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# The Transitory

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## Plane

Macy Davis

*eleven40seven*

Chapbook Series #4

Texas Christian University

The Transitory

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Plane

Macy Davis

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FIRST EDITION

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*“My shadow and the shadow  
of sunflowers are the same”  
-Aimee Nezhukumatathil*

*“How often have I lain beneath  
rain on a strange roof”  
-William Faulkner*

*“Perhaps home is not a place, but  
simply an irrevocable condition”  
-James Baldwin*



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 7 “Dorothy lived in the midst of the great Kansas prairie”
- 8 Midwestern Mythology
- 9 Saturday Night, Sunday Morning
- 11 REVIEW: Midnight at the Narrow-Gauge Cinema
- 12 On Walking into the Woods after Lights Out at  
Summer Camp
- 13 It’s been two years since we spent two months together
- 15 Funerals at 1208 Kingsley
- 16 the home and the journey
- 17 Second Language Acquisition
- 18 Monday is for washing
- 19 Cradle of Liberty
- 20 The Farmer’s Almanac Guide to Growing Heirloom  
Tomatoes



# “DOROTHY LIVED IN THE MIDST OF THE GREAT KANSAS PRAIRIE”

-FROM THE WONDERFUL WIZARD OF OZ

There will always be no place like home as long as I can see the bones of Turkey Hard Red Winter Wheat in the barren fields and each tree is a goddamn miracle spreading skeletally across the wide open space that wagon trains traversed long before barbed wire bled them open with the ritual sacrifice of draining the Ogallala and begging a God of grain bin murders and combine accidents the kind of God who lets a son run over his father before he takes tractor safety on a November Saturday and hunters safety on Sunday in the community center begging that God for children and corn and worn out Wranglers cracked leather boots wear less history than the rattlesnakes and prairie dog towns that kiss twisted cattle ankles with dust bowl Conservation Range Program lips when the wind sings until limestone monuments and gypsum paved paths can no longer hold up home and truck tire and young liars with strong work ethics until the sky stops stopping me in my tracks when it sets the prairie on fire I have seen the prairie on fire at night and that too is home the burning to bring out the green and the gold that will come months later the first summer I missed harvest there was still no place like home and even when my internment is complete in the graveyard behind the little country church this hardship and hunger will continue and we will luxuriate in the tornados and thunderstorms will bring rain that is much more important than destruction.



# MIDWESTERN MYTHOLOGY

Every one of our stories could start  
with a tornado: Dorothy, Langston, Gordon  
Greensburg, the three I have seen touch down  
in the country, splitting atoms of drought-stricken dirt.

It was sunny in town the day I left  
footprints on the hood of my car because  
there are some storms that demand pictures  
taken with steady hands instead of waiting

in the basement. Instead of swallowing ozone  
and shepherding our cars into shelter, we collect  
the hailstones that outnumber the sky's teeth  
and let the Doppler Rader sing a siren song

It was sunny in town the day I left,  
moving to a city for the first time and  
my mom wanted to come. My dad said,  
*just let her help.*

But there are some things you just have  
to do alone, like slicing the stems of  
Impatience with a paring knife,  
removing leaves and hints of swallowed  
soil

as if that is salvation, hoping severed  
heads will still turn west when the wind  
does not swallow the sunlight. Hesitate  
in the front yard with eyes turned upward.

# SATURDAY NIGHT, SUNDAY MORNING

My parents were too young  
to drink at their wedding.

So, I choke down a cornfield  
Coors in their honor,

swallowing youth, stale yeast,  
and my own breath beneath the stars.

I search for a soulmate  
to prove my own self-worth to

the white-washed walls  
of the country church where

my smart mouth was too much  
for Sunday school stories of

good Christian women. They  
never cut their names into

straight-backed wooden pews  
with straighter white teeth.

No wonder I sit before a bonfire  
blaze with plastic-bottle vodka

we pretend could be bourbon, toasting  
the night, watching for police lights.

Tomorrow is the good dress and  
the high heels and the bruises

left behind by an altar boy  
chasing communion down my throat.

Tonight, love is the disgust  
of drinking in the middle of nowhere.

# REVIEW: MIDNIGHT AT THE NARROW-GAUGE CINEMA

Broadsheet boy, a full fold out newsprint number. The lover smeared her breasts with fragile ink misses. Moveable type fingertips tap tap tapping across her collarbone, a hollow home for the salt she said she lost through outdoor osmosis on Sunday. When asked, she answered, "I've not showered since Friday, not fallen into pieces since three weeks ago."

