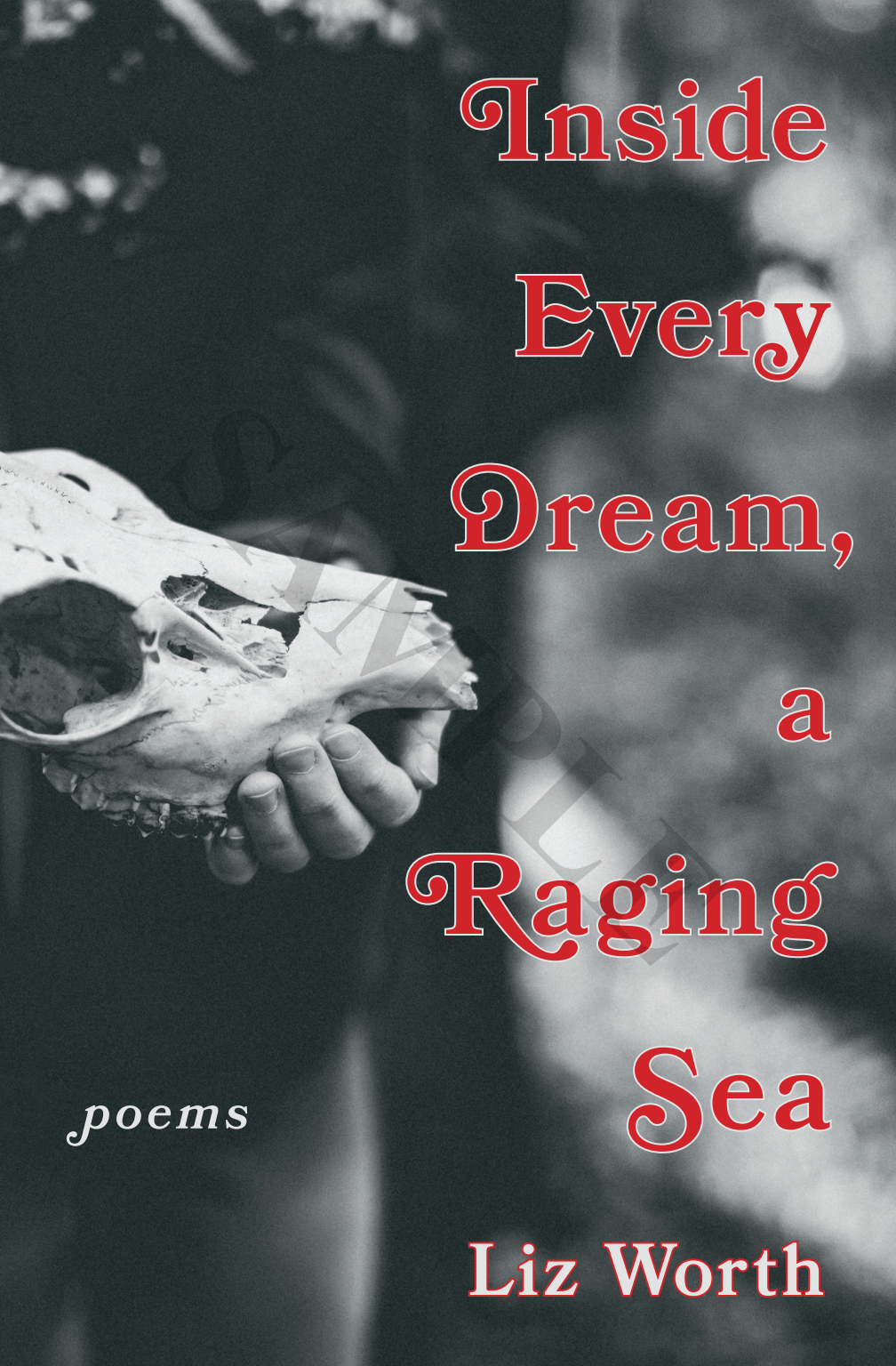
Inside
Every
Dream,
a
Raging
Sea
poems
Liz Worth

Inside Every Dream, a Raging Sea

Liz Worth

I Don't Want It Like I Used To

1.

I find you gasping at my front door, expecting to come in. Can't you see the mess that's already been made? You expect me to clean up after you, too? You want to go digging up old magic, that's your business. It'll be your problem when you don't like what you find. You know I sweep these steps for a reason, but these seeds still manage to find ways to take root.

There are so many things I never wanted to give life to. Too much has already grown from this house.

2.

Shut your mouth: That spell hasn't worked in a long time. Those memories? Pale wishes.

You used to think you could do it alone. And for a while, you did.

Isolation erodes all meaning. You weren't sure whether you were living your own reality anymore, or lost in someone else's. You needed to come back home.

Look at you now. The scorch of your movements, the fluidity of your gaze. When will you tell me where you've been?

3.

Let me show you the true shape of my mouth, its curves and circles.

I don't dream like I used to. I can't picture when it all stopped. Probably around the same time I started to wonder if other people's lives were like mine: piles of paper scattered around the house, drawers that could never be cleared out, hours dwindling to bare threads.

A blister on the inside of my foot, a monument to the time I've wasted.

Once, I touched my finger to my knee and a thousand tiny moons spilled out around my ankles.

