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# Preserve Her Form

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**PRESERVE HER FORM**

An honors paper submitted to the Department of English, Linguistics, and Communication  
of the University of Mary Washington  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Departmental Honors

Hannah Morgan

May 2017

By signing your name below, you affirm that this work is the complete and final version of your paper submitted in partial fulfillment of a degree from the University of Mary Washington. You affirm the University of Mary Washington honor pledge: "I hereby declare upon my word of honor that I have neither given nor received unauthorized help on this work."

Hannah Morgan  
(digital signature)

05/08/17

preserve her form  
h. scott morgan



INSIDE

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*For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken down (that is, when we die and leave this earthly body), we will have a house in heaven, an eternal body made for us by God himself and not by human hands. We grow weary in our present bodies, and we long to put on our heavenly bodies like new clothing. For we will put on heavenly bodies; we will not be spirits without bodies. While we live in these earthly bodies, we groan and sigh, but it's not that we want to die and get rid of these bodies that clothe us. Rather, we want to put on our new bodies so that these dying bodies will be swallowed up by life. God himself has prepared us for this, and as a guarantee he has given us his Holy Spirit.*

Paul the Apostle  
2 Cor. 5:1-5 New Living Translation









## PREPARATORY

I am not obsessed with you – with hating  
and grieving you in circulation, and the terror  
of forgetting – anymore. The ceramic jar we chose  
was gorged with you until the ash spilled  
on the dining table and yellow-mahogany piano  
after the million granules made us restless  
and Mum, yielding to the terror of forgetting,  
began to move the dense baggie from one jar  
to another, patting your culmination into a more  
fitting shape. You had never been so pliant  
as then, but still you heaved an obstinate cough  
of grey on the piano, so now the jar lid fits snugly  
and I have forgotten enough that I know remembering  
is not necessary. I am not obsessed, but I could be.

Not necessary: I am not obsessed, but I could be recalled to it. When Judas was resurrected – I'm thinking of Lazarus. When Lazarus was summoned a fourth day dead, the crypt sent his sisters a bandaged man. What was the condition of the body? Beneath layers of frankincense-soaked tatters, do we suppose the bronzed skin stayed taut, a supple brain and heart kept slick with lukewarm reds and blues on grey, channels of blues with red entwined like dormant roots holding their turgid sustenance, unleaking and safe-buried six inches down, until the soil warms or was his body already emptying? How much was left to shudder awake at the muster? How much is it forgivable to criticize a carefully wrapped gift?

Is it forgivable to criticize a carefully wrapped gift  
when I am sole witness of the unveiling, acrid  
bandages falling? No one can speak of you  
like I can, and no one seeks it, that story. My death  
volunteers me: I could seek it again, I suppose  
resume my leaning into the strongest wind.  
It will be the dry cough a mahogany bulb gives as it  
presses its last reserves into white roots at the first  
inspiration of heat. I have resurfaced a half-decade  
of springs, and if there is no water, I will have nothing  
but death in layers, many many papery skins.  
Four days have been my rest, then you ask for me.  
Bandages must escort this body from the tomb, until  
I am not obsessed with you, with you.

MANY MANY PAPERY SKINS

A dead person forgets the body first:  
obedience to mechanisms of skin,  
the needing; she forgets thirst

and relief, how hairs disperse  
in wind, a hundred thousand embodiments.  
downside-up roots. A dead person forgets first

how anxiety is physically immersive  
and fingernails are pleasant, pale crescents  
against a scalp; she forgets thirst,

the satiation: what do the dead have, rote relief?  
rote relief? our deadness is different: the dead get existence  
without need; a deadened writer forgets

a dead sister forgets a perimeter  
of bodies: daughters, son; sister sister mother father  
many many bodies are quenching memory, forgetting.

They think they remember:  
the dead person's hair was red as emergency  
before the skin was compelled blue, the first body  
a deadened writer came to forget, I came to forget

LEARNING TO GIVE  
BLOOD

Plasma Sonnet

When she<sup>†</sup> defends her history,  
my mother uplifts her arms  
at obtuse angles like worship, except  
she is looking at the elbows:  
*We were piss-poor, and they paid –  
extra if I gave twice in a week.*  
*If it let us survive, I did it* she narrates  
while we look at the surrendered elbows,  
blue roots beneath packed layers of scar  
tissue presented to us as memoir, we read  
about our mother and her daughter;  
*I survived.* The wrists of the angled arms  
roll back: more blue. The fingers  
curl inward: wrinkled red, white.

<sup>†</sup> Widow of addictions; at the time, her daughter was three  
or four, we guess. We do not need to ask questions like that.

