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This is Not an Act of Creation is a collection of poetry that aspires to be brutally honest and completely unabashed. Whether joking about how much it hates the Cowboys or losing itself in the face of loving someone else, this collection speaks to what it means to live presently, even if the present is as ugly as the dark waters of the Pacific Ocean or crying in the middle of logic class.

eleven40seven

Chapbook Series #2

Texas Christian University

Fort Worth, Texas



THIS IS NOT AN ACT OF CREATION

DANIELLE KOTRLA

This is Not an Act of Creation

Danielle Kotrla

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For all the people who have
seen me crying on campus and
stopped to ask me if I am okay.

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THIS IS NOT AN ACT OF CREATION BUT A PLEA

I am tired

Of being asked

To constantly create

In spaces where I am

Knowledge-seeker

Lover

Writer

Reader

Anyone but myself.

I'M CRYING IN LOGIC CLASS (AGAIN)

After PHIL 2050, Fall of 2017

The first time this happens,
The professor is working a problem
I could not solve at 2:30 this morning.
He is explaining the simplicity of function,
And, coincidentally,
It is at this moment that my body has burst into pain.

As I watch him erase the whiteboard,
I feel my concentration bleeding through the lines on my notebook
paper.

When he and I are talking later the next week,
He says, "I thought you were simply
Overwhelmed by the joy
Logic brings to the heart."

I tell him that joy is no longer
Born for me like this—
Like fears dismissed by word and simple explanation, but
I still wish for it;
Still pray quietly in places where I cannot hear myself doing so.

I also tell him he should change his story—for truth's sake.

Today, I am in class again,
When I am told of the passing of a friend.
I stare at blank definitions,
And I determine that this is epiphany—
Knowing that the words are gone but not knowing where,
Not knowing when they will be coming home.

So, I phone them,
But the call goes straight to voicemail,
Straight to "not available now, but
Try again later."

I spend the next hour redialing,
Leaving the same voicemail
But with one fewer word each time.

Please call me back.

 Please call back.

 Please call.

 Please?

When I am finally put on hold,
I can only stutter through the request
That I do not cry again in my logic class.

I do this with the knowledge
That my time in that place will end shortly.
I do this with the knowledge
That I will cry once more on an indeterminate date.

Maybe this, this short-sighted
No real vision for the future
Is dangling my body off a cliff
While hanging on with my teeth.
Perhaps this is biting my tongue so hard
It falls off into permanent silence.

Maybe this linear movement from point A to B
Causes me to lose my hold
On any tangible form of closure.

I know that I will leave this class for the last time
In five days,
And I will fall back into a world
That does not strip my emotions
To implications and inferences.

This is the romantic world I have once loved
And will die in one day.

I will one day be found functioning
From heart to mouth to tongue,
And I will be told the sense of logical thought
Has all but disappeared from my voice.

I will tell them that this is euphoric,
This is true enlightenment—
All angels and singing.
I will say that this,
This has been validity of purpose all along.

THE UNIVERSE WHERE MY KEYS AND I EXIST IN THE SAME PAIR OF JEANS

They have a peculiar way
Of existing in the obvious and forgotten places.
Key blades are tapping anxiously on marble countertops
And watching as I flutter by—
Absorbed in a world that is not here.

The threshold of home is crossed,
And it takes me no longer than a minute
To come to terms with my mistake.
I snatch up keys with gratefulness,
Only to put them away with indifference.

That night I am standing on the street corner,
And I am forgotten by those I came here with.
As I fiddle with the keys in my pocket,
I tap metallic tune into flesh and wait to be found
In only the moments when I am needed.

I WILL NOT BE OPTIMISTIC

Let's be figurative
And say that the world
Hasn't gone to shit.

I will not hold a torch
To your throat
And thrive on the fear radiating from the flame.

Do not ask me
To quiet my voice
In order to make yours stand out from the crowd.

This world of ours burning
Its love to the ground
Is not one I will hold fondly in the memory of history.

I will not stand for your right
To penhatred into laws
And erase the hearts of those who are not of your own.

Let's be figurative once more
And say that the world
Can be something greater

Than this.

SPARE CHANGE

I treat my downtime
Like the nickels and quarters
Scattered on the sidewalk outside of my apartment.
When they are lost, I do not search for them,
And when they happen to cross my path
I become but a child of five years old.
In that moment, pennies are composed of
Only wonder and glory—
I am sailing aship to the promised land marked on the map.

Once there, I spend so much time looking for more treasure
That I do not see the world collapse around me.
In the rubble, I am no longer a child,
But an adult who is scorned for believing in the magic.

Now, it is no longer about the spare dime
Or the splendor involved in its discovery.
Now, it is about the fact that I am scrounging for coins on the
sidewalk
And selling my self for spare change.

I lose my time in the process of searching for it,
And from here,
I can only sell out for survival.

