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# Decomposition

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SARAH KINZER  
DECOMPOSITION

## **Contents**

Split

The Potter

Trout

Teeth

Feather

Survival

Three Days After Philando Castile

Outside the Church

Decomposition

Remains

## Split

Examining the spotted grout  
between decaying bricks,

he only sees the possum that he'd hit  
departing from the tar-black drive

that splits his wild Virginian  
yard in two. He'd hoped its death

was just its beastly game.  
A selfish joke. It sat to rot

for days, the body stripped,  
rain-washed of all its blood

beneath a stream of cars.  
He sips his tar-black

coffee at the bar.

## **The Potter**

She said the cup was bone-  
dry: as hard as clay can get  
before the kiln. I dropped it  
on the concrete floor. It broke  
into a small and smaller half. She  
heard the shatter from the living-  
room. Dust from the broken  
vessel held the air.

## Trout

The eternal fishermen belong  
as much to the riverscape  
as the gulls, the sand,  
the trout splayed red  
across the salted dock.

The trees not quite as tall  
as that concrete bridge,  
half-moons of air  
between its joints,  
the train on its steel spine.

A silver line pulls tight  
against its rod,  
catches the sun. The surface  
drifts upstream,  
betrays its coastal lure.

Makes a girl wonder  
which way she'd float,  
pockets lined with plastic,  
hair wild like branches  
wrapped around a trunk.

## Teeth

A dancer floated cold into my dreams.  
Her body bent over itself, folded

where the bones might have been.  
I watched the architect erase whole

cities line by line. I marveled at her  
eternal patience, caught in the gleam

of her golden watch. The dentist  
pulled every tooth from the mouth

of the dead man, left him unable  
to bite. He dropped them one by one

into a metal bin. Dust clinging  
to the yellow floor. The receptionist

refused to meet my gaze, pretended  
not to see my hand on her

counter. I didn't know where  
else to put my hands.

## Feather

I watched a kid run screaming  
at a bird. I'm telling you  
it's what I saw. Listen, he chased  
the thing until he couldn't breathe.  
I saw him gasping, sun-bent  
on his knees like morning mass.  
I think I might have seen  
a feather folded in his unwashed hands.

The bird makes no sense  
of living in ruin, pecks at trash  
from a cart in the lot.



## Survival

*Show me where he put his hands.*

Here. Here I did not move.

Here the should, here  
the show, here the fabric  
wearing thin.

To say survival: to suggest  
the stinger sometime dropping  
from the yellowed body.

I want a bee to sting his hands,  
to poison, to police. Time resists  
passing, resists dropping  
from, persists.

Remember when we  
took the Sunday train to see  
the cherry trees, the children  
playing in the falling blossoms,  
the blossoms melting like snow

in their hands. Survival touches  
every part to live, to stay  
packed into snow.

### Three Days After Philando Castile

Hey , I was calling  
while you were gone. I'm driving  
now, but I wanted to let you know  
the reason I stayed

I also wanted to let you back in  
, not tomorrow, not  
tomorrow, and I know you won't be  
until we've had a chance to talk.

if you need something like that,  
our heads together and what we want  
safe,  
be careful. Okay? You don't have to call me back.

this message, anything,

I can't answer,  
I'll get back to you soon .

[voicemail transcript]

Hey Sarah, this is Sara. I was calling about a couple things. The first, least important thing is I wanted you to know that I stayed in your room over at Liz's for a couple of nights while you were gone. I'm driving to DC now, so I won't be in town, but I wanted to let you know that in case the bed or room wasn't as you had left it when you had left it, and to know that I stayed over there. And the reason I stayed over there was because, so I put a Black Lives Matter sign in my window, and there has been a lot of intimidation and retaliation, nothing really bad, somebody put an All Lives Matter sign over it. I just felt much safer staying over at Liz's.

So I also wanted just to let you know when you get back in to not work in the office, Ian's not going to, at least tomorrow, and Sara's not going to be in the office tomorrow, and I know you won't be, but whatever day you get back. So don't work in the office until we've had a chance to talk.

It's okay if you need to pop in and grab something, or something like that, but at least until we sort of put our heads together and figure out what we want to do, just to make sure we're feeling safe, and things might be just fine by then, but I just want to be careful. Okay? You don't have to call me back.

Just wanted to give you this message, but if you need anything, I'm in DC tomorrow and Tuesday, we'll be driving back on Wednesday. Feel free to text me or give me a call, and if I can't answer, leave a voice message and I'll get back to you as soon as I can. Okay. I hope you have a good trip back and had a great weekend. Bye.

## **Outside the Church**

The pastor's son convinced me  
to chew a pine twig, held it to  
my mouth. Tasted like  
bitter oranges. I lied, claimed  
I swallowed, then spat  
into the sweet communion wine.

Not one of those catholics saw  
the trick, kept reddening  
their solemn lips, mouthing  
along to some distant hymn.

I slipped downstairs  
through the silent kitchen  
with that cornbread yellow  
sink, gold shining through.

There, muffled between the devoted  
and the world, what sounded like god  
made its way through the wall.

## **Decomposition**

We are born into  
An elastic landscape.  
A trillion vagrant

bags pass through  
the landfills, cities,  
seas. Each zero no-

thing. A friend dies  
with grocery bags  
packed tight

in her cold throat,  
wrapped honey-thick  
around her head.

The world floats  
past our comprehension.  
The blue film snags

on branches, takes one  
thousand years  
to photodegrade, sun-

split by halves into  
smaller toxic bits. One  
by one, the oceans

disappear.

## **Remains**

There's something sort of sacred  
in a grave. I don't mean the body;  
of course

the body's sacred. Perhaps  
the words, the faded epitaph.  
Or else

the margins, openings between  
language shift and language death.  
The nothing

that surrounds the written self.  
What's left of me, forsaken  
on a rock.