## Pulse Sonnet

I ask the question, and all bravery drains  
from me before he answers *Yes*.

We become thus bound. But  
when he next hugs, he hugs  
a husk – when he places hand  
on head, the shell shivers like an arm  
paling in the ambulance<sup>†</sup> jostle,  
he straps it with blood pressure cuff.

This anxiety is unexpected. I cannot ask  
whether he ever cradled a bluing hand.

Avoiding a mesh of fingers, I take  
the elbow, thrilled by what goes out of me  
too fast. He checks the wrist for a pulse again  
and again and together, we are hopeful.

<sup>†</sup> Volunteer Rescue Squad. He describes the work in mixed words:  
thrill, compassion, sobering. Most often: *I can't answer that*.



## Dead Body Sonnet

There is a dead body clapping  
at church. Skirt-draped legs droop  
to the floor, and her hands clap:  
white arms lifted in half-way  
angles when brown arms lift all  
the way like a forest. The dead  
body cannot cry out in reverence  
but she can hear: *Uncover  
our eyes! Unblock our ears!  
Make our legs to walk!* Droop-white legs  
walk this body to the alter for arms<sup>†</sup>  
outstretched to grasp the dead head, cry  
prayers into her hair; behind her  
the swaying and crying forest of arms.

<sup>†</sup> Bishop arms outstretched. His name  
was not remembered. Or maybe not understood.

## Intensive Care Sonnet

Twice in close memory –  
I have offered  
God permission to collect  
my soul and dismiss

the body: once<sup>†</sup>, when the blood pouring and puddling  
around my re-formed vertebrae was swallowed by sucking  
tube, cleaned, and re-gifted to the roots – brain-draped  
with liquid weight pumped in at the elbows:  
because swallowing was worse – and the night we were at angles:  
I stared through his stare, split  
the gaze to his hands; pain  
now spilled from two bodies.

<sup>†</sup> adolescent idiopathic  
scoliosis, three curves – 49°  
major arc, age 17 and unstable.  
Recommendation: posterior spinal fusion





## DREAM SEQUENCE

I

Last night I dreamed of my mother  
and the blemish at the center of her back  
I have wanted to pick away when we palm  
our skins with sunscreen. It was growing a plant.  
The dark seed at the center of her back  
had sprouted one broad green leaf and a throng  
of smaller leaves, they leaned away  
from her skin, and I would not touch it  
because we cannot afford another surgery.  
She put on a shirt, which tented at the plant  
on her back. Later, I contort my arms  
to touch the plant on my own back –  
it is substantial.

Telling no one, I have my body  
    bend at a perfect angle, becoming a table  
with a garden (I am the table, I am beside  
    the table) soaked in sunlight. My fingers  
plunge knuckles deep to find roots, red and easy to pull leaving

    big gaps that I suture closed with my palms  
        in a squishing motion like applying sunscreen  
I remember hoping I don't remove anything vital

## II

From time to time, I slide awake thinking  
the item I was holding in my dream has slipped  
down the crack next to the wall –  
to get to it, I am peeling back  
the bed covers like I'm a surgeon sifting muscle,  
my patient is dying on the floor below  
my flailing arm and clenching fingers.  
When she comes to wake me, I tell my mother  
I am looking for something I need.  
She severs the curtains and turns away, saying  
*It's just a dream. You're doing that thing again.*  
and I growl, *No, I am not. This is real.*  
*I have lost something I need.*







## I

The grains of the body of my sister are in the clay vessel on our untuned, yard sale piano. Miss Henry, a widow with wrinkling hands, taught my sister to play. When did the lessons stale and cease? Mine lasted two weeks before Miss Henry's soul left her creased fingers, and hers was the first funeral I can remember keeping away from the coffin threshold as my mother dictated.

I took up flute in the fifth grade as family history dictated, when my sister was again the unmarried pregnant. The vessel I inherited was bruised where the metallic veneer remembered her thumbprint, chafing silver with arch and whorled wrinkle. By the time her daughter received it, a beige spot marked the left thumb's resting place, the tube held eighteen years of breath staled.

