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**(E)S(S): AN EXPLORATION OF SOUND AND SELF**

by

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**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS**

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(e)S(s)

an Exploration of Sound and Self

by

Nat Rezek

# PREFACE

O God or The Queen or Whomever meets me here,  
forgive me, please, for not doing precisely what I set out to do,  
for: isn't that the nature of all of this? Certainly,  
you will understand once you meet the end,  
of this or This, that whatever finds itself in control  
intends to have us think one thing  
yet find another. That is the wonder: (of life  
and writing, the two being not so separate, really)  
That we might make or become something  
entirely different from what we predicted,  
and be proud of it, nonetheless.  
Please, be gentle with my words,  
and let them grow as they will,  
as you have, so generously, me.

And please,   Let speech have space  
let teeth taste Sound in mouth, syllabic symphony or something of the sort,  
say it, speak it, sound-it-out.  
Hear what makes words words and words into something more than words,  
for: Inspiration dies at the hands of shame.  
So quiet that, and let that be the only thing that is quiet.  
Pages and paper and poetry only come to life  
when they live through something living.  
Do me justice, and make some noise.

Part I: The Beginning, Spenser

iii

*Upon a great adventure he was bond,  
That greatest Gloriana to him gave,  
That greatest Glorious Queene of Faerie lond,  
To winne him worship, and her grace to have,  
Which of all earthly things he most did crave;  
And ever as he rode, his hart did earne  
To prove his puissance in battell brave  
Upon his foe, and his new force to learne;  
Upon his foe, a Dragon horrible and stearne.*

Edmund Spenser. "The Faerie Queene" Book 1, Canto iii.

Before the words were full and even still,  
As man did grope about for something more,  
The sounds and shapes would venture at their will,  
Their bodies lacking meaning, lacking form.  
Unstructured noise, a music without score,  
Communication frenzied with no feet,  
A structure did the need of man implore,  
And so, they made the ever-bearing Queen.  
And always since the sound and men have been one team.

The land they inhabit is often thought,  
To us, at least, just a place of the mind.  
Imagine, however, a scene real or not  
To which who reside are completely resigned.  
They're summoned to us contained and confined,  
Just noises and sounds and figures in ink,  
They know that's their use, but to it are blind,  
And live in this mindscape to which we're linked.  
They thrive in this universe, of which we don't think.

But to them, it's there. It's all that there is.  
It's filled to the brim with life all its own.  
Expanses of forests and villages  
That symbols and sounds protect and call home.  
The easternmost town, which houses the throne,  
Is lively and charming and beautiful,  
With bustling streets capped in cobblestone.  
Which to this strange place is the capital,  
The East finds itself a cultural apical.

But the Queen has a town on each edge of the world,  
And whilst the towns themselves often are well,  
Between them a dangerous terrain unfurls  
That few cross alone and still live to tell.  
The thing is, while no hunger this would quell,  
There's no *real* reason to cross the between,  
A hundred horrors that others befell  
Are just symptoms of leaving fate foreseen,  
Life would be perfectly nice in the East with the Queen.

This Queen was born of complex growth and poise;  
A set of rules and marks and lefts and rights,  
She made the g for girls and b for boys,  
And ways to battle with no fists in fights.  
The Queen made order, she put sound in sight,  
A sentence structure, making right from wrong,  
What once was floating aimless now held tight,  
Now man had something real to last for long.  
Where nothing was before, now understanding strong.

The Queen could not do all of this alone.  
No, of course, she had advisors many,  
Although the rules she made all on her own,  
The help she needed was always plenty.  
Though one would think she needn't any,  
A table formed, an army, 26.  
For her they've served for many centuries,  
And always worked for all her little tricks,  
Together these brave knights could any issue fix.

They follow her rules, they work by the plan,  
These knights are common, we know them by name,  
And though they're each crucial to speech of man  
We often don't notice the roles they play.  
We think them unvital, deny them fame,  
Copy their movements and limit their space,  
We know all their labor yet use it in vain,  
We make of them words and hold them in place  
And only do credit what their bodies create.

Some, which are 'special,' exceptions are made,  
The Queen often favors limited few,  
Among them we know, the first knight is A  
Alone is a word, unneeding of two.  
But most have no chance, no time opportune,  
To go on their own and be something of note,  
It is discouraged, and halted then soon,  
That one simple knight have reason to gloat.  
One single letter's meaning gets stuck in your throat.

Now after millennia of loyalty  
And tireless service of humble speech  
One knight sought to challenge her royalty  
And think herself more than a puzzle piece.  
A consonant, constant with no decrease,  
Did know she was one of the best,  
Her sound an undoubtable masterpiece  
Syllabically sought after, sonically blessed,  
Thinking it worth, the letter then named herself: Ess



## The Rose

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jay\\_DeFeo#cite\\_note-22](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jay_DeFeo#cite_note-22)

Who among us has The Rose in our stomachs?  
 How could I know that it's me?  
 Palm-tree paragon of leaving whatever dark corner of this place that we came from  
 to some Big Thing Promise.  
 It simmers, just a centimeter beneath the too-quickly sunned surface  
 of whatever baby skin we wore here.  
 I am wearing something, all the time.  
 I am boiling, simply burning up, utterly fevered under layers of Promise.  
 Plastered with potential and no way to cut it out.

