

# **Sex with Trees and Other Things Equally Responsive**



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**a chapbook by  
Rebecca Lu Kiernan**



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## A Virgin's Last Day

---

Bodies are burning in this  
    patched up boat,  
the hissing of water snakes  
    harmonizes with the  
crickets' trill. Too far apart  
    to kiss, I hear our babies  
whispering their names  
    through angel feathers.

Your eyes affix me  
    the jaws of life  
could not detach them.  
    Everything I say  
is beautiful, funny  
    or smart.

Am I wasting a life  
    'til this virtual  
stranger defines me?  
    Have I been loose-leaf  
only now to be  
    perfect-bound?

What draws me to skip  
    heels clicking ahead  
of respectable measure?  
    To close my eyes  
against the blurring  
    rather than squint?

Your charming smile  
    launches, ricochets  
down in the pale green  
    unbroken lake.  
Splashing, swirling,  
    plunk-plopping  
the fish scatter  
    knowing all  
too well a hook  
    when they see it.

## Pre-emptive

---

I will have a rib removed  
And mail it to you  
    In a sanitary jar  
        Saving you  
    The trouble  
    Of robbing me  
In my sleep.  
    Incision  
        Is  
            Easier  
        Sewn  
    Than the slow jagged  
Tearing  
    Of stealing back  
        A bone.



## The Resentful Bride

---

My pet bat sleeps behind a Prussian tapestry  
Of *The Resentful Bride* and lives peacefully  
In the refrigerator when I am out of town.

I have lost respect for him, becoming so  
Suburban, relying on me to catch his mice.

I long to see him emerge during a dinner  
Party shrieking, red eyes glaring, wings  
Snapping, spiraling in wide, terrifying  
Circles, horrifying my dignified guests,  
Rolling them up in paralyzed balls like  
Any respectable bat would do,

Disheveling my damp cherry hair from its  
Tight silver pins, leaving me breathless  
And curious.

As the first night I penetrated his icy  
Cavern, before either of us had know  
The dizzying taste of blood.

## Spill

---

You're often sixty seconds  
Or seven words  
From ever meeting them at all  
Having turned twice to leave the party,  
Going out of your way to observe  
A lightning-struck willow  
With pearly orange embers  
Where everything would change,  
Something calling you  
To watch the gray rain,  
Squint at a stained glass window  
Or stand longer in the impossible  
Silence of a swirling street corner,  
Dizziness, longing, recognition.

They're always coming at you  
With Norman Rockwellish grins  
Translating your map, showing you  
Shortcuts, pointing you to home-style  
Diners and souvenir shops full of stuff  
You can't get anymore, book stores  
For your out-of-print tendencies  
In their sleepy vampire towns,  
Touching your arm  
To raise a vein.

But you're in hot pursuit  
Brushing sleeves with them,  
Meeting their pale eyes,  
X-ed out people in your address book,  
Sullen photo of a long-suicide love  
In your wallet,  
Pulling over to watch  
Their mesmeric kaleidoscope leaves,  
Steely cobalt lakes and cotton candy skies,  
Begging to be mercifully spilled.

## Curate's Egg

---

I cut the lie in half and  
    swallow  
the sweet,

The rest, I place in my  
kimono pocket for  
    evidence  
until the stench is  
    unbearable.

Eventually  
I eat that too  
as all  
    women  
have been  
    taught  
to do.

## To The Bat Living In The Air Vent

---

Dear Bruce,  
I have left you seven headless mice  
in the refrigerator next to the lamb  
and a silver starling in a cigar box  
decorated with shell shaped macaroni  
spray painted gold on the pie shelf  
next to a jar of fireflies.  
I miss you already.