Here is their headline: "Young woman guzzles youth like Mountain Dew." A one-column image of them will be inserted above the fold, holding hands on the way to the movie theater. She paid for their tickets and he snacked on typewriter keys and regret in between pop corn kernels, call it a Milk Dud moment. A finger on the back



Photo Here

of her thumb and the song she will not let go of. A noisy office layout, lights off. Exasperation and Imagination are written on their still entwined hand when the car door open. This is why journalism is dying **Read More: First Date pg. A6**

# ON WALKING INTO THE WOODS AFTER LIGHTS OUT AT SUMMER CAMP

Summer feet speak of cheese grater  
paths and the same pair of sandals  
calluses peeling into wide skin swaths

I use to floss beer can revelry out  
of my teeth, getting drunk on bleeding  
gums. What do boys around a bonfire

find more beautiful: My mercenary smile  
or the way I swallow their smoke mouthed  
jokes and regurgitate as a “total bro”?

Another laugh at the little lightweight.  
Three drinks in and spinning sorry summersaults  
into the lap of the swimming instructor.

Natty Light condensation drips from his  
hand onto my hip. Where are the mosquitos  
I have been expecting to snack on me?

Since the first moment I jabbed the  
nail of this place into my palm.  
Rub dirt into an open wound.

# IT'S BEEN TWO YEARS SINCE WE SPENT TWO MONTHS TOGETHER.

Blood-red snapback baby,  
do the scabs on your ankles  
still speak of tomorrows basketball  
bruises? They used to whisper to me  
while I watched you search for pine  
needles to tell the story of your fear.

Yes, I remember how the life jacket  
swallowed you whole before I  
had the chance to save you. So, I  
have to know: do the new bike tires  
cut teeth on the backs of your skin  
better than I used to?

My incisors miss the taste of the scars  
I left on your birch bark  
back. I can't see a sunset without  
thinking about the space between us  
at the bar. Then and now.

How could I forget the ice cream  
sandwich's worth of frostbite that  
rests between us? It still melts  
when I can't seem to pull you  
up in my dreams of the  
strawberry I took from your  
fingertips.

No, it was definitely you who  
took the raspberry from my  
tonsils.

Here's one for both of us to  
answer: Who has more to lose,  
you or I, when you lead  
me down to the beach  
blind in my bathing suit?  
The sand is a million tiny pressure  
points as I sink into the lake bed.

# FUNERALS AT 1208 KINGSLEY

There are cat-sized cardboard boxes  
buried in the backyard, beneath the sod  
I helped lay at 12. The tomato cages  
I spit up are buried under the same  
hackberry tree where my sisters duct taped  
me at 8. The sprinkler heads I ran through are  
six-feet deep and my Slip n' Slide has been  
gone longer than I ever used it. When I was  
away at 18 my dad cut the lowest branches  
on the climbing tree. The brick patioed  
buffalo grass that burnt bare feet  
before they knew the shame of wearing  
shoes in the summer was replaced with a  
deck the summer I turned 11 and I  
sunburnt holding down boards and handing  
my dad screws. My 20th year was playing the game  
of what had changed while I was gone, from the yellow  
walls of my bedroom being replaced with beige  
to the swing set that sat in the backyard  
where three girls pretended to be princesses  
and pirates on the plains.  
Now, the only thing I scavenge  
is belt-buckles and kitchenware,  
hiding my youth in the back of my car.  
I bury my books in plastic tubs  
hold a eulogy for them before the moving  
van comes.



# THE HOME AND THE JOURNEY

growing up means a time of transition  
trading Harry Potter posters for the middle  
seat of the airplane row building a blanket fort  
of boarding passes from one coast to no coast  
the middle-of-nowhere a mountain range searching  
for the perfect book to read while on the commuter rail  
the metro the T every city a different mode of transportation  
none of them the same as the two feet that carried me first to the library  
and then to school backstage for Little Women the musical carrying the March  
family's couch across the stage and rucking up the rug for Amy to trip upon in Act 1

what I mean to say is in the last six months I have become transitory

migratory moving from home to college to the coast to another home to a new city  
searching for the type of touchstone that used to be my childhood bedroom  
what might be my childhood books what is definitely my family they say  
college is the best four years of your life and as I look forward to more  
learning and less stability maybe it is the homes of others that can  
become the sort of thing I find solace in a fictional hug and a  
reminder of a real rug and the first time I found myself  
in Jo March am I not Laura Ingalls Wilder running  
wild across the plains searching for my own  
green gables like Anne looking for home

# SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Are you looking for someone who can:

- A) Hear the sharp snick of a can of sweetened condensed milk opening
- B) Make the gunshot of a lobster claw cracking
- C) Demonstrate the gentle thud of a boat bumping a dock
- D) Understand the music of ceramic mug handles clinking on the shelf

Do you want someone who looks like:

- A) The sock monkey when he vomits his stuffing
- B) The nest of blankets you make when you're sick
- C) An unopened jar of Hatch Valley Chiles
- D) A box of envelopes with all the glue liked off

Is your dream man's job:

