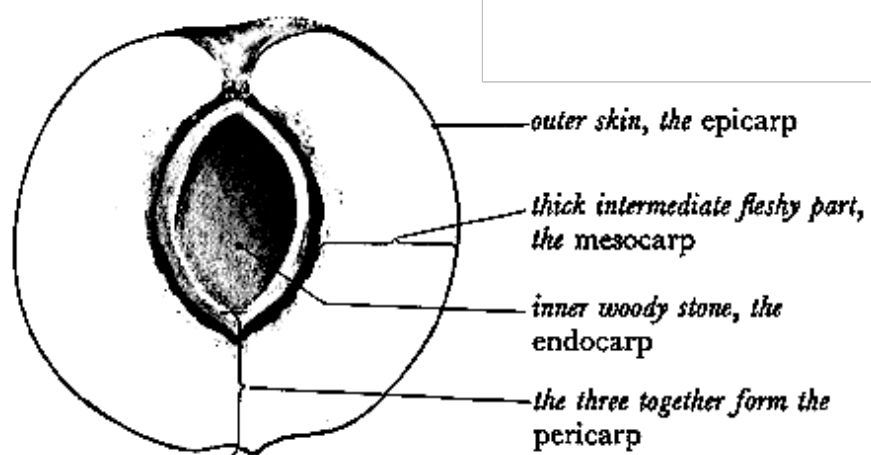


BRUISED FLESH



“BRUISED FLESH”

POEMS ABOUT ROTTING FRUIT

by

Joanie St-Kaminsky

To share is an act of love.

To be named for your work is an act of love.

Thank you for reading.

Share at your will.

Reiterated, 6th ed.

5784/2024 • Joanie St-Kaminsky

Prior iterations of “Esoterica” and “when Once I asked for sunlight”
originally appeared in *Headwaters*, 2018-2019.

bruised flesh was originally published

5778/2018.

joanie.tripodi.kaminsky@gmail.com

www.joaniestkaminsky.com

“Section through a peach.”

reproduced from

The Encyclopedia of Botany

by David Darling.

2016 © David Darling

daviddarling.info

For Mark Andrew Jordan
1963-2016

And butterfly bush,
which is invasive

You don't get to decide

when you leave this world

table of contents

WE HAD A GREAT STAY	2
IN THIN AIR	6
THE BODY BETRAYS YOU	7
OPPORTUNITY	9
THE WIND	10
ESOTERICA	11
FLOWERS IN MOONLIGHT	13
STANDING NEXT TO A TREE THAT LASTS IN WINTER	14
ABEL AS A GIRL NAMED DOROTHY	15
MILLENNIUM	16
NOW AND THEN	18
OUTRAGEOUS GLORY	19
THE HAYLOFT	20
WHEN ONCE I ASKED FOR SUNLIGHT	22
RECITING THE SHEMA TO MYSELF IN THE TOMATO GARDEN ON CHRISTMAS EVE	23

BRUISED FLESH

WE HAD A GREAT STAY

The world keeps spinning
beneath the orange skies and pine needles
winded daffodils the world keeps spinning

against the ocean of robin redbreasts
Peregrine falcon swooping down
for the squirrel the world keeps spinning

No matter how many times the trees
collapse on power lines across the road,
No matter how short I cut my hair

or whether I really loved you
or felt anything that deeply, whether
I felt anything at all, or if the sidewalks

where the buckling wind carried howls
of church bells and stripped tree bark
on whatever street was St. Sylvia

with the luminous pines or were they
oaks? And if there were even cicadas
that year the world keeps spinning,

I never pause to steal a second
glance into the kvetching maw
of the things I have lost,

rather say I've lost
nothing the world keeps spinning
around nothing, around nothing

and cry out *Can anybody hear me?*
Imagine some voice *I do, child* the world keeps
spinning though it was never constant more like

the fog swirled around the mountains
nestled in its arms dissolved
by the sun eight minutes the world

keeps spinning for all its blue skies, really
it's not so much about loss anymore
is it, there's always more

oil, another 200 years, a valley
in which Rip Van Winkle sleeps and
never wakes the world keeps spinning

and from above in the autumn
the trees beside the Hudson Bridge
like a fishhook my father tosses

himself off the world keeps spinning
no matter how much is lost,
the cat never comes back,