*I think often of*

The Accidental Window born from  
 one man's desire to take The Rose away from its mother  
 so he can film it, and cut her  
 face out of frame and leave her there:

A newborn movie star, childless, with a hole perfect  
 for some French doors in her second story apartment.

*Sorry about the hole, Honey* I bet he said.

*Get a balcony put in when this sells, Honey. You'll be rich,* I bet he said.

*And you'll have a balcony.*

It's possible the hole was unexpected. Who knew she'd made that thing  
 big enough to be locked in the house. She did, She knew, I'm sure. Insurance,  
 I'm sure she'd thought it was insurance.

Maybe the man with the camera and the big name knew, too. Maybe  
 everyone who knew her knew she'd built it up too big to move,

And that's why they sent the man to get the camera and get the other men to cut a hole big  
 enough for French doors in the wall and take The Rose and leave.

And film the taking and the leaving, of course.

And film her legs dangling, feet dancing in the new air of her future balcony.

Stomach empty. No Rose, for once. Did she like it, I wonder?

Often when I call upon the Rose all that rises is the gut punch feeling that it's dead.  
 Sitting, brick heavy at the bottom of my body, or behind a wall in the San Francisco Art Institute  
 for 30 years, a huge thing turned all rumor. All plaster, no promise,  
 just a lie that there's still some Rose behind the wall or

in my stomach. I like to tell people I have the Rose,  
 but I'd rather have the Rose. I find it easy to say I have a future;  
 some record deal, or law degree, or house up in the mountains to Make Things fervently and live  
 in some mythic muse filled squalor. Some legend, future legacy,  
 Wikipedia page, even.

I find it harder to really have a future. To stumble, ungraceful forward.  
 To plant the garden and promise the Rose and swallow it, thorns and all,  
 then spit it up all neat and pretty in the cold and eager hands of Los Angeles,  
 that boob-job lady who never gets her hair wet and only pretends to watch when I say "mom,  
 look!"

I've been neglecting my standards, Jazz and otherwise. I'll sing for any tired muse these days.

But picture the women who went down in some tiny history,  
 whose names live on in hardly any households  
 but are so very lively in the ones that keep them  
     starched and watered and well-tended and well in-tended.  
 Imagine being carved, a permanent fixture, a growing shape shaping more shapes,  
 in the conscious mind of some fraction of the future.  
 If I had a Rose, I could command some conception of myself, I could quit  
 being all alliteration and maybe star in some short film of my Rose being cut  
 out of my second story apartment and dangle my feet in the new air of my future balcony  
 and, maybe,               get a balcony. And then dangle my feet off that.

But often when I call upon the Rose all that rises is the silly little prodigal ghost  
 of the child who taught herself to play the pentatonic scale on her father's lonely piano  
 just because she liked it and stirred up the family rumor mill that loved to hover and whisper:

*There's something to this weird kid who can only read when Steely Dan is playing,  
 But boy does she read fast when Steely Dan is playing.  
 She's probably a genius, Right?  
 She's probably some type of genius.*

And, probably, she probably was. But she rested on her genius laurels and never taught herself  
 another scale and still doesn't know her goddamn scales.

*She was full of roses, and I know it by the feeling of  
 their brick heavy bodies on the floor of my stomach.  
 I am weighed down, languid and scorched by her promise.  
 I am making promises of promise that I doubt I can keep.*

*“Life would be perfectly nice in the East with the Queen.”*

But Ess felt the word “nice” had betrayed her  
 By taking her sound without spelling it,  
 “nice” was not something that Ess sought to stir,  
 Resenting this “nice” as her counterfeit.  
 Although it was shocking, the rules did permit  
 Ess to confound what was “nice” in the East  
 And narrow her sights on the gap that split  
 Her town from the rest, which, riddled with beasts  
 Surely cemented her value to be increased.

The other 25 thought Ess quite bold,  
 She’d always served so silent, so stable,  
 Ess loved their Queen and did what she was told,  
 Rejection of this sort shocked the table.  
 Although her actions were condemnable  
 Ess swore she’d keep up with her other roles,  
 So the knights agreed, if she were able  
 That she would be allowed to seek her goals.  
 Unclear yet what those were, Ess seized firstly her control.

Now Ess knew that she must show true her point  
 And wracked her brain for feats to let her prove  
 Her value as a piece not in a joint—  
 What of her worth allowed her now to move?  
 Her ego had she long known how to soothe  
 Believing it but not yet knowing why,  
 She thought perhaps a battle might improve  
 The might she’d long repressed from others’ eyes.  
 A beast maybe, would make her finally qualify.

A beast there was, a number, in fact.  
Figurative and literal, too.  
The numbers lived in squalor and chaos  
With symbols senseless and language so crude.  
Together they made things, power they grew,  
Controlling creations that spoke in code  
Instruments heavy and numbered and cruel  
They manically made and rarely did slow,  
Mathematics and such no vulnerability showed.