When was the last time you saw me in the daylight? Sorry, I shouldn't ask questions like that. My words don't work the way they once did. I could have been imitating wolves instead of performing so many emotions, but now it's too late.

My body never should have bent like that. Contorting to fit into places I never wanted to be in.

See there, where the bruise won't heal? I can't keep my finger out of there no matter how much it hurts. But when I close my eyes, I see flowers, great flourishes of red and purple and, just for a second, I almost start to dream.

Other Half

What are these photographs you've left me with:
your thumb in the wrinkle near my mouth,
a new understanding of what my frame can hold.

The way I saw myself, later:
thick with deception,
aged from wear.
I was never what you thought I was.
Still, you slept here,
left an unfinished story
beneath my feet.

Look, I shouldn't have been doing all of this with
wet hands, too much to hold on to.
And now it's all slipped away.

Walls take their time to talk.
If I sit here long enough maybe
I will finally learn that not everything
has to be said at once.

And when it was my turn to speak, oh:
so many lies have come out of me.
Enough of a web to be woven into something new.
Every strand, spun into the shape of another woman.

She looks just like me, lives the life I once had.
She's always hungry; I feed her constantly.
You probably heard her in the kitchen after you went to bed.
We've both got you fooled, impossible to tell us apart, the way she laughs at the right times and stays so busy.
You don't notice I'm not even here anymore.

I made myself so small
to sustain this other life but
I'd started disappearing long before she ever arrived.
I'd lent myself out to other fictions,
didn't know how thin it would make me.

Every day I lose a few more of my verses.
I don't write like I used to.
I can't get back to the way things were.
I can't fit into my old shape, I'm just enough
to thread myself through the needle that sews me shut:
cross my heart and hope to die.

Fear is a false food that burns more than it gives.
I watch for faces I wish weren't familiar.

Unravel these threads, the knots in the back of my hair.
Help me dry my hands. Show me that they have been washed enough
and that something can still be mine.

Not Everything at Once

What did you learn of my life, reading too much into the coffee stains on my papers, patterns of dust on the bathroom mirror.

Every night I close my eyes and let the sun's last hour burn the day off my lids.

We used to wander for hours on Sundays.

Around here the streets have no sidewalks. People look at me from their car windows as though I'm breaking a rule.
I have six words written on the first page of a notebook. I can't take them further than that.

In my kitchen, I bend spoons, take inventory of what's already been used, the parts of me that once had a tale to tell.
I didn't come all this way to write books my mother would like. At least empty cupboards are easy to entertain.

You were the one who wanted a strange future. But that wish was the wrong spell. I knew it the second you said it. We were outside the supermarket. As the statement left your mouth an old woman lifted her finger to the sky, clutching a rock to her chest with the other hand. Her grip crushed it to sand.

I have since learned to relax, arms settled at my sides, eyes easily lost in thrift-store portraits of faded grins.

Sometimes I think that my tongue is a bone that *clack-clack-clacks* the questions I'd rather not ask.

You understand now why I wouldn't take your call. If I sit here long enough this place will finally tell me something.

I still wear the silver necklace you gave me. It looks different, too, its delicate chain flawed with the bloom of tarnish.

Do I still sound the same, at least?

Places like this aren't what you think they are. Up close the white vinyl siding is always stained with dirt. The grass is thin; you can see the earth between the blades. The whir of the bus route three blocks away is enough to wake you just as you're falling asleep.

What is it that you couldn't find? Does this feeling ever leave, the one that says there must be more, always more than this?

Anticipation

Three winds rise up these hills. Can you feel the difference between them?

I can, but only if I close my eyes and listen—hard—to the hum of the sun.

Trees used to grow here. See? Their stumps are nearly buried under all this grass.

Give me a taste of something I had once. The flesh of a peach in August, the juice on my chin. I used to hate the stickiness of anything on my face.

I walked all night once just to see what might happen. The birds sang themselves awake. Someone held my hand and I thought *Please don't let this end*, but dawn isn't known for keeping promises.

Not that I kept very many myself. Turns out none of us do. But to admit it means losing the hope of having anything to look forward to.

There comes a time when it gets harder to be excited for the future. You look too young to know such things, though. You shouldn't be here yet. It's too early.

Go. Forget what I told you about those winds. There's nothing to hear in them, nothing more to look for than your own sense of time.

Maybe, Sometimes

I read your letter. Twice.
It was full of sand and grated the tips of my fingers.

A poem came to my throat,
tasting of pale petals.
I swallowed it carefully. Later,
it blossomed into the unexpected,
a birth I never wanted.

Tonight, the sky is a colour it has
never shown me before.
I want to reach out, take hold of
its clouds. But I dare not:
look at these hands,
the messes they make.

I'm not who I'd planned to be.
Maybe that's what ghosts are:
rejections, unmet expectations.

Thunderclap, my pulse
a wave against rock.
A sore inside my cheek
where certain pleas have become ingrown.
I still worry about
the same things I always did:
sore throats and early appointments,
running out of time.

What shape would I take
if I were thrust into the sky?
I am not a crescent moon.
There are too many things within
that I can't satisfy.

Do you think maybe, sometimes,
you could hang a purple scarf over your lamp?
Leave the curtains open.
I will stand on the sidewalk.
You don't even have to come out.
Just imagine me as a woman
in a white dress, lightning in her hair.