

**Gilded in Gold: A Portfolio**  
Little Daggers 2024

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*For the Little Daggers Cohort,  
We may never enter the room again but we  
are all always in these words, all of them.*

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<sup>1</sup>Revised for portfolio.

<sup>2</sup>Workshopped in zoom class.

<sup>3</sup>Revised for portfolio.

<sup>4</sup>Workshopped in class.

## PART ONE: DECAY

## **I belong to ink but**

I grabbed the paint and  
I tried to outline you  
with traces of my fingers.

I waited to see you  
come back to life, to me,  
to cross the miles through this canvas.

I grabbed the pastels and  
tried to impress you  
onto the page, but your fickle freckles

eluded me, banded  
in laughter I couldn't recreate.  
Uselessly I tried to prove my mettle.

Instead I grabbed the quill.  
*(Will you give me one last try?)* I wrote your name.  
I watched it atrophy and I decomposed with you.

## Summoning Sappho's Scissors

In lethargy and love, we come  
to this place of worship that we can't afford  
because I lost my penny and your hand in the  
currents and storms that shroud this place from us,  
but I follow the sound of her lilt and we enter from the ground.

My eyes are mad and your smile is wry.  
I drink spirits from your lips  
and the rain falls to mist.  
At the door they pound  
but we've already christened this holy ground.

I paint roses on your lips  
and you kiss sins on my hips.  
I broke a promise  
and you broke a lung  
trying to bargain for one more life.

But we slip in and out of this flesh that now denies us,  
I stitch myself into your soul until we're sick,  
but that too breaks down and suddenly we're nothing.  
Nothing! And nothing! And in nothing,  
we find something. And isn't that what you craved?  
With their nothing, are we allowed to be  
something?

The church has crumbled and our bodies  
form out of the rubble.  
Bruised, battered, and bared, but  
can you see the soil?

She rises as a vengeful violet  
and splits the earth from the sky.  
Now on this untethered ground  
I find balance in kissing you  
and absent is any revolt from those on high.

## Rehearsing the Rosary Red

Picture me in red  
cherry lips with tiny perfect hips  
as I wear a cross that will protect me until I'm dead,  
between my breasts it supports me like filament and never slips.

I trace my hands with it's manicures and nails  
here on this crucifix that many followed.  
A symbol they praised. Even worse were the tantalizing tales  
from their master that I too swallowed and wallowed

for. Now you want me to die  
for you because inside sings what you'd call  
Lilith's lilt. My heart is wrong and so I lie  
prostrate on your cold floors begging for any mercy at all.

At your doors they strike me out  
but watch me whisper and count on my ten  
fingers, like a mantra I'm dispelling doubt,  
because there's not a single sin I wouldn't do again.

Picture me in red  
because I've let the monster of the night take me in bed.

## Maybe/I don't know/But

It was spring. You put your  
tongue

down my throat. I bit it off.

You spit                      in my face.  
When I wasn't around                      you came.  
Nothing changed.

But before that it was fall. It was fate. I  
fell. In your bed you offered me a string.

No, it was a rope.

You wrapped me up like a leash around a  
dog. I stuck my tongue

out the window.

You wanted it in  
side to side and seize me. Turn me  
inside

out with your  
hands. Don't choke. My neck  
broke. I see your face. I see

your hand running down my neck,  
down my throat.

I want to whisper.

*"Can we go outside?"*

But we'd fade

away.

Bonded to the bed. Relish  
in winning the chase. And I,  
the prize. You relive it and I  
am not allowed to enter again.

I try to run. My feet are in  
cement. You pour



me a glass of red wine.  
Insisting I oblige. You  
overindulge. Me and  
you until it's we  
and we're empty.

Enter me. You think I'm so alive.  
Eyes greedy. You lean

closer,

tug me

closer,

hold me

lower.

Shove me here  
and there

and

*"Where do you*

*want my lips?"*

I whisper.

I mistook your eyes for lust. Trusted  
you enough. Let you—

you cover my mouth,

*"Just promise*

*not to shout."*

I whisper. I whisper.

I was her.

Until the blood from my  
tongue turned to ink.

The spring became summer.

In the pages I was  
summoned.