She asked all about what would most impress,  
But met with an unenthused suspicion  
Concluded a beast the paramount test,  
Committed herself to the mission.  
To cross the gap at one's own volition  
She saw as itself a laudable task  
Such risk was worth the grand erudition.  
She hardly paused enough even to ask  
If all this was really worth the glory to bask.

Glory and such were hardly the motive,  
Though outsiders surely did think that her goal  
Something less plain made her ever votive  
(How does one explain a need to be whole?)  
Glory is easily palatable,  
It's commonly named and rarely condemned,  
Or, people respect a need for control,  
But even Ess knew not from where it stemmed,  
She only could name the call which the gap did extend,  
She only could name that constant need to ascend.

## Part II: The Journey, Petrarch

*SWEET air, that circlest round those radiant tresses,  
And floatest, mingled with them, fold on fold,  
Deliciously, and scatterest that fine gold,  
Then twinest it again, my heart's dear jesses;  
Thou lingerest on those eyes, whose beauty presses  
Stings in my heart that all its life exhaust,  
Till I go wandering round my treasure lost,  
Like some scared creature whom the night distresses.  
I seem to find her now, and now perceive  
How far away she is; now rise, now fall;  
Now what I wish, now what is true, believe.  
O happy air! since joys enrich thee all,  
Rest thee; and thou, O stream too bright to grieve!  
Why can I not float with thee at thy call?*

Petrarch, translated by Thomas Wentworth Higginson. Sonnet 227.

## I

And so, Ess ventured beyond her enclave,  
Suspecting she may come upon some thing,  
Some guidance, maybe, some winding up spring  
To push her towards the feat she craved.  
For her position, growing ever grave,  
Hopeful that some route to her would sing,  
The promise of this hope to her did cling,  
Push her to a version truly brave.

She'd held for years, in countless languid times,  
The thought that bravery did in her move,  
That knightly title rightly was bestowed  
She thought her body good for more than lines  
And capable of independence proved,  
So must this journey be the one that showed.

## II

She, as all others did, knew of a town  
To the North, which harbored a frightful thing  
A timeless creature, was once thought to sing,  
But now only screeched a deafening sound.  
Great efforts were made to keep the noise drowned,  
But no livable noise could possibly win,  
So the town up North was ever shut-in  
Attempting to keep their sanity bound.

Though Ess knew this thing was famously cruel,  
She thought that her will (and her ears) were quite strong,  
While others before would try and would fail  
Perhaps their efforts would prove miniscule—  
Maybe this match was for her all along  
Fate had them fall what she'd easily scale.

III

Now bold, and growing bolder by the step  
This image of herself made each foot fast  
And faster, each one racing with the last.  
Did too her mind keep pace its building web  
Of imagery, her future flowed and ebbed  
And pictured her a victor, name so vast  
It filled each home without its ceaseless caste.  
And forgot the words by which she was kept.

This image of success she pictured well,  
So well in, fact she missed a simple cue:  
Some foliage, so obviously placed  
Upon the hole in which she quickly fell.  
How stupid would she be to make this true?  
How long in here would this day go to waste?



IV

A while, it seemed. The day did turn its head.  
The sun climbed slowly up that morning but  
Was even slower, treacherously cut  
Its moments thick as through the sky it tread.  
And with each dripping minute grew her dread,  
As Ess did try to ease her sinking gut  
Only further did she fall into her rut  
And promise quickly bent to shame instead.

Her future fell far faster than the sun,  
Its leisure seemed to stare her in the face;  
It dipped its toes in the horizon slow.  
Her ignorance made confidence undone,  
The sky could only laugh and hold its pace  
The beauty of the sunset seemed to gloat.

## V

Suspended in this trap so amateur,  
She sat as light slipped gently into dark.  
Simple, silly misstep, stupidly stark,  
Her name now only rang in failure sure.  
Her ensnarement Ess knew she could endure,  
But exit proved a noted harder arc.  
And as she thought, a trickle felt she, hark!  
Ess hoped her mourning may be premature.

The rain came slow, then sudden, with such force,  
It soaked the forest floor in which she stood.  
The thunder hard and loud, but soil soft  
She thanked the sky, its kindly flowing source,  
And tried her hand, rejoicing that she could  
Now easy break the ground she thought was rock.

VI

She worked and worked, her hands grew raw and sore,  
But stopping never once did cross her mind.  
A chance had she, one difficult to find,  
And promise promised promise even more.  
The dirt did crack under the massive pour  
And to freedom had Ess herself resigned,  
With every fistful, failure did unwind,  
And even once again her story's score.

Each drop fell gently, together in sound  
A familiar hiss, one she knew so well,  
As if the sky her victory proclaimed,  
The droplets sang a song upon the ground  
And danced upon her ears like tolling bells,  
The rain, it seemed, was calling out her name.

As it often did, back home, sixteen and still taking the 48 metro bus home from school.

Or before I knew the difference between words and simple noise.  
 Mom's voice must have been one in the same with that sound,  
 which has always poured, relentless, upon our roof.  
 And it always will, long after that roof is ours  
 or there at all.  
 The rain will still make a song out of the ground's resistance,  
 knowing only how to fall, silent and undeterred until, *drip*  
 something tells it: No.

