Prophet Syndrome
A Collection of Poetry

By Valerie Muensterman
Class of 2020
PROPHET SYNDROME

A COLLECTION OF POEMS

how do you like your blue-eyed boy

Mister Death

- E. E. Cummings
AND-OUT

An angel
passed out fluorescent
black tooth of street
his infant face
nuzzled cardboard
rooting ’s teat.
People thought drunk
we called bull tempting
appetite fried
sign sickness
prophet syndrome
mellow halo
, gravity.

He smelled so bad.
Depraved body of
pockets patch gashes
containing human if
radio static faces
, his sketchpad.

We frisked him found
madcap images
of us gawking, railing,
calling home help and
in sick, slipping, sinking,
sunk, falling out and
down
how many for
’s likeness?
He grinned his teeth
flicked cards
One? Endless?
, Three?

Rounding corners
we met over palm nets
extended as begging
if food would even
swell him when ’s comes
open-throated consuming
Motel’s ecstatic surge Blink.
An angel left open-tongued
sucked up in the mouth
of night illuminated
and the sign
got the last word
, NO VACANCY.
AFTER PERSONA
*Inspired by Bergman*

You and I, these frail interchangeable bodies
my skin your mouth my hands your ass except

the part of you that leaks is me
shivering on rocks like a kid.

It’s true, I’m the lucky one.
Your burnt-stylish mole stops no
twigged sand nose line toward my
mouth, sorry like silent animal tracks.

Always, fear is learned; people met spiders
in fists of dirt until we found a teacher.

My nose in mirrors sickeningly starts to
resemble yours. If you break it, I’ll kiss

your husband, or mine, or anyone’s really –
can’t I lie in the sand, for once, like lack?

To compromise faces renders symmetry;
to compromise souls renders waste.

Grind this sand between your palms
at the temperature of lightning, and you’ll get

beer glass broken from my blood. Drink and
you’ll drain the old self out the bottom.
THE DEPRESSION

My wife and I take our weekly lap around three decrepit mental hospitals, a three-point route we call the Depression, gasping, spitting to ward off disaster #2. Now is her favorite time of day: sunset, or her other favorite time of day: sunrise.

Her favorite daytimes lack people, like the bodies of these tired buildings whose drywalls lick the water-smoked air.

Hospital chambers lock in old voices. Is the sound cruel, or comforting? With children, at least screaming means one is alive enough to scream. Remember how Stephen would call for us, seeing things at night?

When we met, we got loud and bothered people and delighted in not caring. Now, I prop my legs to make blood flow.

I read in a magazine that hearing voices is the sensory mirror to touch – your vocal cords vibrate, then your throat travels through air to find my ear, which the brain steams over to process as a motive.

I jabber when I want to touch her, but once again, I’ve spilled my breath and rasp like leaves against concrete.

Our house feels more and more like a hospital at night. These walls carry the cracks of voices, even imagined ones.
FLOOD WARNING

Bitter breath. Ohio’s
Hot with salty sewage.
I hear the beaten fringe
Of flung gravel cracking. Burnt-
Gray, the river’s rubble
Flung like fur down the Ohio.
Hesitate. We run deliveries
Parts of used cars when the engine went
Last June. Above the fuming hood branches broke
Down by water stood, rain smell. . .
I want him.
I. In dream prognosis
   a matter of minutes
   I go I soothe fate
   in the bathroom.
   All that’s mine,
   I vomit into the sink:
   my keys, my luggage, my job.
   I gargoyle my life out
   with salt water.

II. An adjacent mirror
   he shaves his neck
   smells of lotion
   my face radiates
   into his back
   I clasp him
   even if it’s like
   touching a
   surgical table.
   He swats his
   razor into the sink.

III. I bite his neck,
    sucking like
    an infant
    at a sore breast.
    I suck. I am
    the parasite,
    unable to
    stop till
    he crumples,
    spilled out.
    The tiles become
    a broken womb.

    I know it is
    my illness,
    this hunger,
    which draws the
    being out of him.
    I weep I take
    my strong medicine.
    My miserable lips
    are cracked with life.
STAGE DIRECTIONS FOR THE PAINTER’S HANDS

[ Last thought to emerge a forehead! the face’s slate from stringy from stitches of body fabric If bodies operate in one long stroke if stroke conveys motion scratches like prayers in sweat-sunk mounds of earth Your partings crane on the conversation continuum spit on sour-sapped breakage – au revoir, kwaheri auf wiedersehen, talk later! When he goes do not say to him just adjust sinews or sin the sloppy-sung crease. Paint language impossibly translated. Move fast, rely on death of now to smoke-signal a bone-tinged color dance Freehand the forgotten in the musked minds of gray-gone sequence Preserve him in your oily image. ]
POEM IN WHICH THE LAST BATTLE HAPPENS IN MY YARD

Whenever I dream
that I am dying,
the end comes
and sight goes out.
My imagination dies
in that death
with my dream body.

Out the window,
shadows shuffle
across the field
and I am afraid,
these figures,
clothed in black
holding nothing.

I attack them
pulling off
their endless masks
a hundred plastic
attachments.

Inside the mirror,
my face turns blue.
My hair, red,
obscurces the blood
but not the itch
of dried crust
on my wild skull.

I am eating breakfast
with my mother, outdoors.
What will we do? I ask
and nod toward the yard.
You died last night,
remember? she says.
I didn’t want
to tell anyone yet.