- A) Shoving damp teabags into other people's purses
- B) Burrowing into empty Amazon packaging
- C) Pushing his teeth into the cork board
- D) Licking the shadows under his own eyes

Your ideal first date is:

- A) 10 ft up a lodgepole pine
- B) Finding the fetus inside a cow's uterus (OB glove required)
- C) Contemplating cracks, in a voice and a phone screen
- D) Holding acetone-soaked cotton balls

CONGRATULATIONS YOUR LOVE LANGUAGE IS

If mostly A's: The vividness of a fever dream

If mostly B's: Damp socks worn with sandals

If mostly C's: Physical homonyms used to teach phonics

If mostly D's: The countless voice mails left for an insurance agent

If a combination: Touch

# MONDAY IS FOR WASHING

and I will scrub the Kansas from my tongue  
scour it against my ancestors' tin washboard  
until y'all does not slip against my teeth  
and the men I kiss cannot taste  
the blood ground in sweetcorn, swallowing only  
the wheat chaff that I have used to drown  
dropped consonants in. These teeth do not remember  
the shells of a state flower littering  
the floorboards of the truck and the dirt roads  
where my dad taught me to drive.  
How long has it been since this breath  
hugged a turn of phrase? One could say  
up a creek without a paddle still sounds like the  
rushing wind, a microburst, a wildflower  
against cracked skin.

# CRADLE OF LIBERTY

Small Saturday footsteps sinew along  
a narrow brick path, this is freedom's

crowning, a two-brick pacifier to  
break your teeth on, and half of

half a dozen graveyards swaddling  
you in a gaping maw of broken stone

death's head inscribed upon bent wrists  
that hold your head up, as you beg

for a burnt tongue to drag the moss  
from the names weather has long

weathered away. Probability's consolidation  
to create a new home feeds you slowly

compromising questions about the nature  
of the slaves this city once held.

A lost moment of meaning. Spit  
your future rent money into the bushes

and wait until you learn to walk. Then keep  
walking. Otherwise what good is a trail?

# THE FARMER'S ALMANAC GUIDE TO GROWING HEIRLOOM TOMATOES

## 1) Learn to Graft

Find the best roots, the almanac told me,  
solid stalks to lean your fruit against. Learn  
how to transplant fragile things, so when  
I move into your apartment, placing  
my depression glass in your corner  
cabinet, you know not to drink from  
the carnival glasses and that the pink glass  
knife should only ever be used to slice  
the Striped German's off the vice.  
Grafting increases vigor and we both work 1  
ate hours and long days, finding soil  
only when the sun has set. A productive  
growing season in the window boxes  
my father taught you to build. This is the single  
most effective cultural practice with which  
to move in with someone before marriage.  
I made a downward cut into the root stalk,  
sliding myself across the linoleum and waiting  
for the graft to heal.

## 2) Protect and Support

Surely, you have wondered where my collection  
of westerns came from? Here in a high tunnel

is the grandfather whose smile I will always  
wear and whose army uniform buttons call

the bottom of my armoire home. There are some  
tomato cages I cannot cling to anymore.

Find the bamboo stakes, please. Don't make me  
trade your arms for steel and your hugs for a greenhouse.

The best tomatoes are still grown outside. The Dwarf  
emerald Giant I wear on my vines doesn't mean

that I don't need anything else. There are still  
days where it feels like you don't quite know

how to be a man like the cattlemen who  
taught me how to grow crops in the first place.

### 3) Prune Correctly

Every book we have does not fit  
on the shelf you built me when I first moved  
to grad school, to you. You take your shears to  
the side of the apartment that pleases you most.  
Keeping vagarious growth under control. Waiting for me  
to find the shreds of covers underneath the trash can  
because you still can't clean up your toenail clippings  
and I can't clean up my mouth for your mother.  
Out the window I wonder why you left this almanac  
intact, why my pots still look like weeds. I miss the  
Midwest sky in the same way you carve East Coast  
mountains in the kitchen table. Better air circulation  
comes when the dust is gone, and you whisper lies  
about better air circulation in my ear when I want  
your mouth to be matching the  
wildflowers I planted on my body today.

#### 4) Space Generously

The first time I slept on the  
couch was the night your brother called  
me a hick and I showed off my shit  
kickers  
wide alleys between rows  
keep the fruit from  
finding pressure and biting blood  
out of each other's lips as it grows you still  
wait for an apology  
wanting increased airflow between the  
Japanese Black Trifle and the Black Krim  
you haven't asked  
what it is that I want  
a garden bed and a sleeping bag  
remember the boy scout night  
you  
first held my hand on Lower Center Hill



## 5) Grow on Mulch

A no brainer.

There is no need for soil splash.

I don't need the Farmer's almanac to tell you  
to take your shoes off on the rug, please.