Rain would be a very quiet thing if there was no roof to hit. (Imagine that. Silent rain. Just falling. )

I love being the thing that it stops on,  
 even on those days waiting for the bus when there was nothing  
 but whatever I was wearing between me and the rain,  
 and no way to tell how long it would be that way.  
 The bus comes when it pleases. The rain even more so.  
 Cold and sixteen, I had no choice but to respect that.

//

I am very good at being in control of what is out of control. Standing in the rain taught me that.  
 Most of the other kids turned sixteen and drove to school,  
 and kind of sneered at me and my wet bus stop as they went by in their convenience,  
 but I made a deal with the rain in which it could soak me straight to my core if it wanted to and I  
 wouldn't care. because I got to listen, entirely unobstructed.  
 some sounds don't need to mean anything. Most beautiful things are beautiful  
 simply because they're there.

//

I, guilty of spinning my wheels, often reach  
 For some kind of stillness and am met, when I'm lucky, with the hiss of rain on cement.  
 I harbor with love and resentment a parasitic craving to listen  
 to my mother speak and not know what she's saying,  
 like back when the rain would  
 hit the roof so hard the gutter dripped for hours after,  
 in perfect conversation with her voice,  
 speaking before words meant anything.

Some sounds deserve to stand on their own, meaning something without saying anything.  
 I think we all have the right to do that, really.  
 It's just easier to understand with rain rather than people.  
*god* are we obsessed with understanding people.  
 I didn't get soaking wet taking the bus home to be different from the kids and their cars.  
 I simply took the bus home in the rain. We were making sound for sound's sake.

## VII

Empowered now more than ever before,  
Ess resumed upon the path she had mapped.  
A newer strength within her body tapped,  
From overcoming such a lofty score.  
She passed the bound'ry of the forest floor  
And marveled as the vast white plain unwrapped,  
Her feet were sore, her skin cold, her palms chapped  
Yet only strength she felt right to her core.

Her goal drew near, 'twas just beyond the plain,  
Where fate would truly tell her future tale,  
The town up to the North which did behold  
The creature so deserving to be slain.  
So solid did she feel upon her trail,  
Much closer to the promise she'd foretold.

## VIII

The people of the town met Ess warmly,  
Although an air of sheer confusion showed,  
For just one single knight was rare alone;  
They'd only come in groups so uniformly.  
The people feared their future stormy,  
For what would just a lonely knight forebode?  
Alas, their tone changed quickly as she told  
Her plans, t'which the town dissented firmly.

The beast that lived just past the edge of town  
Had stolen lives and ruined many more  
Its twisted music drove most people mad  
Or used its heavy strings to beat them down  
Opponents ravaged, leaving only gore  
The people warned the only outcome: bad.

IX

But Ess assured them all that she was strong  
Her body's sheer determination  
Could be the town's much needed salvation  
And all who thought her weak could come along.  
So, many did, they sought to prove her wrong  
Thinking her defeat meant their elation  
They followed Ess, to her frustration  
Until they heard that booming, monstrous song.

Within one moment many did turn back,  
The ones that stayed climbed high into the trees  
Or hid behind the trunks of sturdy wood,  
They held their screams in fear they'd be attacked,  
And threw their hope to Ess to make their ease.  
She set her stance, and knew alone she stood.

## Blackout

Inhale. She tells me I have that *je ne sais quoi* and we laugh because that's what we do but, I don't know. She must be right (god, I hope she's right). I blacked out.

Inhale. Lightheaded on purpose: let me be clear, this is not the kind of love story you think it is, but the greatest loves in life drain the air from my brain with full intent. All of it. Inhale. Like catching an immortal fruit fly between toothpicks. It's possible, but you have to hold on perfectly or you lose it. And when you lose it, it's still out there. You just don't have it. Exhale, *reluctantly*.

Inhale. I was asked why I think I'm not allowed to like attention and *shit* (exhale) that's a good question. Inhale. This therapy session is the fight of the season and I'm pinned; transparent, apparently. I didn't know I was see-through until now, so clearly having been seen through.

I am not (allowed).

I do (like it).

Exhale.

Can you blame me? Picture it:

Inhale. Knees shaking under the invisible weight of eyes. Mind bending, cracking, trying to comprehend how horribly heart-wrenching it would be if every opinion in this place hated what I'm about to do. Or, god forbid, exhale, simply brushed me out of their periphery after ten seconds of a chance. Or, inhale, god willing, brushed me off at the starting line and ten seconds in can't tear their eyes away. What kind of spirit can I summon under pressure, under that searing demand to hold my breath? Inhale. Everyone in here wants me to fail or is in love with me or is in love with me and still wants me to fail. Inhale. Everyone in here knows I'm good in bed. Inhale. They can tell I fuck like a Van Gogh painting, climbing up the walls, colors swirling and boundaries between bodies shifting, the laws of physics all weak and bendy with their backs arched, ab-suh-lute-ly buzzing. Inhale (yes, that's right, inhale again) Everyone in here knows I'm growing a rose garden in my gut, and that I have tattoos in places they'd be lucky to see.