My father is dead and I still want
his almanac with the days it rained
the world keeps spinning and spirals

Earth's mantle wide like a musketball
in Harris' cornfield leveled by war
reenactments where we shot off

the fireworks, the red skies
the warning light, the apocalyptic
non-sequiturs the world keeps

spinning even as it tenses, rears back
and weeps for G-d and all the wasted
time the world keeps spinning, a kid

again in the autumn drizzle, in Red Hook,
spinning until I'm dizzy and the parade
is going by and it's Thanksgiving,

then it's Christmas the world keeps
spinning even as the stars blink out
and the ground falls out from beneath

our feet, were we dancing or trying
to keep warm? Now the warmth rising
like steam off asphalt every summer

you took the world keeps spinning
against my will, no matter how many times
I tell myself it's a bad dream it's over

this is the morning, I wish I could stop looking
for signs and wonders, for Flex Mentallo
in the jawline of every Luke Skywalker-

looking twink the world
keeps spinning and first it's the
JC Penney and then the high school

atrium I want to float above myself
and then the UFOs, CD-ROMs, LEDs,
really I wanted so badly to believe

but all that's left is two cans of sweetcorn in the pantry,
somebody I really should have fallen in love with
if only I hadn't been so exhausted, a motel marquee that reads

WE HAD A GREAT STAY
EVERYONE WAS FRIENDLY
AND WELCOMING,

The laughter of my old friends
bubbling up like reflux in my throat.

IN THIN AIR

It's Field Day again.
The leaves careen like Challenger,
in thin air, and gore the blue
track gold through the fog.
You squirm with rotting Cheerios.

You forgot your gymshorts.
Who pulled the dream from you?
The stars worm into seagulls
and split their fledgling wings,
scouring the cape for carrion.

Coach mouths skyward:
*I don't want to claim
anyone's love.*

THE BODY BETRAYS YOU

This city has gapped teeth and I'm between
them, my back against one marble fang.
I've walked through museums without reading
the signs on the exhibits, I've walked down stairs
without looking down once. Without looking down once.
The jaw of this city will eventually swing shut.
I mean like krill sucked into the mouth
of a baleen whale. Shut without opening.

I am choking myself on myself.

The body betrays you. It calls
what you don't call desire desire,
sustains attention long as the
bladder's empty, confuses the dream
with the blind-slanted moment of waking.
A moment changes shape the second
it's remembered, and you really gotta focus
to remember how it happened. Without feeling.

Whoever's at my door better swallow me whole.

Careful what you call embodied,
if you're giving body to the bodiless;
if you tell lies and the body betrays you.
What do you mean to say with your breath?
I don't want to want but I want to want you.

Time stretches tender new skin
over lesions millimeters deep and crosses
its fingers we don't pick the scab off this time.

And time eludes us, lest we pay it forward.

OPPORTUNITY

chunky bird on the wire, come in
little bird, window's open, yellow bird
come in, come in
let the sparrow to his screeching
and the flying ants to die in pools of sugar

the crow tells you don't trust
the chirruping cat or conditioned
breeze he says come back, the window
is closed chunky bird, yellow bird
come back, come back

when you are but feathers
come in, come in
and let the sparrow to his wailing
and the flying ants to fuck and drop their wings
and the crow to cry don't listen come in

THE WIND

Blow me suggests that I am the wind:
pressure wanting stillness moves, and you
are something rigid enough to sway.

This being the vocation of wind,
work done to weeds. A dandelion
parting the grass, scattering its seed.