## PART TWO: DISCOVER

## Prodigy

I grew up twice. Once at home and once alone. A door opened. I learned to walk again. But I am unknown to myself. Bought a dictionary and didn't recognize the words. What is a name? Who is to blame for my unanticipated agnosticism? Questions, question, questioning. I drew it out. It looked like a doily. I showed it to you and it unraveled. Run with the string and tie it around my wrist. Claim your the secret to my success. Call me baby and baby me through it all. Swaddle me in your arms and crave canoodling. Question me, "*Don't you wish you had hirsute to grab?*" Ask yourself if that's just what you wish *you* had. Make me confused because you are. Teach me the way I need to act because it's what you need. Mold me into your prodigy partner and leave the shavings of me in your mouth. Chew on the good parts and spit me out when I've lost my taste. Make me grow up again. I detach my revelation from our relations. Shed the skin you touched. Become a body to you would disgust. And shame. It haunts the motions that feel the same. Dancing between pleasure and pain. Knock at the door. Find the me without you.

## **Hair To Row is a Norm Activity at the salon**

She said she wanted her hair assembled like a bouquet,  
strands tucked back into tiny nosegays.

She wanted to be seen on a boat on the Seine  
and have roses and lilies tossed  
to her to be weaved into her blooming hair.

So she sits there in the chair.

She stares.

She is unable to allow herself the duality of right  
and wrong. Hair must be perfectly trimmed  
but never recklessly cut. Cut  
means change and change means different  
and different means wrong and

she watches as they cut, snip,  
shape her bangs as long as

the willow trees. Push back

the lethargic leaves and enter,  
but be careful not to trip,  
there's so much she can't risk being exposed to the world.

## **Clocking into Work, Apparently**

Like a buzzworm you snake  
back into my life,  
back into my mind.

I already hear you all the time  
I don't need to see your  
rakish smile repeated in my mind  
as you send out your demands and lashings  
and ask me what I have to say,  
a million things on my mind  
but not curated to what you  
want to know and have validated.

How have we come to a place  
where the daughter becomes a mother.  
Where I must validate your role  
that you often can't even uphold?

I cough out the phrases you  
want to hear like phlegm  
and when it makes a mess  
you tell me to just understand.

Especially when I don't.

And I just want to scream outside  
but it's stuck inside  
in my stomach and never even  
reaches my throat,  
caught in a cycle,  
a roundabout with no exit.

And I try, die, cry, and wonder  
all the time,  
why I'm not given the same grace that  
you demand of me.

We were a team, but my body was my own.  
Or did you think that was shared too?

## Statue of my Sister

You loved statues so much you  
became one. You surrounded yourself  
with a towering temple I

shrank beneath. Mine  
couldn't compare. You, young but now  
a god I admire and fear. Suddenly  
immortal and strong, no longer the fickle  
fruit fly. But fast you grew. When did  
your hand outsize

mine? I miss when you needed

to look through my eyes. I showed  
you around my temple. Told you  
how to build it. You just wanted  
to draw. I envied your carefree,  
casual cleverness so much I became the green  
grass at your feet. The cement rolled

in to make your next temple. I feigned

accismus and let the wind be

my whisper;

Beg for your casual curiosity. Barter  
to give advice once more. If talk is cheap  
why is this not enough? Why was I not  
what you want? Grow up. Grow apart.

I love statues so I made you into one. Two  
things I am not. Maker or mother.  
They are the same. Things I am not.  
I am deceiver of words and wants. I  
am a poet. You draw, you sketch, you design.  
Did you resign? What do you see in the architecture  
of my mind? Did you note the patterns?

I built a temple to

hide. (

I didn't

know how to let you inside. On the other side  
of the world would you send me offerings?  
) I thought

that was how it worked. We were scattered

in distance  
and  
my  
mind.

I cried but never to you and I waited but never asked  
you and I begged but never out loud. I whispered. I wished her. I wished you

into a statue. I thought maybe then I could understand.  
You were better. You were bolder. You were bronze.  
I was the grass on the ground.

But in my whispers I listened. I heard  
that steady beat, the sound of footsteps along the path.  
I heard but couldn't see. I felt  
your outsized hand pull me up.  
I shook off the dirt. You wiped away the  
crud from my eyes. You were my height.  
I felt your arms around me. Your heart beat  
in time to mine.



## **The Resurrection or The Reckoning**

You were always piss drunk  
until you traded your wine for  
His blood. Suddenly your feeling  
Thoreavian and shapeshifting

before their eyes. Shedding skin  
like a cicada. It took you 20 years.  
Now what are you gonna do?  
Born again, just dedicate it to someone else.

Die again. This time it's final. This time  
it's your choice. You decide:  
live for love or live for knowledge.  
You choose both. It seems noble

but it's just  
avoidant. A vow you can never  
catch up to. And you write it all  
in black ink. It bleeds across the

page when it rains. And it does.  
You store an extra copy in your veins.  
It shows up in the angiography.  
But so does the liquor. How far

did you think you could run?  
How much forgiveness do we  
owe you? How much of it is false—  
shadowed in prayer and promise

to do better, read all about it, write  
about none of it. What is a story?  
How can it ever end? How do I honor  
when the dark spots flood. It could never all be good.