Exhale, *like a slap in the face.*

I've been painfully awake and disgustingly, permanently present  
for the worst moments of my life. I must have been breathing normally. My mistake.

But,

Inhale,

I am so temporarily here right now, elbow deep in every breath and blink and beat, that I will not remember a single thing I'm thinking the instant it's over. Exhale. I will simply remember the feeling of, inhale, having been there, inhale, here. Inhale. That divine serendipity that sweeps you off your feet only when you've got the perfect combination of practice and blind faith, that sweet, sweet stomach drop —it only strikes me when my eyes are closed and my breathing slows.

And then (wait for it... Inhale. . .)

it comes,

stifled ear pierce shrieking, siren song like an ambulance's ballad through drawn blinds but, inhale, so hypnotic nonetheless, bright lights sifted, sinking through shuttered eyelids, everyone else's hands stalking up towards my shins, scratching desperately at the updraft I've struck, inhale, struck gold, struck by lightning, struck a nerve, struck dumb, inhale, struck right in my screaming lungs packed so tight they'll last longer than anyone would've thought. Exhale.

//

Inhale. All-consuming victory meets life flashing before tight-shut eyes meets enormous realization of why I breath to begin with, all spun together and split through paper thin consciousness and stitched right into the skin lining my chest which is resurfacing in some breath holding contest in a sickly turquoise pool sometime during 2007. I keep winning those things. Exhale.

Inhale—

## Part III: The Battle, Shakespeare

*O thou, my lovely boy, who in thy pow'r  
Dost hold time's fickle glass his sickle hour,  
Who hast by waning grown, and therein show'st  
Thy lovers withering, as thy sweet self grow'st—  
In nature, sovereign mistress over wrack,  
As thou goest onwards still will pluck thee back,  
She keeps thee to this purpose, that her skill  
May time disgrace, and wretched minute kill.  
Yet fear her, O thou minion of her pleasure;  
She may detain but not still keep her treasure.  
Her audit, though delayed, answered must be,  
And her quietus is to render thee.*

\*

\*

William Shakespeare. Sonnet 126.

I

Air, cold and sharp and thin and barely there  
Cannot escape its shape in Ess's lungs.  
She picks it up like pulling tiny hairs  
And lets it stiffen tightly on her tongue.

She's ravenous, but tender with her touch  
So as she might not bend or waiver,  
Her every cell appealing humbly such  
Each molecule might return the favor.

To call it tunnel vision understates  
How deeply to this moment she's devout.  
It's only 'in' that dominates;  
Ess has no business breathing out.

The eyes that bore into her back were gone:  
Alone were she and it, that inhale on.

II

*It.* This. The thing that legend never left  
Alone, that plucked young soldiers in their prime,  
That roamed and sang a screech that never slept,  
And seemed to ridicule the laws of time.

Its skin had aged so long it had forgot  
To grow or heal or treat its soured wounds.  
Thick strings of steel replaced the flesh of rot  
All future hopes of showing life, marooned.

Forgotten under façade abhorrent,  
Its stomach just a hungry afterthought  
Most people claimed it killed for sport,  
More twisted minds believed that souls it sought.

Whatever reason drove its famished force  
Had no apparent use or honest source.

III

The beast was versed for years in Ess's goal;  
It found no surprise in another dare,  
But even it was shocked if truth be told,  
To find an S arrive in solitaire.

But there they stood, rooted in their poses,  
Planted, still, like they'd been there all along,  
Like Ess was here before the Queen arose,  
As if this scene were just as right as wrong.

They were not the calm before the storming,  
But comfort in the knowledge that it's here,  
Ess had sat out rain and found it boring,  
Why sit when she could touch the storm revered?

She is not the hurricane nor its eye,  
But still, she'd rather make it's sound  
Than let it pass her by.

IV

Ess was new, another anomaly,  
A freak of the law and nature alike  
Grown into her newfound autonomy  
Identity taking on form lifelike.

She's something so threatening, and growing  
Irreverent, spiraling larger and  
Splitting and sparring, her lines overflowing,  
Swelling beyond what a form could withstand.

If the beast had eyes, they would be staring.  
It had reason, for once, to question chance,  
In all its seeming kindness and caring,  
Its peace now disturbed at Ess's first glance.

Stirring the tides of seeming divinity  
Ess could see herself, now to infinity.

V

So “now” becomes wed to future and past,  
And time bends in circles and slips and swirls,  
Beginning to end does hardly elapse  
But “now” becomes real as her movement unfurls.

Not much true thought is charged in her footsteps,  
The cells in her skin could speak on their own,  
Talking so fast that her limbs lost all sense,  
Not saving a word, not risking to slow.

Unlike the knight that fights stiff and plastic,  
Like chessboard pieces, like how she had felt,  
Powerless pawn, her movements all static,  
Finally, now, Ess controlled the hand she was dealt.

Shouldn't she play it, succeeding or not?  
But Ess laid her cards with barely a thought,

VI

Confidence, it seems, becomes a burden  
When it's tended to beyond proportion  
Without check or balance to make certain  
That such a thing could grow without distortion.