## II

My family devours one half-loaf a day, faster than bread can stale,  
and my mother is baking weekly. She claims the name Esther dictates  
her culinary giftedness; the namesake grandmother and aunt left  
a legacy she adopted. Of her many daughters, she expected vessels  
for legacy, but while we watch the kneading hands thin and wrinkle  
we dip our inheritance in olive oil, eat the slick, unsticking memories

as indulgence, until we learn the need to mourn memory  
as much as flesh, mourn how a body rejects reminiscences staled  
by the draining of blood from deep-channeled brain wrinkles.  
She survived the surgery. Now, a daughter records recipes by dictation  
while mother touches the dough, lifts the blue-glass vessel  
of oil and cries out *How is there so little left?*

## III

A click, and she clutches her knee with the left  
arthritis-numbered hand until neither left nor right remembers  
whether it grips flesh or dough, the warm vessel  
she was going to knead. She murmurs and stalls:  
*I'm not sure I'll make it*, the knee dictates  
about a daughter's recital. The right hand squeezes dough, unwrinkling.

#### IV

Weeks of my sister's death gave our mum an unfamiliar body: wrinkles deepening their channels around her eyes, wakes left by wakefulness, memories replace dreams. Faith dictates a hope, and to that end, we sometimes forget to mourn. Grief pours from us slowly by the year, wine from stale wineskins, our overstretched vessels.

#### V

Playing after a year hiatus, blood vessels rise as ten fingers wrinkle, knead keys. Staleness from harrowed lungs: how little is left? I think there isn't anything. But memory tenses, at once dictates sound.

NOW I AM WALLOWING IN THE CHAOS

everything written from this memory has been lie  
but my hand didn't know it was a lie,

when I wrote; though the throat knew, it was  
the wrong part of me that knew it was a lie

and now I've told, my brain is mourning  
softly (because she did not see it as lie

in telling, it was memory – it seemed  
like memory to claim this obsession, to lie

forever in the grey ashes of the dead  
that were gifted me) – memory becomes lie

like the unbroken becomes broken:  
as cleanly as a small female body lying

facedown on a sterile table is scalpel-plied  
from whole into half-loaves; or as a mind lying

in a blood-encased brain subsides  
into latency before the surgeon lays

drill to her shorn scalp; or as a young heart  
seizes. as the heart withholds and lies

ceased. as white skin flushes blue: cleanly.  
memory in a typeface body becomes lie:

betrays itself, betrays its lineage, denies  
its God. the heresy of pressing truth into word.

there is no true story in me but the one in which  
the body grows stiff and blue from lying

still and the soul triggers a panic, Rise! Rise!  
still the stiff blue body only lies

and considers the linoleum under-face,  
the beige grain. this is lying

prostrate, but also this is stubbornness, so  
stubborn: there is persistence in lying

for this long; and there is strong refusal:  
you say God I hate this body lying

in the middle of my kitchen, but also  
I am nothing without this lying

body, absolutely nothing, please Almighty  
preserve her form, preserve the wasting, lying

bodies of ours, bulb husks that they are,  
beckon us from our half-hidden lying

and the souls will come – grace willing it's true  
the souls will then come – in this hope, I lie and lie.

LEARNING TO GIVE  
BLOOD

Alive Sonnet

I pretend if—  
my sister were alive—  
we would be friends—  
I would be brave—  
and fight her           with my mouth  
and not like her husbands who tore  
her body with their bodies:       my mouth  
could make her cry and repent this time  
she would cry           she would repent  
she would be impressed  
and let me hold  
her hand, we could  
eat cake to celebrate her  
death day<sup>†</sup> together

<sup>†</sup> January 16, 2011.

## Rolling Vein Sonnet

I think I am brave: after the pinch, I choose to watch  
the crimson piping away of myself.

I think I am brave: the chord is warm – I think  
I am a hot beverage dispenser.

On days I wish to dispense my blood alone,  
I cannot stop him from following:

His vein always squirms below the needle,  
away. Three false sticks

before a good one. I learn to be satisfied with one stick, to lift  
my legs, ask for water, drink the offered juice;

I think he learns to clench  
the bulb, his teeth, we learn to say more with our eyes:

*I am the rolling vein*<sup>†</sup>,  
as the red pipes away from our trembling white elbows.

<sup>†</sup> I think I am brave: but how much  
does skin welcome the needle



## Skin Sonnet

These are what I remember of my sister, her tattoos:

Rag—Doll, a word on the flesh of each calf  
Venous pumpkin on the lower back, it grinned menacing  
yellow: these days she would be scorned  
Coffin on a finger of her left hand: her marriage  
prophecy, deaths foretold  
Dragon across the breast bone  
There was a homemade tat on an arm I cannot envision  
There were names of her children – all three? :  
Seraphim  
Morgana  
Lydia  
†

At the end, there was a Venus of many colors at her wrist:  
(two weeks before her death, and I learned about  
her lover from a wrist)

These are what photographs help me remember:

Wide expanse of tan skin  
The sharp whiteness of a smile I would not trust  
Deep earth-brown hair overlaid with plaits of pink  
Long, angular arms raised in pride and glamour

