



precious

poems

Shannon Flower

energy

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Shannon Bramer poems  
energy

FIRST EDITION

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## WHITE PAPER BIRDS

Sometimes you have to breastfeed your kid  
even when you don't feel like breastfeeding

your kid. Near the end of her feed she pulls off  
to look at you with her round eyes and you don't

look away. Sometimes you have to sing  
your kid to sleep even when you don't feel up

to any song. When you put her down she  
cries, she always cries. You pick her up when

you are a piece of glass. You kiss her  
and kiss her and pick her up and put her down

and kiss her again like a wolf.

You are a real mother.  
You don't kick or break any toys

on purpose. And you don't scream and you don't weep.  
Your baby grows. You've got a shiny red shovel

for all your shitty feelings.

You've got a daughter with a broken lip  
where she's been biting down.

The house is full of nests. Tiny piles of torn  
newsprint, a million crumpled swans

swimming down the stairs. Another life  
folded inside each paper bird.

## FIRST SNOW

Going home the small icy way you said it hurt her  
She walked away he could see her open  
You didn't understand and then wanted  
Did you dream about her again yes did she call  
Her hands and we didn't wait for it to start snowing

The car was parked poorly she needed help  
No if you touch me again you won't be able to  
Look everywhere for her boots where did you put  
It down and the mice are trapped so you know  
Inside her over it now and home

Did you say the laundry was incomplete  
What will we do with her medication  
Wait if you can to help fold and put them  
She is not going to come back is she did he do  
Something wrong he said it had nothing

Up against the window her head felt  
Cold before she started following me downstairs  
When you pushed her away so I could cook  
Dinner properly

## ABOUT A WEDDING

Pete should have been invited. There were poets. Customers. My mother wore a tuxedo. We had to watch our numbers, so no children. No Pete. I felt a bit sloppy. My dress had spaghetti straps that kept slipping from my shoulders. We had a rectangle for a table instead of a circle, which still bothers me when I think about it. It was October. I don't regret the chrysanthemums or the devilled eggs sprinkled with cumin; I wish I got to have one. The church was a choice, like folk music. Like Tom Waits. I'm happy to remember dancing with my two fathers at once, because now I have none. No Pete of the horses and trees. My stepsisters refused to show up. The chocolate cake tasted like a funeral home. One of my bridesmaids puked in the limo. None got on my dress but a bit got in my hair. That's how it goes with weddings. Pete should have been invited and Harriet, clever Harriet, shouldn't have been there at all.

### THREE DIORAMAS

*It's not an easy oblivion, for example sometimes I still love my collarbones*

Tipsy is a baby buried in a tree

Passed-out is a solitary swan in the basement, forgetting light

Oblivion   a bruise   the size of a cruise ship   shitfaced   shit

faced   is a mother of three   a mother of three I said

*What's wrong with me is also what's wrong with my mother*

I cry straight into his eyelashes I pee through my new dress

I kiss her hands I fold laundry I can't move

Your grandson is growing like a tombstone

She plays with tomatoes she smells green like vines

I love dirt I hate dirt on his noodles don't worry once

the bunnies black out you might have some sex

a husband stop hiding your purse be resilient

my bunnies my babies



*We touch the gills of the girl who left her sisters*

little faces, fingers    after supper we love

our iridescent mermaids    dish soap bubbles

sea foam    after I dry my hands

a few petals drop from the lilies on the table

it's a story of resignation    verisimilitude

we touch the silent girl

once upon a time    she had all the things i wanted

a father    a brother    a beautiful voice

her tail turns to legs    she misses her tail

her poor legs hurt

oh mama                      they hurt all the time

## PRECIOUS ENERGY: A TRIPTYCH

*dazzling white towels the size of blankets*

I think towels are revealing. If I go to someone's house to sleep and they say—oh, I've left some towels on the bed—I race right over to see them. I like when towels match, are fluffy. Suzanne (who is still single) has dazzling white towels the size of blankets. Jennifer and her husband Tim keep two kinds of towels: buttery yellow hooded towels for their three small children and thick green (sage?) towels for themselves and their guests. I was drunk at a party they had recently and stumbled into their walk-in linen closet. They had beautiful sheets and pillowcases, too. I stayed in there for a long time.

*a generous woman with shabby towels*

My towels, on the other hand, look like the towels of someone who has given up. When people stay with us I always give each guest at least three towels. I insist on providing clean towels every day. I'm generous with my towels even if the towels themselves are shabby. My husband and I have never spent money on good towels. Whenever we find ourselves in a place where we might buy some new ones we always change our minds or pretend to forget. I pretend to forget. I don't think my husband cares about towels. He often uses the same one for weeks before deciding to take a fresh one. I pretend to forget about my desire for new towels because I don't want to ask him for extra money. I don't want him to know that I'm thinking about towels, or my friends' towels. That I'm *wasting my precious energy*, as he might put it. I'd rather buy some expensive wine and drink that and forget about whatever it is I think I might want.

*the pink towel of a little girl*

My uncle Steve used to give me a new towel every Christmas: a high-quality, cotton towel. As soon as I finished university and got engaged, he stopped with the towels. Perhaps he thought that once I got married my husband would look after the towels, or maybe he thought we might get a bunch at our wedding. At that time I was overloaded with mismatched towels; I didn't put any on the gift registry. I was so young! I didn't think it suited me to have things that matched. I'd never even heard of Martha Stewart. None of my friends owned houses. My uncle's towels are the ones we still use. There are nine of them. They are navy blue, maroon, teal, and brown. There are also four with black and white zebra stripes, and one pink one—the first he ever got me. They are forlorn towels. They are soft with age, worn. The pink one smells like our six-year old daughter. On a good day I truly love our towels; I indulge myself and think of them as beautiful. And anyway we keep them despite our malaise, despite our scorn.

## RECTANGLES

A little girl with heavy brown bangs  
had no trouble eating her  
fava beans. She drank her milk straight  
down with a blue straw and shovelled  
potatoes and paprika into her mouth  
without paying much attention to her  
parents, without worrying about how  
full she was getting, or how tall she might  
be growing, or how pretty she was, or  
how ugly, or how smart. She ate without  
ceremony, without thinking about school  
or her spelling homework. Briefly, her mind  
touched on summertime: goldenrod, dragonflies.  
And then, after a particularly large mouthful  
of potato she started musing about paprika, how  
she liked the bright, burnt red of Hungarian  
paprika, and thought it wonderful that it  
tasted the same way it looked: warm.

When she got to the fish sticks she hesitated. They had come from a box, now crushed in the recycling bin. They were perfect little rectangles, easy to cut into squares, or pick up whole—dunked and dipped in relish and mayonnaise. Crunchy on the outside and white and flaky on the inside. She heard her mother say to her father: *as far as fish sticks go, these are the best you can get*. She saw the fish on her plate before it was shaped into a stick. She tried to calculate how many fish there might be in a box of sixteen fish sticks. Then she thought about discarded fish eyes, floating in a puddle in the fish stick factory. She remembered the yellow bucket her grandfather used to take fishing, the way she liked to smell it and then try to change its smell by filling it with dirt, rocks, flowers and sticks. She ate quietly, concentrating on swallowing. She did not look at her parents. She felt alone at the table with her little prayer for a million fish mashed up to make one lousy stick.