The want to prove something, or to succeed  
Is not itself an act without a guide,  
Should not be ridiculed as if its greed,  
But should be questioned, should be tried.

Ess found herself in battle unprepared  
In limb or flesh or anything but soul,  
And soul can render broken wills repaired,  
But cannot move a mountain on its own.

Soul could take Ess to this fight and make her stand,  
But could not render might into her hand.



VII

Wideset stringed fickle rhythmic beast  
Does drop, does sway, does moan and lift its roots  
Sweating, dripping, licking at its own teeth  
And praying to succeed in its pursuit.

Ess, strong and sturdy as she's known to be  
Her tiny body was no match for it.  
Nothing, really, this heavy thing would beat,  
Unless you've conquered counting on the tip-

Fingers, dainty things, not meant to fight  
Alone, at least, have not a face to this.  
Its noises swim and stammer in her sight  
And Ess thinks fighting only done in fists.

A planted foot, a throw, a swing, a miss.  
Poor Ess now knows this horror's winning kiss.

VIII

And God's not here, as was with Arthur,  
No will divine, omnipotent control  
Would choose to take her body any further  
Than her own force is willing to enroll.

No God or Queen or Fate bestowed this task  
Nor wanted her to question them at all.  
Divinity has coldly turned its back  
Choosing instead to watch her body fall.

And being faithful to them all her life,  
She could not help but feel she was betrayed.  
First the battle's blows, then came the knife  
Of feeling all her saviors turn away.

Ess had thought she needn't their assistance,  
Until she felt its nonexistence.

Loss, Loss, and what I Lost.

Today, my mind knows only drip and drop.

I've lost too much for loss to stop.

And grief's a thing that never leaves and doesn't rhyme.

Grief's a thing I simply grow around (I guess).

I was born what feels like whole, I guess, and now, as I grow, pieces get cut out and used for Who Knows What. But I know it's not For Me. Because I am going to waste in the face of gaps and holes and missing pieces, staring at puzzles that once looked like real things and now just look like puzzles—which does very little to help me in Being Alive, functionally speaking.

Over the span of 1 month I lost 2 people.

One still walks the earth and the other doesn't. One I chose to lose,  
and the other I never would've chosen to live my life without. Never. But always knew I would.  
and wow how cruel that he's the first of many I'll lose in that manner,  
and that, really, so is the other one,  
and that I'd never choose loss if any other option  
didn't also end in loss, and yet  
here I am,

having lost them both, I guess. and gaining in myself something that can only be explained as  
negative space. Valuable, in a certain way (all great art has gaps), but empty, by definition.

I guess. Personal growth, I guess. I'm a work of art, I guess. I'll be fine, I guess.

But is loss a thing that one recovers from? Guess at that. It doesn't feel that way.

You can't lose a finger and grow it back. That finger was one of a kind.

I'll never see that finger again. I'll never see my hand the same.

Things are what they are and then they change, and wow, how cruel, that they never grow back.

I am 45 days from knowing I would feel this way, and, wow, how, cruel, that I'll never go back.

## IX

Ess's face does flush to red as she looks  
Upon her gash, sanguine, spilling, too much  
Of what is meant to stay inside has took  
A turn towards broad daylight, and sits as such.

Veined and pulsing, still living at the touch  
It squirms and squeals and begs to come to view.  
Hoping any witness worthy of its trust,  
A willing victim, truth that's told too soon.

Ess stands still, shocked by her own wound,  
A swelling hole its only demonstration,  
And lookers on do gape their mouths and swoon  
That she withstood such sheer humiliation.

But has she now? her empty head does fall.  
Her skin will heal, but not her pride at all—

X

—The thing she fought so hard to get and keep,  
The thing that dragged her through that inner war,  
Now slips away and leaves her far more weak  
Than ever had she found herself before.

Undone, poor Ess collapses on the floor  
Too tired to lay her bigger self to rest.  
Too small to move a single muscle more .  
Too lost on any version she thought best.

She sees it now, her place in all this mess,  
Or lack thereof, of something meant for her.  
A knight can't simply be the letter S.  
A letter's never meant to face the world—

A letter's only meant to make a word.  
One S alone is something never heard.

X.5

*And yet, I go about my day so sure that I am something. So Sure that i am Something.*

## Daily Mourning

The only thing I've ever buried was a bird that flew into the kitchen window when I was eight.

I know that my cats are in the garden, and that my grandpa's in the ground, and there are others, here and there. I've been to one funeral for three people who fell from the sky, where I watched heads bow and pray over three empty caskets. But I didn't see those boxes hit the earth. I walked home, silent, hand in teenage hand with my brother who, like me, had hardly known death and hardly heard a prayer in his life. We left the church in favor of a storm so strong it turned the umbrella inside out. And I walked up the Big Hill in Michigan, a place made for Summer, with my brother, who, like me, had lost any feeling in his hands 10 Hail Mary's into 159 Hail Mary's. And I was very cold. And he was very cold. And the bodies in the boxes would've been cold, had there been bodies in the boxes. But they met their fate with the ground a week before, crushed on the Fall harvest of some stranger's farm in Kansas. So the caskets were filled with 53 Hail Mary's each, and laid to rest in the ground still soft from the Summer but getting colder with each September day. And I wasn't even there. I had my own cold body to deal with.