ESOTERICA

Something is following me.
Sometimes I open a door
and there's just another room, and sometimes
it should be the backyard but it's lexical darkness
and I can feel it stirring. The stars I can see but there's
something between them, something massive, something
with amble fingers. Feeling along the ridges of timelines.
It will find me eventually. It leaves me notes. It asks me
to define *door*, and I write back: *something you slide notes under*.
It shows me rooms I haven't seen. It makes me feel small.
It makes its nest of language and the deeper it sleeps,
the more difficult it becomes to *articulate* I am at a loss
for words, wandering what's left of the Hudson Valley
to forage fresh image-food. It asks for *room*
knowing I can't give it that. Instead I give it *home*.
It chews on that for awhile. They tore down the old
auditorium, so when I open the door I expect the darkness
but instead I see the blue room. I sit second chair.
I play the trombone. I've forgotten the fingerings.
The beast helps me with my scales. It remembers
what my muscles don't: *ligature, pianissimo, with feeling*.
We work our way through *Night on Bald Mountain*.
The poem will not break. The poem will not break.
I feed the darkness music but it wants more words.
There's a note under my door this morning: define *memory*.
I write back: *the process of telling a lie*. Then I open the door
and the darkness yawns: DEFINE GUEST. I have to think about that.

“Guest is someone who drinks your coffee and knows they have to leave.”

Then the fingers run through my hair: *I’ve never seen a boy
with such beautiful hair can I take a picture with you
or — excuse me, I’m sorry, what are you?*

But the beast does not ask what I am.

It just runs preadamite fingers through my timeline.

It says, HOW DO YOU TAKE YOUR COFFEE.

I reply, “*room* is where I come to you.”

FLOWERS IN MOONLIGHT

are just unnatural. Especially white flowers,
which is why I stomp the morning glory

whenever I notice the buds uncurling.
I'm thinking about being buried alive,

being half-buried, here in the khaki field,
just my legs gnawed by the night-bugs

I find beneath the river stones. What
ran through this field—lovers, rivers,

maybe foundation—nibbles my toes.
The stars turn and it's making me sick.

G-d, if you're looking to write a song,
compose in the key of a car alarm.

STANDING NEXT TO A TREE THAT LASTS IN WINTER

I.

We move backwards through the scriptures
and the universe feels swollen, like the squirrel carcass
I found by the road last week after Sunday school.
I'm standing next to a tree that lasts in winter.

II.

I keep dreaming about locusts. October comes
and withers, we move through Exodus and I feel
extradited. We'll leave when Mom stops talking.
I'm standing next to a tree that lasts in winter.

III.

Isaac makes sense, but I'm stuck on Job.
My father's been researching UFOs.
I talk to G-d more the less I believe in G-d.
I'm standing next to a tree that lasts in winter.

IV.

The first week of Advent, Mom reads us Genesis
from Grandma's bible. A pressed leaf falls out.
I think it was maple. I thought you'd live forever.
I'm standing next to a tree that lasts in winter.

ABEL AS A GIRL NAMED DOROTHY

Somebody is tapping their heels
together in the hallway one, two
three times and it's concrete
and I'm crushed, somebody else
please take my place in the field

and I will give the gift of life, Lamb
in the place of my blood on Cain's tongue,
the sweet, sweet honey of a high school kiss
that is between the Lord and I, banging
the same rhythm on the timpani,

one, two, three times *there's no place like home*
and I won't go back there, there is the memory
of a lightsaber tucked under my armpit
(for all intents through my chest),
my sweet Cain bashing my head in with a rock,

such devotion, such love as siblings
seldom give. As I bled, I saw G-d watching
Cain uprooting wild onions and understood
for the first time what He meant by *innocence*.

MILLENNIUM

'99 was the glitch.
The world soft-reset
what should have been fatal
error, and webs of glitches
spool on memories of a childhood
that maybe happened or didn't,
like say, a Dutchess County Fair teddy
bear twice my size crossing the stairwell
I saw it! It doubled back
to look at me! I swallowed a penny.
Heads up. Or like the kitten when she turned
surfaceless, cylindrical, lemon-white, black-robed.
Things like that. Impossible things. I remember Y2K
even if I can't, events are viral, they spread
like a Drudge Report headline, proto-clickbait,
across a ThinkPad bogged with adware
and no Norton immune system.
Early that decade Earth hadn't shot
the house on Deer Run; now it's turned
over twice and Google shows strangers' cars
parked outside, and a decimated forest.
Now words get tangled up in my thumbs,
and though they tried the Maricis couldn't teach
me the cat's cradle. I really shouldn't be surprised
at this point when my voice glitches
and whole decades get caught in my throat.
I probably should have started smoking

when the tens began. Glitch is the sound
of iteration, and if you've been listening,
you should already hear it.

