?
August helicopters overhead,

a beam scale, seal-a-meal, kitchen table piled with stems,
tins of seeds, bags of leaves with pretty names—

Indica, Sativa—my mom's thumb brown with resin
and that rotten honey stench meant we were rich then.

Polonaise

She sits at the piano and tries to play the *Polonaise*.
She plays it too slow but I think it is beautiful.
In my tutu I whirl through the living room
and arabesque as though I know how it goes.
Mommy whines into a laugh and groans,
stumbles over the black and tangled notes
but I think it is beautiful, the *Polonaise*, all broken and slow.
I know how the dance goes.

New Moon

What happen when lies are cut to powder?:
tiny bones, the fine white line of a new moon on the mirror,
demon semen, an hundred dollars.

Mommy where does it go when it's up your nose?

When Daddy comes home to you holding a blue high heel
that hits the bridge of his nose. So tall he falls; drunk,
bloody chin, crying that the children are watching.

Mommy why do you lock the bathroom door screaming?

I know the echo of the click of the blade on the glass.
Don't you see your reflection?

Cabo san Lucas

We parked the van on the last catcused cliff
to camp for two weeks. My first desert.
I was amazed: so many scorpions live near
the sea, cow skulls, like in coyote cartoons,
lie bleached between weeds, sea anemones have tall
black spikes (I thought they were blowfish that would rise
to pop me while snorkeling. I ate salted papaya
while mom fasted and practiced the divorce.
I played desert island all day Saturday with no sunscreen on my
feet—they got burnt, swelled big as oranges. I couldn't walk.

Mom said we could rent a hotel room for the last week.

I remember the dust in town, a woman named Eagle,
an outside market with bullfrogs and blankets.
That night I ordered fish at the Blue Marlin
it was served on its spine eyeing me.
Mom brought a twenty-five-year-old guy back to the tiny
hotel room and they had sex in the bed right next to mine
and they had sex in the shower twice.
I remember I jumped in the pool with my new watch on
and it broke because it was only water resistant.

Blue Road

My Daddy plays bass in a Dixieland band. I know “Trouble in Mind, I’m blue”, blue throats of weeping trombones, blue egrets, willows. I know blue.

Sometimes my big brother and I climb the willow and throw rocks at passing cars below. Next year I will know death drives a blue truck—our basset hound’s head rolled over like our stones.

Blue road.

The Last Hour

Maui

Hana

Sun awakes the volcano
rolls sweet yellow
mangoes onto the road

Kipahulu

Blossoms in the ravine,
like ghosts,
are night-blooming.

Makawao

Don't let the green grass
deceive you, this mountain likes
to pretend it's Spring.

Haiku

Rain is grey, low—
a rainbow.
Kahili flower bows.

The Last Hour

My mom showed up, told me she would kill herself tonight.

“The first time I wanted to die,” she said, “I was two or three-years-old when I looked in a full length mirror tried to pull out all my hair.”

The first time she told me this was during the dress rehearsal of Flower Drum Song.

I was a Chinese chorus girl putting my make-up on.

The theater is on Mokulele Highway and shares a parking lot with the sugar mill.

The last hour of my childhood smells like this—molasses and traffic.

I follow her to the car and beg my mother to live.

I promise her I will leave my daddy and move with her to Wailuku.

I will make milkshakes and take her to yard sales and put the phone in my name. “It will feel like home again,” I pray to a passing airplane.

This hour is the end of daughter. A tire rolls over a stone.

She says, “You are my reason for living”

So I will do anything for her.

I will do anything.

*

I fold like a rainstruck butterfly

but I dry off

I fly

2117 Ona Ona Place

Ona Ona is a one-way street with peeling fences
 unattended gardenias lots of little dogs.
 An old Filipino man, shorter for his long shorts,
 wears a neon cap and crusted slippers.
 Usually he holds a hose.
 His birds-of-paradise spy, one-eyed, over our fence—
 smirking with their spiked beaks.

2117 Ona Ona Place. Warm grey clouds rolled down from Iao
 make knobby lemons with fat seeds, green tangerines.
 In the afternoon I hang sheets on the clothes-line—
 it feels *normal* to do laundry
 to eat sour strawberry guavas
 to stand in a breeze of sheets.

Wailuku is all one-ways broken cement
 plumeria trees short government buildings
 the Portuguese lady with the small mart that sells sushi and jewelry
 and the folded man always standing by the door
 with ash knees and cracked feet.

Wailuku means ‘water massacre’ because the story goes:
 the stream through Iao Valley ran red
 with the blood of Hawaiian soldiers, brothers
 when King Kamehameha won Maui in 1790.
 The truth is Wailuku is cloud-pressed,
 heavy with the humidity of the dead.

The sheets sweep the grass and catch splinters—
 I pick them off if there is sun to stand in.
 It rains a little usually.