## The Eye of Jupiter

---

*I never said you weren't an angel,*  
He whispered from my ear piece,  
The last human voice  
Stirring up the gray shadows  
And slumped silhouettes  
Of our San Francisco apartment.  
I approach a three-hundred-year-old  
Hurricane  
Larger than the earth.  
It feels like home.  
A storm in a red lake  
Masterpiece  
Brushed wet-in-wet  
With detail.  
My angry world raises its head.  
I eat my freeze dried  
Good luck black-eyed peas.  
Orange gingerbread squares  
And suicide pill.  
Another mystery to give his poetry.  
New teeth.

## **A Dinosaur's Heart**

---

I cut my hands on treasures,  
Junk diamond shipwreck  
Champagne dinosaur bones  
In lavender clay  
A twelve-year-old girl  
Whose tear ducts produce glass.  
My watch takes photographs.  
My pillow has an escape hatch.  
Even a dinosaur's heart  
Has a secret compartment,  
Suicide pills  
For the bang or the whimper,  
Extras for mercy killings.  
Broken sex fever,  
Leave a picture by my bed,  
A razor in the claw-footed tub.

## **If You Think With Blood**

---

If you think with blood then life is a drumbeat  
Prowl of war and sacrifice, injury, healing.  
A jungle road paved with snake fangs, wolf  
Bones, skid marks where cheetahs  
Have turned on a dime.

Put your ear to the ground and you can hear  
The collective heartbeat of tarantulas  
Motionless under pillows, riding in pockets,  
Fruit bats penetrating pears, house cats  
Caught in rabbit traps.

If the road to your house began to crumble  
I would crawl to the deepest fissure,  
Spill down every crevice, into every molecule  
Being absorbed by one man,  
Fractured by another.

## Sex Addict In Therapy

---

Does my desire unnerve you?  
Crawling over you like a jaguar  
Muscled for the strike, down on  
My haunches, unblinking,  
Lips parted, my breath condensating  
In your ear?  
Are you happier to hunt me over a  
Half scrubbed toilet, oblivious  
To you in yellow gloves and pinned  
Hair, woefully accommodating you,  
Bending like wet, underfoot grass?  
I miss slow, swollen lips. Bring  
Fresh lilacs, pulled, not cut,  
Moist from dirt, dragged through  
Sand, delicious orange melon to  
Drip down our elbows and chins, a  
Blood crimson sky buoyant on ocean  
Salt at eclipse. Bring tiger balm,  
Handcuffs, nipple clamps.  
We bob away.



## Red Tree Prophecy

---

I imagine you alone at your desk  
Shifting your long legs beneath

The cage of the work bread-hour,  
Appendages tingling against the

Pins and needles of blood begging  
To course, head propped on your wrist

Closing your eyes against the tweed  
And faded denim and cherry wood and

Ancient creaking floors and the smell  
Of dust on books and ink and

The forgotten whiff of skin when my  
Sleeve brushed yours and nothing more,

Scrubbing your face with my feathery  
Branches, pressing your nose to the

Back of my neck, knees bent to my root  
Trying to cup your trembling tongue

For torturously slow morning sap.

## The Man Who Remembered Too Much

---

19 in braids and hot pants  
I lived with a truck driver /  
poet / Harrison Ford look-alike.  
Dyslexic, he tickled me awake  
to take down poems that  
came to him in dreams.  
We took our dinners to the  
picnic table in the  
gray-blue light of our  
evening yard and basked  
in the pending darkness  
like geckoes in the sun.  
He kissed the back of my  
neck and rubbed my cherry  
curls all over his face  
and watched unblinkingly  
as I undressed, dressed.  
He remembered everything  
I ever said and it got  
so I had to be careful.  
He had trained himself  
to remember, as he could  
not write things down.

I know where that house is.  
Sometimes I think we could  
dance there. His arms would  
not forget me. We would eat  
strawberries with whipping  
cream in the claw-footed  
tub and wrap ourselves  
in a marigold towel,  
watch the bats fly  
over the Gulf of Mexico  
from the porch swing  
and giggle, skipping into  
our almond sleigh bed  
and never notice the house  
had been so efficiently  
demolished, and never  
remember the things  
we can't forget.