THE DOCTOR SAYS SPITE IS NOT A FOOD GROUP

When the boy in my philosophy class
Tells me that women do not go into the field
Because they are not good at logic,
I enroll in the next available class,
Track him down at the end of the semester,
And engrave my above perfect average into his desk.

We do not speak,
But he swallows his backhanded comments
And vomits them up as soon as my back is turned.

At the party,
A boy bets that I cannot drink him under the table.
I do just this,
And after he has handed me five dollars and an apology,
I run to the backyard and throw up.
It is not tequila or regret that is burning my throat,
But the taste of bloody victory,
The taste of asking for this in the moment
And then expecting more when it has passed.

When I am left on the corner
Of reflection and self-cultivation,
I realize that, perhaps, I am fueled
By nothing other than spite.
I do not take a moment to consider this
Any fault of my own—
Besides, it strengthens the bones,
Increases circulation,
Sharpens the tongue—
And who am I to believe that
Being this weapon of a woman
Carries anymore of a negative connotation
Than would otherwise be received?

A GIRL :: A LOVER OF METAPHOR

I am telling my boyfriend about the wreck
I passed not half an hour ago.
And I am trying to describe the details but
All I can say is,
“It was like if you shot a deer
In the eye at point blank range
But the eye was made of raw meat
Filled with red jell-o.”

He ponders,
Nods,
Asks me if I am okay.

I am confused by the question
Until he reminds me
That this is not the way
Most people would describe a car accident.

I am confused by my professor
Asking if I always break my lines this way.
If I always use these metaphors—
War, or the moon, or the kingdom come,
The woman who haunts the same dream on different nights.

I take his red ink comments and
His dull-blade criticism
And write a poem about them.

I write a poem in which
I watch the moon rise, every night—
This is the redemption, the new birth
Every twenty-four hours.

The castle walls are always under repair

And I am only adding to the decay
As I attempt to fix the wreckage.

The woman in the same dream
Reminds me that red is not my color.
She reminds me that you should only
Kill someone if you can do so quickly.

And the war?
The war is never over,
But, my friend,
In this moment
It has already been won.

I AM AN ASTRONAUT, AND I AM AFRAID OF SPACE

why would i search the sky
for stars
when they are here
beside me?

i spiral into your atmosphere—
gravity gone.
i am floating at your fingertips
light, featherlike.
the version of myself
i never was.

my tongue is weightless,
but heavy still it does not call out
for god; for you.
solitary here does not mean alone
if there was nothing but a
void
to begin with.

i do not, will not,
wait for you
on the edge of the universe,
because there i will become
you. and then
i could not love you.

and, my darling,
i could not imagine
a worse fate than
being in this universe
and seeing nothing
but space.

THE ECONOMY OF THE GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE

Heated metal imprints rivets into my bare feet,
But the second-degree burns are lost in the siren's song.
Two kingdoms call for allegiance, and as
My center of balance turns over arch of foot I
Shift from heel to toe and

The world at my back stills as I tip forward.

I am fully dedicated to falling into
Bared white teeth and silver tongue until a
Voice just past my left shoulder inhales sharply.
He says, "You're the third one today who cannot commit."

I want to ask him if he could see the moment when
Desperation turned to despair, or indecision,
Or guilt, but I do not make it this far.
Instead, I sit on burning ledge and watch the waters below
While he fills the space between us
With small talk that does not fit the silence.
He says, "The river is damp this time of year and
People don't think that 'cause of the sunshine, you know,
But that river is always damp."

My head bobs in time with pull of the tide
And I know he wants to ask why
But he never does. Instead,
He asks me about God and the sunrise
And what the hell the economy is doing,
Which is another way to spell why in some sense.

When I cannot match motive with predicament,
He shuffles to steady feet and begins to walk away—
The only part of him that remains here is his voice
Carrying through the waves to my throat,
"Well, kid, you might as well live until you find out."

THE HATRED FOUND IN AIRPORT SILENCE

As we are all waiting
For the flight to Detroit,
I attempt to make small talk
With the man seated to my left.

I ask him why he is headed to such a god-awful place
When we are currently planted
In the most beautiful city in the world.

He asks me if I am always so shitty
At initiating conversation.
When I do not reply, he carries on and
He tells me that his business is taking him here
And he'd rather not go, but
Complacency pays the bills
And turns on all the lights.

A willingness to do what is despised
Puts the pot on the stove,
Irons the suit taken from the closet
For these occasions only,
And, well,
Isn't that the purpose of all this?
Are we not driven by
Wanting more reasons to slip into that suit?

ON CRYING IN A METAPHORICAL SUBWAY STATION

I'm crying in a subway station,
Or rather,
I am standing in the shower,
Pretending I am crying in a subway station
Because there are none in Texas,
Or more specifically,
Where I am now in Kansas.

But,
I am standing in this subway station,
And I imagine that I am held here
By nothing more than desire.
By nothing more than the need
For inspiration and a one-way ticket home.

I imagine that there is a man with
A guitar and a change-filled coffee cup,
And I imagine that he plays the
Song I never knew
I needed to hear.
His voice resonates and I
Reminisce of a childhood
Labeled token.