After Hitting-Up

She cries like a mynah never-ending.
From the bedroom comes the tremor of mommy
slammed into the door. She,
and his own busted vein have made him angry—
he chases her through the living room,
out the front, hurdle the porch, and like a cartoon
they circle the lemon tree.
“You faggot! You piece of shit!”
His fist finishes it.
The cops are here already and I can’t remember anything
except the yellowed-green edges of her cheek swelling.
“Those lemons have boils like knuckles, “ I tell the police,
“monstrous seeds.”

By The Time my Daughter Arrives

I've overturned each cushion, the throw pillows,
the couch, the plants are out of the pots, the carpet all dirt,
clothes and shoes, cigarette
butts, porn videos I checked under the
mattress I'm down to matches and 6 dead
Bics on the coffee table I've un
done every drawer, the closet, behind the head-board
on my knees I've pinched every inch of floor

and I still can't find *any*

I'm so exhausted from looking
the t.v. on two days, curtains drawn
I'm now at the kitchen table
my hand around a can of flat Pepsi
passed-out actually
face-down on a plate with a baked potato

First Overdose

Missing hinges, the screen door
crooked leaning on the stairs
of the front porch.
Thick wisp rain,
Low, flat moon.

In this early dark
all the hibiscus are black
but the heliconia
are full of fire,
the torch ginger,
angels daggers,
outside peeking in the blinds
drawn and cracked.

I clean the kitchen,
wash charcoal stained spoons
—*Mother, I wonder about a ride to school
morning is soon*
In the silverware drawer I find syringes
I hide them in the garbage
tidy myself into a knot.

I know in this house a door is locked.

At the end of the hall my mother's grave
laid with fresh cut anthurium,
Demerol, and a shot of cocaine.

I am pressed to the floor, cornered
before the sun and ambulance scream
only my ear open

daughter, remember to live

but it is not *her* speaking
God's voice, maybe, a tsunami
rises to me.

My answer a tongue fisted tight
listen:

Dear Seabury Hall,

Please excuse Julia from school again today. She is afraid. Actually it is a long story and none of us have time for the gory details of a child's life—but you should have done more than a credit check on her parents when you let her in—In fact, she didn't even ask them. She just got a ride with her friend, applied, took the test, told her parents to sign YOU gave her the scholarship to your beautiful white school on the hill. Though she'd like to pretend her mother will pick her up after dance in a minivan or that she enjoys luxuries as common as hot dinners or holidays in Aspen, she must feed the cat, buy groceries with food stamps, and help her mother recover from her four day stay at the Molokini Ward where she was stored for an overdose and suicidal tendencies. Her dad is drunk and her brother ran away. Please excuse Julia from school again today.

Sincerely—

First Kiss

Is it just hollow? Or sucking? And how
do you breathe and pretend to know
where your tongue goes with all those teeth
and spittle groans, should you keep
your eyes closed? I didn't know
when he shut the door behind me that teeth
are bones or that he'd grow
and his breath would be
sour milk and he'd hold me to the wall
until my jaw tired. Kissing feels
like laughter. Language could never tell you all.

Christmas Eve

It is Christmas Eve, the car is dead
 (every car she buys dies: the Subaru, the station wagon,
 the rusted yellow Dart—her name on the title
 turns a vehicle to ashes: radiators are known
 to explode, alternators lose teeth, a clutch
 immediately smells like rotten steam.)
 The car is dead—we cannot leave.

For two days she's been locked in her bedroom—
 I heard her last night, the kitchen creak,
 eating cheese and Pepsi.
 I am sick of the Grinch's luck and fucking Snoopy.
 The eggnog is gone. The cockroaches are friendly.

*

10 p.m. she is still alive.
 Long sleeves mean green veins, no dreams for days.
 —*Goddammit, you drank all the eggnog?*
Did David call?
 —Yes, I told him you were asleep
 He said he'd call tomorrow
 —*Now I'm stuck here you little bitch*

Christmas Eve
 my mother forgot she made me
 and the fierceness of her lace up heels
 kicking and kicking, screaming
 —*Why don't you go live with your father!*
Leave LEAVE like gunfire, needles.
 I know only to freeze
 curl my head to my knees
 and let her beat me.

When I scream, when she's done,
 my scream does not end until the cops come.

*

Mom never taught me to pray
 but I learned how to anyway.
 Happy Birthday Jesus—
 did you get to pick Mary?

When the Cops Come (a riddle)

Mrs. Coplady—
I'll tell you a story:
My whore mother
is now a stranger
a vampire a junkie

this house is ugly
infested with ghosts
She beat me
while sleepwalking
so I've run out of jokes

but here's how the riddle goes:
If all junkies have nightmares of dead mothers
and the daydreams of vampires are blood-colored
and blood is thicker than daughters
then are junkies vampires and mothers?