I've wrenched my way away from it every time. The only thing I've ever buried was the bird that flew into the kitchen window when I was eight. And, admittedly, myself, in the sheets of my ruined childhood bed, as paint flaked from the wall and into my mouth and I let it sit there, savoring the bitterness of passivity and wishing, gag reflex on the edge of its seat, that I wouldn't. I let myself lay in what might as well have been the ground for a long time, as the day grieved the night and the night grieved the day. What part of it was burial is undetermined; the waking up or the falling asleep, or the feeling that neither had really happened since I buried the bird that flew into the kitchen window when I was eight.

The premature immanence of my own body in the ground,  
skin still soft and sheets still dirty.

(My brother, forced to watch his first burial without having anyone to walk home with)

XI

Defeat's a thing that s had never known.  
Words can lose if put to improper use,  
But *letters* hardly face a task alone,  
And s had never chosen solitude.

Battle, having always been a strength of hers,  
Did clearly prove to not be hers at all.  
The thing she'd loved was now the cause of hurt;  
From failure would she never disenthral.

And silence was the only option now,  
Loss and disillusionment consumed her,  
Taking with it any will for making sound  
And leaving her to lay just as she were.

Mourning now the moment which it started,  
The hiss of rain had long since departed.

XII

So there she laid. A body put to bed  
In the town square, knees bent up, head bent down.  
A simple thing, a shape that's soaked in red,  
A loss, embodied on the ground.

Not in it yet, her breathing barely sound,  
A form approached and faltered at her feet,  
Finding her face, he bent his body down,  
And spoke his name. Another Knight. the B.

"I've scared the beast" he said, "get up, you're free."  
But S maintained this place to be her grave.  
Her muscles ached and begged for only sleep,  
And so, the Better knight sat down and stayed.

Together they remained and passed the time,  
And after several hours,  
Ess realized she was fine.



XIII

Fine may not define her state completely  
For wounds are real and hers still surely was,  
But standing up whispered to her sweetly,  
And knowing she was safe now gave her cause.

The B was quiet in his protection,  
He'd let her lay in silence for the night.  
Calmly did he tend her resurrection  
As warmly as he'd greet the morning light.

They'd been in battle countless times before,  
But never had he seen her in this state,  
For sobbing, sibilings, subtlety and more,  
She always practiced poise and pulled her weight.

This curve upon the ground was something new,  
But doubtful as she was, he saw it through.

XIV

And sure enough, her eyes did open wide,  
Now that B's temperate silence set the pace  
For Ess to set her damaged pride aside,  
And let the rising dawn now see her face.

Bashless, bruised, or brazen were their behest,  
So too could they be basking in the sun,  
So too could B and S be written "best"—  
All kinds of ways could they define someone.

And thus, they also could define themselves,  
By either falling down or getting up;  
Perhaps even by both are they compelled  
To find that just persistence is enough.

Not only victory can valor prove:  
It's evident in Ess's will to move.

XV

Unwrapping her limbs and straightening out,  
Embracing the B's outstretched offered hand,  
She stood as if she hadn't fallen down,  
And stepped as if she'd never lost command.

A stunning demonstration of some new  
Deluded perseverance perhaps not fit  
To her present tense, yet, finding it true  
And right to walk away, she simply did.

She saw no point in choosing now to stay.  
Leaving the people of the town abuzz  
And turning back to East with newfound faith,  
(While cliché, as, of course, she knew it was):

Virgin to both defeat and to success,  
Ess found her pride in trying nonetheless.

XVI

All the people of the town did wonder  
If Ess again would try to take the beast,  
Or if she'd let her promise be encumbered  
By the looming threat of more defeat.

But Ess did hardly bother with their ask,  
Nor did she answer offers from the B  
To help her make today the monster's last,  
Or join her on her way back to the East.

For once she didn't want to make a plan,  
To go alone or solely to depend.  
She'll walk back through the gap because she can,  
And maybe she will never reach the end.

The bus ride home from West Seattle was long and unfamiliar, despite the fact that I must have gotten there somehow. On a number I never took coming from a direction I never came, my city looked backwards in a way I'd never seen it. My whole body, like a sleeve turned inside out, no longer recognized the concept of recognition.

I take off my shirt too fast some days and leave it flipped inside out on the floor, walking around wondering why steps feel different in a bad way. In a nothing way. Somedays I watch my feet hit the ground and still don't believe that I am walking. Some days I am sure that I am not walking. Some days, though, I am very sure that I am walking.

The sunken subconscious process of flipping my skin back in place took a very long time. Seven years of finding loose threads I didn't know existed and learning how to sew them back with nothing but my own broken fingernails did not come easily. I am better at sewing now, but I will never stop finding new threads despite thinking I knew all the places to look.

But, skin now mostly in place, I am finally a person I recognize. Whether or not I feel like I am walking, I am familiar with the wonder that comes with it. Like every person I used to loath, I enjoy the promise of a new day simply because it will be something. It is the structure of a thing and the damage to a thing that makes a thing a thing.

