touching the earth

rachelle wales
love’s body

her nightly glass is a spoonful of blood and milk, her hair bound in acres, tied with tumbled lakewind and tangled in piercing valleys, the caverns of other flesh. I carry her in my arms, walk past rumpled rain edges we’re not taught how to read, only catch and fold unfold and fold again. but my little love, she points at the ripple runes, reveals our names redefined in the fits of a slow fire. her three tongues have no trouble mouthing around the jagged sate-sweet of sound. with a spear-tipped ear she hears the tickled hum of a distant voice muffled belly sky and dark sunrise as i watch her teeth grow small and savage and white
the history of one

walking around in my head
at night and I remember what he
said, or might have said, or maybe did not

say at all: the form and pressure of time
is catastrophe. Look at the geometrical
order of it

the trickled fall a daily epic of desire and
self-deception, age of shams
and beauty.

street in my head begins to twist
and start a game of chicken with the
cars. A shadow of hands at a broken
wheel, and the play

moves in waves, on to another
town, another tide of cool-skinned
humanity, a paradise

at a distance, but also dangerous:
all of us a limed nature, a nightingale
bringing profit to the tree.
while
you're
soaping
your foot

we live mostly in agatha christie
novels, because that is the kind
of inside out you develop absolutely.
we spend hours peeling tape so
we don't notice the dead
foot, shiny and domestic. it knows
everything, a power in the house
a question of class, and we know
it must be from a child who drew
pictures of frogs, minerals and stars
thinking oh I’m going to be a doctor
thinking it’s possible not to make distinctions
but the foot stands for something
else, a pencil, a flower, a cake
unsharpened, unloved-me-not, a child
altogether uneaten by the color blue.

yes

it is possible that we
might walk through this
uncharted house with all
the windows and doors clear
and windblown and open; though
explicit in the we is the sliver
of a knife in unfinishableness
an allegiance to the unsealed
box, the count of glaciers.

and although i do feel
the way we make air
ankles tails and scents
infinitely expandable, a new
place, an inhabitance in which
something else is still able
to happen—i also know
we is a fragile pleasure, artist’s
charcoal, not ink: i chose this

land, a person testing the quality
of water, the root of alive. i know
to expect a clean cage continually revised
the patriarchy game

you shoot.
you avoid.

you assault the enemy
fortress. you must deliver
the final blow. it’s not hard to
understand. read the manual.

now, pause.

you are a homing missile,
i, the swirling city.
you have the power
to play, touch fire,

attack! and my favorite—
eat the extra.

i cannot stop myself, the sound of ripping,
cannot stop. i hear you and i must have
them all—voracious. i eat bit down hard
just to bare my teeth. rising against my
trespass, against the scarlet stain on lips.
wind, hungry for me, harsh against the
whippoorwill’s chant in his hidden thicket.
eating strawberries, the bright red sacrilege,
a conflagration of flesh and juices spilling
down fingers. mountains and the scent of
pricklypear move conspicuously. creature,
let my eyes devour you. the stone beneath
sighs, cracks smoothed out by the grit of
cadmium wind. hungry. come out. creature,
i hear you. flies dance an overt crown above
my head, share my stone. i hear you. there
is something in the brittlebrush, padding
around. there is the cold stone and desert
thorn-bush, the graveled shhick of tires, the
heavy thrum of bees. sound of dessication,
dead-dying cactus at my feet. yellow berries
on stark, starved stems, tall yellow wheat-
grass wasping in the snake hole, tonguing
like the wind.
this air is fraudulent, charged,
taste a wet band-aid. there is frost
in the air gap, broccoli florets in your
hair but this time, the sky will be the off
shade of blue, and full of last year’s soup
and you are an abscess waiting to be absolved
dissolved in thin gold. drink it!
pretend it’s just pre-filtered sunlight
darkflowering on the limb. as the flight
attendant calls, unbuckle the seatbelt, smash
out the window. smolder the cigarette of skin
and inhale thinness. feel it overtake your bones.

where the knot starts

at first i put up my hands, back away, say no i can’t do it. at first i am afraid of cutting
you. until you put the blade in my hands, a nervous silver animal in my hands you are
the steady glow of red and gold and your head in my hands is a land i’m not sure how
to walk across, finger-legs spreading open the patterns of your growth and finding
dark spots, a sky to be stuck to. until you put the blade in my hands i am afraid at first
of damage, a split end too small to see to make healthy. until you sat on the air condition-
ing unit outside with the swirling blades so close below, head bent forward, a sun
drawing blood i mean sweat from your neck at first a steady glut of wet and under my
hands i crave the small puddles forming, your saltwater soaking the channels of my
fingerprints.
saturday morning screening of *let me in*

raining quarters outside the window
and no one here, no one coming

voices stack on top of empty seats a dry
crackle in the dark. i am an earlymorning
bed, hair and head a strangle
of sheets, weak pillows and no one