## When Poets Collide

---

What a miracle you are!  
Three thousand miles away  
Breathing on the phone  
Bubbling with poetry  
Sparkling with neurosis  
Hermitlike, vulnerable  
Bathroom habits carried out  
With military precision  
Fondling your hyacinth  
And peach poison oleander  
No smell to your skin  
No taste to your breath  
Only your unbearably broken  
Eyes haunting me in a photograph  
Masturbating to the song  
Of the things you'll do to me  
In a San Francisco hotel room  
On wet rented sheets  
Room service, hold all calls  
We'll have French toast  
With raspberries  
And smoked salmon  
For naked breakfast  
Sponge each other down  
In a claw-footed tub  
Steal the soaps and towels  
And never speak again.

## Damage Control

---

A copper lamp blinks from the paint chipped gazebo.

Pre-hurricane night air bows the cobalt willows.

Now I see my choices are black lacey nightgowns

in a fortune cookie.

As a child, I fell in love with an ancient

doctor's doll, a pleasant jade woman, nude

on a bed or coffin, never knowing she revealed

the ailments of a thousand women, killed by modesty.

I waited for her to rise, lips swollen for her lover.

Our lives run parallel,

You, a tourist on this sugar beach;

Me, a damage assessor,

Slicing the shells of petrified turtles,

Nursing the slick formaldehyde skins of frogs.

## Breath and Fingerprints

---

Lavender geckoes cling to  
the blinding kitchen light  
naked of old eyelet curtains,  
they dance, a bulge of lime eyes,  
twirling tails, fragile suction cups  
naked arabesque.

A lone banana tree penetrates  
the old pink moon, the one  
we rented from a movie.  
Palmetto bugs eat mouse bait  
and live, don't call them  
roaches, we have to live with them.

I eat raspberries  
the lover left behind  
in such a rush, silly me  
making pie in a torn apron.  
Eye watering snort of  
laughter, sweet hysteria,  
the intoxicating whisper  
of insanity when the  
night carousel spins,  
*mmmmmmmmmm, aaaaah*  
the first taste of flesh at detente.  
Come, come, no matter how  
late. Bring blueberries with  
whipping cream, put your  
breath and fingerprints  
on my every inch, leave the  
light on  
but don't touch a thing  
for everything is in  
its proper place.

## **I Will Make Love To You**

---

Full speed ahead on a ski lift  
Ever so gently atop an ivory mare  
With perfect rhythm in a swaying tree house  
Brazenly in a lunchtime parking lot  
Cooperatively on a safari tram  
With eyes rolled back in my head in the shark tunnel  
Relentlessly when you are trying to edit a book  
Medicinally when you have writer's block  
Calmly behind a Prussian tapestry at a state funeral  
Sympathetically beneath the broken cobalt willows  
Covered in violet paint as we roll on a canvas  
Under the grimace of gargoyles in a paint chipped gazebo  
Comically in the heart shaped bed of a honeymoon suite  
In a squeaky patched boat beyond the three-mile limit  
With total abandon on a runaway train  
Surprisingly when you are eating a ham sandwich  
Through pink suds in a French antique claw-footed tub  
Next to a crushed metronome in the orchestra pit  
Under my red cape in the unexpected gray rain.

Oh, Sweet, the ways I will make love to you

Without hesitation, without mercy,  
Without you, if necessary.

## **Breath**

---

No words were better left unsaid,  
Save the ill-speak of the dead.

Friend, flesh is dust  
And breath is fleeting.  
Say it while the  
Heart is beating.



## **Ambivalence**

---

What may I leave you for misery  
When your cheetah-paced affection  
Has turned on a dime?

Perhaps I will give you nothing  
But take instead  
One string from your violin  
One key from your typewriter  
One knob from your stove.

## End Matter

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### ***Sex with Trees and Other Things Equally Responsive***

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