NOW AND THEN

*No water for horses,
not in this weather*

commiserant:

your rainbow back arcs
against a bailing sky
I can't even ask you this,
decked as I am in coveralls

the conch shell drones the ocean
and I know it's just white noise

but I can taste it,
so what makes it real?
splayed out in a field
of wicked-tooth daffodils
sly-grinned,
skin soft as condoms,
my face pressed on your fist

smoking, as it were, clove cigarettes
because I keep my promises some

I search the clouds for horses
and when it gets dark, I search the ground

OUTRAGEOUS GLORY

In the musk-thickets, we are just like deer
devouring cardamom, dreaming of wonderful spices.
A man approaches, thick with debt
like he's just stepped from the dust of collections,
moving like an eviction notice—summer hangs
pungent and semen once more, before it finally
heaves inward, groans ecstatically, and I am dimly aware
this is over. We are broke again. It's November. I'm thinking
about repression—trying not to think—trying not to
panic—like a wild deer—I know these boots
I got on credit might someday leave me homeless.
I see you waiting like a carrion-feeder, you must be
humongous, to keep all that poverty down,
if I could gorge myself so empty I would retch.
Maybe in California I can drive to California.
If, at the end of my life, I find myself in Spokane,
and in Spokane, in the company of friends, let's drive
down to the redwoods. We putter like electric kettles.

I'll brew us a strong pot of cardamom tea,
and we can talk this thing through.

THE HAYLOFT

deciduous forest
decadent, decayed

all the pale glory

your veins
cracking tendrils

thawed
stream
bed

i bite down hard,
taste metal

hope it runs like
melted copper melted
caramel

carve our initials
in the chestnut trees

(the ones marked
with pink ticker tape)

the trail is lost
or whatever

pretend you
haven't forgot

the resonant consonance
stands in solidarity with
the pain that vowel insists

was always there

(i was always scared
of you, just sometimes

)

i grew fangs
bit my lips

resonance,
an echo

in the field where
the pink ticker tape blew

where the oak tree
once stood, proud

turned, walked away

WHEN ONCE I ASKED FOR SUNLIGHT

When once I woke entangled in shade

light moves pleated through the pokeberries

And let the dishes soak till they vinegar'd

awash the guiding hand of light is love

There's no lightning-soup, I'm sorry, just being—

the way that things have always been

Now it's just the way you remember them

the stream still runs, defiant of life less love

What the heron I met when I was less a virgin

light still running through that stream, love

Would have made of the way I loved?

in the last dream, I am sitting on a couch

across a dark bar, waiting for your shift to end.

RECITING THE SHEMA TO MYSELF
IN THE TOMATO GARDEN ON CHRISTMAS EVE

Today I am listening to *War of the Worlds* again,
thinking about the street-sweeper outside the Eckerd
in the Bronx I washed every Wednesday who told me
Every Wednesday the leaves'll be falling from the
trees soon the ends of times are near.

I am old now. There are weeds in the garden
of my life. The sky's my olive branch, and you
are the child I would have slain on the mountain,
because I knew you'd understand. If only to be
star-footed again! The trees in the woods
in the yard are not nearly so dense as you thought,
child, you must have known, I took you down
the mountain on a sled in the trees through the woods—
Today is Thanksgiving and I'm gone fishing.
I know you are thankful that I'm dead, and that
you would have killed me if you had the chance,
and if you had a chance to say you loved me again,
so am I.

AS OF THIS PUBLICATION:

Joanie St-Kaminsky is a faggot, transsexual, nonbinary trans girl, high futch, queer, antizionist Jew, poet, artist, anarchic, disabled, neurodivergent, autistic, crazy, and whatever else you are going to call it.

She uses she/it pronouns, whichever makes you personally most uncomfortable.

She currently lives in so-called Crown Heights, Brooklyn, occupied Canarsie land.

This chapbook is typeset in EB Garamond.

