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Four Poems

by Kasey Perkins

Peristalsis

In the dream a strange

ephemeral someone

keeps peeling back my fingers

like the leaves of a persimmon

and leaving sharp

hard objects in the meat

of my palm.

She forces me to open
my mouth and eat scrap metal.

The first is a fish hook
I bend the sharp in on itself
carefully trying
to create a steel pill
smooth edges
something that won't puncture
my esophagus like so many
wide terror mouthed trout
the barb tickles
on the way down
like hair brushing
my shoulder blades.

Next is a silver coil.

This one is easy
it slides cold down the throat
an accidentally swallowed
ice cube

a screw

and I'm pleading now

since they neither fold

nor dull

She makes me

I can't stop pulling

my own mouth open

and force gorging

her silent force at the periphery

of my vision egging me on

selecting new tidbits

for the collection.

A staple, the back to an earring

the metal tube that binds

eraser to pencil

small washers

a rusty triple A battery

my esophagus a burning

trash compactor.

My guts are the insides
of a shaken up analog clock
the contents
of a junk drawer.

The Second Chance

(for A.C.)

in the observing afterlife
the college student has fired
himself into the sky
leaving a crepuscular vacuum
in his wake
air left behind
a door shut
an intake of breath

this is it

he is no longer he

he is not hard Cyrillic

rather the luxurious curve

a mathematical derivative

this is it

they are

the unruly bars

of industrial metal

riffing guitars

sheet music of rain

drenching Mars

this is it

the softest she has ever felt

precipitation pearls at her new throat

collarbone ringed

with Capricorn stars

the crones are here

they press her to their galaxies

a blackness finer

than cashmere

hush now new daughter

this is it this is it this is it

the last time she saw you

the one with the red hair pleaded

this is the second chance you deserve

The Oven

for Sylvia Plath

I.

My fingers crawl across

the cool sides

it's a Belling

brown

or perhaps a Frigidaire

no one will know

or care

about corporate branding

here

it's 1963: London

and it's cold

I don't want to

burn, but sleep.

II.

It's painful

the steel wool clenched

tightly in my hands

like a clutch of

razor blade pubic hair

my nails bite back

and I scrub

it's a Viking

black

which is fun

and makes me look

accomplished

at house parties

but for now

I'm scrubbing at the cremains

of a \$2.89 Aldi pizza

thinking about what I've done

to my babies.

III.

The remnants of a Sunday

roast—beef, potatoes

something for the kids

it smells like meat

and gas

which I've just turned on—

gas not always being

my secret ingredient—

I am the meat.

IV.

I've removed the racks

the better to fit my body

like a Sunday chicken

scrape scraping

my claws against the walls

picking at the crisped bits

something to

clutch at

to catch against my

fistful of hard wires

my arms tired

the air thick, acrid smells

accosting my nostrils

vinegar, my solvent

inside the oven

inside my veins

something for the kids—

nontoxic

crunchy mom things.

V.

I turn and burn

I melt with a shriek

I am the meat.

VI.

how could he

how could he

how could he

and me

having conjured children

with him

like conjuring the clouds

of baking soda

that fill the Viking

these Valhalla clouds—

stupid, viral

chemical free cleaning

yet chemical reactions bubble still

like a gas line

through my insides.

I too am stupid and viral.

VII.

a cake of soap

a Cuban restaurant coupon

a gold filling

a tender Britishism, like “love”

a wedding ring

a gas knob:

when your husband has an affair,

stick your head in the oven.

The Oven Pt. 2

she sends me reeling back there each week

flooding industrial oil remover flooding

over vinegar in the oven over and over she sends me

the steel wool rips through my flesh

fresh blood bubbling into baking soda pink each week

pink like slow budding agony a peony opening

powder flecked with blackened ash
and what are you thinking inside the oven
she asks every week and my blood leaks from her mouth
from her questions and the metal shrieks against
metal she sends me and I know I'm damaging a ten thousand
dollar appliance and *how are you feeling about that exactly*
each week we take this peek inside the oven and
something in me cracks it's just as filthy just as white pink
red black vinegar and solvent and shredded ash and she asks
and now where is the pain on a scale of one to ten
peonies I want to say pink peonies pale again and again
oil and acid and flecks of hot wire *eight maybe nine*
liar all those peonies completely mine unseen she sends me
and every single week it somehow never gets clean

BIO: Kasey Perkins is a professor, freelance editor, and writer who completed her MFA in poetry in 2014. Her chapbook, *When the Dead Get Mail*, was released through Finishing Line Press in 2019. Overall, her poetry and poetry book reviews have appeared in the *Chattahoochee Review*, *Chariton Review*, *Digital Americana*, *Green Hills Literary Lantern*, the *Wisconsin Review*, the *Oracle*, *Lumina*, and many more. She currently teaches first year writing, foodways courses, and medical humanities poetry courses at Washington University in St. Louis.



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