† These are what I envision but do not believe existed:

Egyptian ankh  
Delilah (the daughter of a husband)







I AM A LINEAGE OF FALSE STARTS, MISCARRIAGES,

I am a lineage of false starts, miscarriages,

I am a lineage of false starts, heart  
disease, brain blood, scoliosis: our spine-stalks grow  
one way, then rotate toward the light fluttering  
red and white red-white

A lineage of false alarms and sirens,  
tunnel vision pinching to a pinprick, little puncture  
portal; everything else: red pixelated dust

of false starts, monologues  
are better than dark reds, than doubt. Monologues  
quell coronary stutters

starts and involuntary ends

In us: two of each chromosome.

In us: misplaced blood  
misshapen bones  
misinterpreted futures

In us:  
we can only offer: untamed anxiety, disobedient  
bodies, incurable whiteness, blue eyes,  
hesitation – no. of this gene, we have also  
history and rebellion.

Let us celebrate our unfitness for the life ahead.

## PROPHECY DRAFT ONE

Thesis: God wants the end times like I want you, like I want a deep-lung cough to rid a choking spit glob, like I want to put bread to my mouth and consume consume, like I want to remember how to pray earnestly. God wants the end times like I want isolation, my broken body away from every other broken body. Which is desperately. Until I achieve it, and then it is desperate unwanted. God wants the end times like a young scoliotic woman wants to fall asleep on the surgical table: they want the mending of bodies. Until the mending is permanent. Perfectly mended, perfectly. And our spines won't choke our organs, and we cannot arch our spines. We are the scoliotic woman. God is the surgeon. The anticipation: this is the closure, the suturing of millennium-old wounds; this is the reconciliation of skin-half to skin-half. The dread: here is the second beginning. Will the stitches hold?

In the beginning, there was: no beginning. There was the Word, and He had existed an eternity before there were days. No days. No bodies. There was harmony, which is perfection, and it was good and it was good and it was good and good and good and could only ever be good. There was love, and from love is always creation, which is also called beginning, which is also called ending. And there was a before, and there was an after – the first beginning.

At the beginning, everything made was excellent, prognosis satisfactory. Until unwanted complications triggered acute ungood: it developed rapidly, no clear root cause, no clear symptoms. Eden was autopsied and we still don't know exactly what happened, must have been a fluke. Ungood happens from time to time. Probably was unpreventable... I'm sorry for your loss, the Word murmured in the moments after the first body began.

Our bodies began in this second eternity. Mostly, there are small beginnings and small endings. When my body is most fearful, the Word shows me this: a beach; the texture of sand against unclothed feet, the texture of wind over me and over these endless gathering-ungathering waters.

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone...*

In the end, there will begin the third eternity. There will be a new heaven, a new earth, and a sea of new bodies. To each mended soul, an unbroken body. What won't we gain? We will gain harmony, health, immortality, infinite light. What must we lose? An understanding of necessity, darkness, yearning. Must we lose the sea?

*“It is finished! I am the Alpha and the Omega — the Beginning and the End. To all who are thirsty I will give freely from the springs of the water of life. All who are victorious will inherit all these blessings, and I will be their God, and they will be my children. (Rev. 21:1, 6-7 New Living Translation)*

In the third eternity, there will be no death or crying or pain. But there will be tears. We will be looking at the outspread fingers of our unblemished body when the seawater trickles from our eye. We won't beg for surgery or resurrection, but to understand the tears. The Word knows why the tears come and cannot unknow it.



Here is a new prognosis: the third eternity will not remain an eternity. It will be good until a crimson droplet ripples the sea slumbering. A new pending end the Word has been expecting.

At the end of this end and at the crest of the next beginning, the bodies that have been forgotten will be remembered. The next beginning will remember grey ashes, mahogany pianos. It will be unwanted, expected, preventable. It will be permitted.

Conclusion: Eternal complexity as the only treatment to preserve imperfect good: death and mending, death and mending. A method of harmony. At every new beginning will be the unsoundness of bodies. What is fixed? God, the Word, and the wind across gathering waters.

## PROPHECY DRAFT TWO

In the beginning, our parts were due to fail: my spine would buckle in two then three swelling angles; my older sister's heart would withhold another pump; my mother's skull would need a draining. We bleed to mend, cede to skewed bodies, proceed to end:

when we raise our arms, we try to defend our own bluing, bending, our lying still, hesitation, and forgetting; this body feels the emptying and dying as a new blade carves a new body; the old bulb cleaves by the next sprout piercing the next eternity and from each tomb there is wholesome leaf.