Do I restore the resurrection or the  
reckoning? You do not exist without both.

## PART THREE: UNEARTH

**I never said goodbye after**

the dying breaths of hers.  
No one but me to watch  
as she takes her final breath out.

your breaths mixed with

you breathe in

You say "it's all relative,  
she'll come back alright."

I say "But-"

You turn on the light.  
it was never at night,  
out in the shocking light of day and

I can't stay.  
But staying or not staying,  
it's all crap.  
I take a nap and slip back

to you.

I wake up and face  
in the rain, in the bookstore windows,  
in the shape my breath makes in the cold and

you

It's getting old.

I bought you a book.  
A book I think you'd like.  
One of those fustian  
mystery books you love.

You'd cut me off at fustian and  
call it sophisticated, say

I wouldn't understand.

I can't stand  
without turning back to  
see if you're waiting for me,  
headphones firmly placed over your ears;



## **To you I walk, for you I waste**

The sand beneath the dunegrass burns my feet. It burns like your mouth on my lips . You touch me. When people are around you touch me. Like ghosts, you pretend they're not around. You want to hear the sound in my voice when you touch something right. My manipulated moan is the bone you fetch. You catch my arm. "*Shit,*" you whisper. I traipse through your mind– I find a shrine to my mind. You are eating my flesh. You bite my lip, to swallow the blood. You bite off my tongue to devour my soul. You take my pen– my swan feathers. I was a maiden. You were my master. I wrote you love letters and begged for pleasure. You made me promise. You kept my feathers. You used them to floss your teeth. You had my skin in your gums. You told me I would live forever. You put me in varnish, for I am left over. I was your food. You were my lover.

## Ashes to Ashes

You've torn            away from me.  
Now a scrap of paper.  
Your love falls  
out of my hands.

The peels off  
an orange, I eat,  
they have your smell—

It's just as well, I'll  
find you in hell. Ashes  
of written vows. Broken  
locks. Running into  
filled in door frames.  
Are you aware?  
Staying away            doesn't deny this,

this, this, this—  
Is it a kiss? Did you miss  
me? Do you find  
me in the timbre of  
your voice where I fall—

Your skin was the palest  
in late fall. You walked along  
the quarry. You worried. You  
held my hand. Palms to  
sweaty palm.            My dear,

My dearest,

(

My sister was dead  
).

I wrote to you. It  
was in my head.

Did you know me  
at all? You sat with me  
against the wall. I felt  
the ceiling crash—

My bodies in the culvert.  
I reach for you like Adam.  
Like God, it's you I can't find.

## Poets Wander, Poets Live

If this were a myth  
you would be Eurydice.  
I, the poet who can't find  
their way. And you the explorer

who wanderers anyway. Why  
did you go? I can't fault you  
for things I am also to blame.  
Running away with your mind

always seems like a good idea  
at the time. Until you reach the end  
of the strand. You were supposed  
to be mine. Don't mistake my grief

for ire. I string this lyre with hands  
burnt from fire. I went too close.  
I wanted you back. She said you were  
like the sun. Don't let this be my plea,

please just come back to me. Turn  
around because I can't.  
Walk in front of me  
instead. I become your shadow,

your arrow. Draw the bow and point.  
You whisper to me as quietly as  
borborygmi creeps inside.  
I am your hand, it's why I write

all the time. I am your eye.  
*What do you see?*

I'll tell them you're proud.  
For you, I'll say it out loud.



## **Ars Moriendi**

*Meditation on "Death and the Miser" by Hieronymus Bosch*

You place yourself on the bed  
waiting for Death to come in.  
Act surprised and cry until the  
pity rolls in. You dress up your sins  
as the only option. Guilt becomes your  
religion. Predict this ritual  
as better than your coffin. But  
the lines are getting blurry more often.

They zip up your mouth  
but I still see your mouth moving.  
Are the doors closing or are you just  
moaning? And he waits outside and you  
(you are all the same), run until he's drained,  
skin pale as milk, you stage a parish

because the real one comes to the wake but not  
the funeral. They took what you said you gave.  
Bury you for your crimes, we could not  
be blamed for them everytime. Sigh,  
sighs, sighed. Roll up in bed. Take the spoils  
instead. Pretend you're dead. Maybe you are.  
You thought it was an art but it's tearing  
us apart. I'm taking back my bowl full of  
blood run curdled and cold.