I will save my Brandywine until tomorrow  
when you are not here. Until then, I will  
place it in the crisper to ripen. The first time you  
tasted fermentation was from preserves  
on my lips. It was the first time I took  
you home. There are so many benefits  
to warm soil and moisture conversation.

I think you have learned all of them  
from the amount of blankets you  
bought and the quilts I brought.

The first time I cried your name  
the lights were on and my skin  
became biodegradable. In the field  
my father pulled out a .22 and you  
pulled out your cellphone and I  
pulled out my teeth to plant and  
hoped they would grow into  
something that both you and I  
could indulge on this time.

## 6) Lay Drip Lines

The last tattoo I got was preferable to overhead watering, long and lean along the lines of the bicep you once told me you loved to lick, but I never felt

you place your taste buds against my freckles, small unexplainable phenomena searching for each other. The Yellow Pear has turned in the biggest regret I have

because I cannot get the hose to the roots without a kink, without tearing the leaves off. The foliage has to stay dry, to let the ink bleed down the stem. It is hard to learn something

for the first time and as much as you tried to teach me, I still could not remember to lock the doors of the house and the doors of my car. The plastic tubing snakes

down my throat and I wonder what else you could want me to water, what else could you want me to choke on before I have proved that I love you? The Sun Gold

is less fussy, sweetness unmatched, and you smile when it and I are on your plate. How am I supposed to know what to make? This guide book doesn't hold recipes.

## 7) Prevent Disease

Till death do us part, the Yellow Oxheart is  
a fist-shaped fruit, hanging heaving on the vines  
a legacy dating back to the 1920s. The first time  
I met your mother, I met your grandmother, I met  
your great grandmother. When pressure is high  
it is important to prevent a threat to your plants  
As I carefully pick over leaves for bugs,  
I am the tomato blight. I have never ripped a plant  
out of the ground faster than I did the first time  
my stalks passed the point of redemption. The Cherokee  
Purple does not taste like communion wine but  
I choke it down on dirty knees all the same hoping  
to save my garden and my soul and maybe  
this will be the way to win approval. You have to  
inspect these things regularly to make sure  
they don't get sick. I can't remember the last  
time you took me on a date that wasn't to  
our bedroom or on our couch. I can't remember.  
But I know that the ring on my finger  
belonged first to the farmer's bible  
and the diamond can be used to separate  
fruit from the vine when the tiger-striped  
gem of the Speckled Roman will not drop  
itself into my palms.

What I mean to say  
is I'm not sure if you are the tomato blight  
or if I am. Or if I am imagining  
everything because of how much the  
paranoia  
has been burnt into me by this book.

## 8) Choose with Care

Remember our first date? I said yes  
On a whim because I felt bad about  
saying no when you were so earnest,  
sitting the seeds of a summer night

Beside my plate at breakfast and dinner.  
There were more choices if I weren't  
Only looking in one place, but the forest  
is not a breeding ground for tall plants,

and the German Johnson grew beside the  
woodshop on Sundays. In short, I knew  
nothing about what I was doing or about  
tomatoes or men. Getting in your car

was the most cautious I have ever been,  
but caution bred your hand in mine,  
a heavy fruit. I kiss your thumb and marvel.  
Look at these things we have grown together.

## 9) Water Judiciously

Too much water can split the skin  
it dilutes the flavor. My series of messages  
when you are out of town comes from  
the winter-cracked knuckles I refuse

to rub your nightstand lotion into.  
I am sorry that I am liberal with the  
watering can. You know how much  
I never thought I would get a garden

let alone a fellow gardener. Do you remember  
the plot they planted the first summer I  
met you? Full of small footsteps and bell peppers.  
I do not think there were any tomatoes in that

garden, after the deer got in the first time.  
There are soliloquies about that liminal space,  
But I remember most the way it smelled, like  
promises and mint leaves.

## 10) Consider Heirloom-like Tomato Varieties

I eat the produce we have produced  
off of your thighs. Cherokee Chocolate,  
Azoychka, Lucky Cross. Spilling the juice of a  
season's worth of seedlings across  
the forest of our bedspread. Richer than a  
Roma, deeper complexity than a Beefsteak,  
and twice as fragile as  
any cherry tomato eyeball popped between  
the thumb and the forefinger—not the only  
crop our garden created this summer. I  
would not want to trade this flavor and this labor  
for any other kind of plant vining its way  
across my back, even as my shoulders beg for  
the weight of the book to be lifted off of them.  
We put the creations, the salsas, and  
tomato sauces into my great grandmother's  
china hutch beside the Cloverleaf collection I  
will one day inherit from my mother's garage sale  
boxes. I stand on your great uncle's mid-century  
ottoman putting the mason jar of seeds we saved  
on the highest shelf for next summer. The pressure  
canner in the kitchen steams up for the dry end of  
tomorrow. A hollow rattling for next year's harvest.

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