When I step onto the subway,
Still in tears,
I imagine that I ride to a destination
Farther from home than I began.
And there, I pretend that I am not
Searching through back alleys
For poetry.

Perhaps this subway,
This city,
Those tears,

Are nothing but a metaphor
For all the things I have wanted to write,
But for which I have never allowed the freedom,
Because they were found in the shower drain
Instead of the quintessential streets.

PERSPECTIVE OF THE BROKEN BODY

I do not think that I am shattered.
Rather, I have left pieces of
My body in every place not now recalled.

They are
On the subway,
In the sheets,
In my lover's calloused palms.

I am not saying that
There, they are safe or
Tucked away secure.

But despite the danger I still remain
Present.
Here.

And when you have long forgotten
Where to find them and the pieces of
Me—that wisp of
A body no longer never pure,
Put it back together anyway
For my sake—if not that of yours.

Then, perhaps,
I will find the piece of myself
That has long escaped the grasp of my heart.

THE EPHEMERAL SCENT OF BURNING RUBBER

The commute home is thirty miles of open interstate
And one stoplight at which you must turn left.

There is no thought necessary here, for
You know this place like

The harmony of your favorite song or
A mother's gentle embrace.

Besides, what is there to be found
In trenches you have dug ten times over
That you have not already seen?

What is there waiting beyond the sunset
That is not the sunrise?

The world is turning on without you and here you are
Stuck on the interstate now skidding through

One red light.

You stop six inches from the car crossing,
And mutter apologies through gesture and
An indifferent flash of headlights.

The world has threatened to leave you here,
In this moment, in this thought,
And that is all you would have been.

THE CITY I HAD ONCE SEEN

When I was in the third grade,
I was the winner of our county's UIL
Creative Writing Competition.
The prompt asked us to describe
What we expected the world to be
Twenty years into the future.

At that point in time,
I believed the world would be nothing more than
Flying cars and robots,
Metallic buildings that reflected light
Regardless of the time of day.

Looking at this now,
I realize that I was not far from accuracy.

The world is composed of machinery,
But I failed to see the soiled hands;
The skyscrapers are all bright
But no one told me they would be burning.

I pray for the vision of a child
When I now paint a picture of the future.

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IN WHICH DUALISM SPEAKS OF THE DAMNED

The map of identity dwindles in sputtering ink and
I am once more floating in the space that separates
My self / from myself.

The nuance in this is that I have long lost the difference,
And I have spent eternity pondering initial existence
Etched into the crevices of hollow ribs.

When I attempt to bridge the broken bones
My voice returns in echo
And I begin to wonder where the Cartesian self sleeps.
My body treads lightly over paths that are known
For the people that travel there, but
Their destinations are often lost among the folklore.
They never return to tell their stories to the locals or
Fellow drifters all the same.

Empowered by the shadows cast by firelight,
They gather at the precipice and applaud each brother
As he takes the last step necessary to launch his body
To a place where his mind cannot follow.

I stand sheltered from their sight and watch with wonder
Until I come to the realization that I have stepped
Into light,
Into myself—this body of mine
Is walking to a place where I can only
Think my self is still alive.

LIVING STATUS OF THE DEAD POET

The greatest poets tend to write
That which is personal
Of deep insight.

Upon this note I must also cite
That the greatest poets
Are dead tonight.

THE BANDWAGON ISN'T A BAD PLACE TO BE

I still give my mother hell
For being a Cowboys fan because:

One: "You can't just become a fan like that, you know?"

Two: "You're just doing this because of your new husband."

Three: "It just seems so pointless, like, aren't there better things to do with your Saturday?"

She does not take offense to this,
And perhaps I am lucky
That I chose the right person to question
And have not been shot for talking shit.

Instead, she asks me about the origin
Of everything I have ever loved,
And questions the legality of my passion.

The examples we take range from
Childhood toys to bands and
Lovers and the future I have long dreamt of.

She does not give me hell
For wanting to write my future into existence because:

One: "Isn't this where you form your truths?"

Two: "It seems so beautiful, that you can be happy like this."

Three: "If this is what you love, then what else matters?"

FALSE ADVERTISING

Is simply another way
To pay the bills
When business just hasn't been
"As usual."

When my boyfriend asks me
If I am doing "okay,"
I implement this technique
In order to stop the conversation.

My mother tells me
That I have seemed depressed again
And I say "I love you"
In order to convince her otherwise.

Just like the average consumer,
She will buy into the punchline
Only to realize the discrepancy in product quality
When the point of no return has been passed.

PREVIOUS PUBLICATIONS

Much gratitude is expressed to the editors of the journals who first published a number of the poems included in this collection:

North Texas Review: “Living Status of the Dead Poet,” “I’m Crying in Logic Class (Again),” “I Will Not Be Optimistic,” and “i am an astronaut, and i am afraid of space”

Sonder Midwest: “False Advertising” and “Spare Change”

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