My structure is sound in a way that managed to sneak up on me. I, despite being ever-present for my own sturdiness, did not expect to be so sturdy, and expected even less the day that I would simply look down at myself and realize I always had been. I am even more surprised by the realization that I always knew I always had been, without knowing it somehow.

I have, in a strikingly purposeful accident, become something that is easy to be. The sky-high aspirations of childhood have built themselves into staircases, with just one step to be taken day by day and the thrillingly constant comfort that I am allowed to feel like I've made it to the top simply by looking down. And I am allowed to be excited by looking up.

There are some things I will feel crushed to move on from. And that is a part of it. And I am amazed by the truth that I will wake up one day finding myself bigger than I was before from being crushed. That I have already been crushed, and already found myself bigger, and already been amazed by it.

Tonight I will be ready to leave today, and tomorrow I might wake up terrified that I woke up tomorrow. And that is a part of it. I am certain that I will not always feel the peace in being myself that I feel now, and I am just as certain that there will be moments, here and there, when I find my way back to it.

Becoming a whole person comes with the realization that you always have been, a revelation that your reflection has never not been the way that you look, that every day is just a day no matter how much you anticipate it or remember it. That writing in the second person is still just talking to yourself. That writing in the third person is still just talking to yourself. That I am talking to myself. That I have always been talking to myself.

Epilogue: Big Room, again. AKA ‘piano concept’. AKA proof that nothing really ends.

I am writing an awful lot of sentences that start with ‘and’ & ‘but’ because I have a hard time feeling like the one before was ever finished. And for good reason. It probably wasn’t. And It’s not like I’m the one in control. The ironic hands of time are around my neck but only threatening to strangle me. They find humor in my panic, a purer form of entertainment than murder, I suppose.

Still cruel.

*That sign sure does say it’s 54 degrees out. jeez. It’s getting cold.*

*Yeah, that probably is the same hawk from the other day.*

*The mountains look incredible, you’re right.*

And we play a game called “going out” where we try going out and hate it, which is why we made it a game because now we win by hating it, when before it felt like losing. Instead of having fun, we will get in my silly blue car and go for a drive. We will listen to the songs we’ve made or maybe just the songs we like, and I will try to focus on the road but I will turn my head and risk it all for every little detail you point out.

*Oh, that’s the girl that talked too much in your art history class.*

*The Jamba Juice is gone?*

*There’s a cop car. That’s funny, he’s doing a bad job of hiding.*

And don’t let me buy you flowers. I am very good at it, and I will surprise us both by arranging them so well that you will want to keep them forever and so for two weeks you’ll have a beautiful flower arrangement perched in all its glory on your desk and then for another two weeks you’ll have a very dead bouquet reminding you that once upon a time (two weeks ago) you had a very nice bouquet. And I’ll buy you more, sure, but how long can that really go on for?

*That is a very ugly building.*

*That is a very pretty man.*

*That is a debatably cute baby.*

But I am looking in the mirror again. Getting dressed up for the first time in a while, ready to get out of here and go back to being the youngest of something, a space I've always thrived in. Youngest sibling, youngest in my class, youngest person working at the farmer's market, youngest person to win a Nobel prize maybe etc. you get it. I'm very tired of being young and feeling old. I am ready to once again be young and feel young (I'm ignoring the part where I'm destined to stop being the youngest at some point. Youngest person to be old, maybe.)

*Roadkill.*

*Jay walker.*

*Sunset.*

*Birds.*

*More birds.*

And I almost made you cry once when I wrote a song called Big Room, which is about being in any room you're in. I have almost made you cry again with 'piano concept', which is playing in the background when you call me, too excited about how good you think it is to wait to hear the end. I think about not answering. When I do answer, I can hear the grin in your voice as soon as the first word comes out. But I do need you. And I don't want to hear the end either.

*Too many streetlights,*

*Not enough streetlights.*

*Bad driver.*

But I think thirty years from now I will still have a picture of us in my glovebox, long after the blue car is gone, because we look good together and I can't imagine ever not loving you. And there will be pieces of us in everything I do and probably still the way that I talk, and my kids will talk like that too, and thirty years from now my kids and I will still say words you made up. And I think, at some point, I will just laugh at them, and not think about you. And it is impossible to know if I want that or not.

*Funny street name.*

*Bus stop.*

*Cat.*

We are going to ignore that we're driving in a circle. We are good at that. You always have new things to point to. I do not mind driving in a circle. I quite like it, even.

*Peach trees.*

*Pear trees.*

*Palm Trees.*

Please don't call me and tell me I don't need you. I can't believe that's a real thing you do.

*This is the best part of this song.*

*Yeah, we could write something better.*

'piano concept' is on a loop in the background  
and we are both about to cry from opposite ends of the phone,  
but we'll hang up before we get there.

*Another cat.*

*No more sunset.*

*A very, very long red light.*

We are both in need of a cry.  
We will do it together, when we go back in time  
to when we did. or in some other life.

*You played track in high school? That's crazy. How did I not know that?*

Anything's a circle if you try hard enough.

I am trying very hard.



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