The Arousing (her)

I.

Kipahulu: everything the size of silver
and open as the ocean mimes the sky
black lava reefs make faces in the moon.

In the dark lauhala seeds look like blue pineapple
and their trees have spiked leaves. A wide waterfall
is always running. There is tall grass, barbecue grills, jungled
ravines nearby—laughing menehunes stack rocks at night.

This is our campsite—school trip—this cliff
and the moon-faced ocean. This is an end.

II.

In 7th grade I was the understudy for Ariel
and he Prospero. In 8th grade he taught me
to use paragraphs and red wheelbarrows.
But that is three years past and I take

no class from him now. Now we talk—
Poetry, his family, or life even.
From his eyebrows sprout the most curious silver wires.

III.

Bedded on browned grass under the lauhala tree—
her legs palm leaves splayed by his fingertips.

His hands are made of rice paper
or watercolor brushes
antique silk.

She is a centipede fingered in the grass.
She is handmade
in the darkened damp of the lauhala tree.
He has grey trails of hair mapped by veins.

*

Crickets in the deep grass
turn indigo to blue—
Or is that the moon?

The Arousing (him)

When I look at you I do
not see a child. Does a jade plant have petals?
I throw the runes.

The I Ching says: the Arousing
has more seeds than passion fruit—
the old man awakened by lightning -

while sleeping under a lauhala tree
dreaming
of a girl's pollen sweet as lychee.

She is without age,
jade, the Hana moon rising.
Blackened lava cracks under her grace.

The stars leave no trace
of us. Nor the waves.

Mono

Demons love the taste of young spleen—inside me *they* sleep,
flood my nose with yellow semen,
their bloody laughter comes up my throat in fits of coughing.

I cannot eat—doctor says it's Mono but I know cracked demons
invited in this house lodged their swollen gonads
in my esophagus to keep me from swallowing. I know I am dying.

I have two dreams: I see a waterfall and try to climb
or I am a bird circling without wind or ground or sky.
Four more days pass. No food, can't sleep.

The doctor gave me valium, Mom and Steve took some,
and me too, but I cannot close my eyes but to feel the heavy
water and no grip for my feet.

I am afraid if I sleep they will finally keep me.
I lost 10 pounds this week. "Mommy, take me
to the hospital. I need..." My voice in a vice. I cannot speak.

At the hospital they give me an I.V., an oxygen mask,
a suction tube for my mouth, for blood, and a suppository.
They are afraid I might choke in my sleep.

The nurse laugh that down my throat looks like
a vagina, swollen and folded closed,
"*But it is demons*—" but they don't know.

Cap

Maybe Cap was short for something but that was his name.
Mom traded him women's lingerie for cocaine.
Years later cops found him full of gasoline,
a hose down his throat, stabbed profusely.
I don't think they cared who killed him
or that he like to wear panties and garters
or that he had a daughter, strung-out, my age.

Passion Fruit

You've never been to Maui—
First, I show you the secrets in the belly of Iao Valley:
Pick the awapuhi, it looks like a red bee's stinger full of tears,
squeeze its nectar in your hair.

Lilikoi, tart
Guava, sweet

This is the stream I was young in—
we can take our clothes off here.
Smell the white ginger wind,
swim,
your skin stretched out like sun.

Lilikoi, yellow buoys
Guava, crushed and pink

You bend my back over a boulder.
Your hands slide off me like water.

Epilogue

The Last Living Woman

Just be still.
You cannot kick or tread.
You will be confounded.
You will be drowned.
You will not be so alone—
there will be the memory of someone
and it will suspend you,
keep you from moving.
It will be a voice or an angel
a fragment of that person
holding you stationary in what will become torrential waters.

It will be your father
but he is always daddy to you because you were his girl the last
living woman that loved him he would say and he would tell you
“Don’t cry punkin. It’s okay to die alone. You will too sometime”
He told me when I was a little girl, so afraid of the end of the
world that it would be like turning into the rings of Saturn
just dissolving into everything.
Simple and maybe beautiful he said.
Today the wind is not telling.

He was right.
He died on Friday and he is everywhere now.
Like light,
close as air.

Recipe for Dining-in (season to taste)

First, rip out right atrium (it bleeds)
Tender it with your fist
Slice gingerly

Measure precisely
½ cup left ventricle (diced)
Sautee together in spicy Szechuan sauce with peas

Serve hot—do not reheat
Please get it all
stuck in your teeth

Amen

Two years after I moved out she finally decided:
“If it’s a choice between Crack or the Holy Ghost
I’d rather be born again.”

So *my* mother, once a little Jewish lady from Cleveland
with a Star of David tattoo on her breast,
has given up free-basing and taken to raising Chihuahuas and
Jesus.