coming. quarters stack outside
into a sudden puddle of sharp voices

as i wait in the belly of the building
watching wet crows pick at crumbs

from inside its mildewed throat and i
think the shine of knives. quarters

spread in floodwatch outside and wind
into towers, into the trunks of trees or

maybe bodies. i have seen the glint
of beveled eyes before and this seems no
different. quartercreatures creep up
to the door, clink heavy on glass and ask

me obscene questions. i see how quickly
they have drowned

out the crows. i see the skid of coin
on coin, saying no one here, no one

coming. i open the door, start stacking until
i too am only a brief scene of strange weather.
where the knot starts

at last i carve into you, watching in the same sun your son holding the kite, riding his trike deep into the marrow of afternoon. i chart a passage around your ear, a swirl of meat and almost-bone i want to eat your lobe gently dear, then served waxy cold and unable to listen. at first in my hands your hair is a minefield: any moment, my hands, my silver animal might get lost in its rough terrain, might only make it back home in small pieces and you are in my hands, strands of hair splintering the humid breeze into my skin you are into me like pain like itch like sting you are agony and there is nothing to tweeze. at first i am afraid of cutting you. at first i am afraid of wanting to.

how to pull a ship from harbor

she is a square lung removing glass, making weather an uncomplicated notation. circling light, a gull carries her diaphragm in a microscope; sleeveless, he understands the function of isolation, of faces implied by margins. she is otherwise the triviality of changes, issuing forth fingers which can find how to pull a ship from harbor; soundless within the fire, her skirt is a brief husk, trees never permitted to enter the soil.
a subscript

moon-man. my creak and crinkle.

i am his daily empty, a mouse-nibbled

hole. i am the wash of his shoulders

the puzzled crater of his knees. i

know exactly how to carve
daylight. this is the last upright

bed, and yes, we are a bit unclothed
(just shadow) but rising

he holds my face, a riddled cup in his

hands and in breath-melt i oxidize, i

know exactly how he could scrape the red

metal from me, if he wanted.

where the knot starts

the thorns must be pushed out slowly, over time. i'm told you have to develop callouses, i

have to explain to your son these callouses. at first i am afraid of string, of hot string in

summer tied at once to you and to me and to him and at first i wonder where the knot

starts, where the spool begins, where it runs out pulls taut fire between our fingers, a burn

at first i am afraid of blistering, at first i am afraid of raw. until you asked me to cut into

you, find your dark mole madnesses and splintered light. it is now, blistered, burning and

bloody, that we might lose the kite to tree or sky, to the ear of wind or the nervous silver of

oncoming night. at first i am afraid of going inside. i am afraid of staying out.
woodstove

you brother, you father, i sister. a photograph barely clothed, bellies and bars of shadow. you father told us wait. smoke.

you brother, i sister. a squatting thin light. you father, arms and arms and arms to split wood, make us warm, say wait. smoke.

you brother, you father, i sister. see smoke. see sleeprats scribbling. maybe hungry. but smoke.

you father, open, cold.

you brother, you father, i sister. a truck of hot bodies, open mouths. toddler-teeth scars keep track of youwin-iwin.

you father, not alone.

you brother, you father, i sister. dusk remembers our eyes.

i sister. a piled stack of wood. watching not sleeping. mouth closed. staving off. hot. want to be open.

want to be cold. not waiting.

you father, axe blade showing. here. hold on this way.

i sister, hard to find where to cleave. hard to count with new teeth. want to say wait.

without marks on skin, want to say you fire, you father, you brother youwin-iwin.

what someone meant to say is

mountains inside belly, rupture of rock rubbling under. shards stinging gut say give birth to new name wrapped in trails of dust and rock. in mouth of hermit cave, taste footprints and blood. someone wanting to listen a little closer to ground, someone saying sun won't come up and eat out of hands; someone trusting in the body

of joshua tree; someone has forgotten name. mountains tug in belly, in belly, in belly. say open legs, keep walking uphill. someone learning right way to lick cactus: someone pours dust in hot circle. someone unseen strokes skin, scrapes old ash onto foreheads. sun indictswim-womb worship: keep it

empty; hide night fires. but hungry. but here. someone dancing barefoot on bones of hermit. someone trying to say goodbye, splintering toes. forgot: half-buried in hermit’s shed skin. it hisses in wind but too deep to be warned. forgot: mountains don’t have sharp bruit of music, but still, flush of cheeks. say move in new formation. like lizard on sunrock, lose homely tail. but someone teaching about power of swirl, someone inventing envelope to dress in private paper. someone reading cloud runes in winter. someone saying more than page of rough weather. mountains sketch insides; someone picks up intestine, wraps it tight around neck to keep warm.
promise

this is an earth we were thought to bury into, a den full of ourselves.
here, fire next to skin, a flickering sheet

of music showing south by a tattered corner edge in the dark.
his bare spine curves—not a compass or key but

a false stairway for fingers and completely hollow, his back is springsnow and scalding. my hands play dry flowers, unbent skin stems, thin

brown leaves: inside, the shovel of flame; inside, the red bite of log. i am intending to puncture. i am under his still, arched feet.