

THE TRUTH IS TOLD
BETTER THIS WAY

P O E M S

LIZ WORTH

The Truth Is Told Better This Way

The background of the cover features a series of diagonal lines of varying lengths and thicknesses, some in black and one in a lighter gray, creating a dynamic, rain-like pattern.

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LIZ WORTH

BOOKTHUG

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A decorative graphic consisting of numerous diagonal lines of varying lengths and shades of gray, slanted at approximately 45 degrees, creating a dynamic, rain-like pattern across the top half of the page.

Part one: Aspirations

Suburban wilds: a self-portrait

Chipped tooth from spilling onto the street. My catch-all phrase:

I'm fine /

I'm fine / I'm fine.

At the wrist ribbons of time—the dead honoured in gold above
flattened veins.

Skirt parted—I'm the kind of girl who lets strange men's legs rest
against hers
on crowded subways.

(Lift. Just a little more.)

I don't run with anyone because I don't need to.

My mind isn't as vulnerable as it used to be but
if you look me in the eye
you'll find the photograph I will become:
a sanded edge, hands grasping for what beauty once touched.

Downcast superstition behind the earlobe, pooling in the
collarbone.

Paranoia's an oil in my pores,
blackheads behind bangs and drugstore concealer.
I scratch, shortened nails, a dictation of unease.

Lips, perilous. Wanting. Gaze, high.

Higher. Looking forward. Away, to something better.

Spit, sister

Raw intro:

In a bus station bathroom you
hand me a diagram: how to separate meat from bone.

You say, “nothing cuts deeper than your own hand.”

I change the subject:

“Have you ever noticed how we still sweat under our jackets
even on fall days like this?”

I can smell the bulk of flesh on the collar of my sweater. My
mouth fills with salt.

You say, “spit, sister.”

≈

I see your
leopard print tattoo through a
peephole in the stall.

Your piss hits the toilet bowl as
my grip slips around a marker at the bottom
of my bag.

In black Sharpie I leave a synopsis that betrays my instinct:

“Home was something we might have loved, once.”

If anybody knew us only by our hands,
they’d think we were twice our age.

≈

With the last of the toilet paper you
create a rough draft of a map
based on Gemini logic:
contradictory, unpredictable,
moving through
gravesites, last year's stories.

At the end of an arrow, you've written "X MARKS THE SPOT."

I want to tell you about the time
I believed I would grow up to be a wolf.

In this mirror, I am intolerant to confidence.
"Where do we go after this?"

Supermoon weekend

I read your tarot cards in New York City.
They concluded that distance makes
the heart grow thunder.
You said you were changing your name to Corpus Christi;
we'd need to
discard the bodies
to make it official.

How else was this supposed to be?
So much buried between us already.

≈

"Gut me," I said.
It was the start of a
Supermoon weekend:
just you, me, and a magic marker.

≈

We'd heard the death of stars is
brought on by song.
We thought: grindcore, necrothrash,
a swatch of black shadow and
asexual flatness.
On all fours we dismembered:
superstitious rhythms,
worried timing,
nervous breakdowns.

≈

We fell asleep at 6am:
your tongue,
my damp
on the floor,
blank sheets,
sour chords.

≈

Waking rushed us with
diehard fanaticism.
I'd slept with bobbypins
in my hair;
they were now under
your bare feet, between floorboards.
We woke with a
corpse paint vocabulary,
honesty a mask you wore at breakfast.
Under the table, an untangling of the earth.
"Mars moves forward at midnight," you said.
I blanched: What's left to defy?

The next time anyone saw us, we'd already lost the answer.

Reach deep

I am a wild horse and you?
You are a eulogy, an incantatory apparition
mandated by a recovered memory.

I need you to check my vitals and
draw the number nine on my forehead.
I've gone blind.
I need urgency, not justification.
Too tired to remember punctuation,
I've been screaming with CAPS LOCK frozen in place.
I am frozen in space and nothing can
warm me now but lamplight and masturbation.

I woke up in a bus station. The first person I saw
walked over to me and asked, "when was the last time you ran
for your life?"
I could not even remember my own secrets.
I could not remember if I'd ever hit someone hard enough to
hurt,
could not remember a sting in my palm,
could not remember bare feet or broken bones and I said,
"stop."

I said, "stop, and come in here with me."

"Where are you?"

"Come in here with me."

"What do you want?"

"Come in here with me and pray."

At the neck there's a squeeze: a sentence is stuck and I need
someone to help get it out.

It's a risk we have to take.

On your knees. I want you to crawl towards me.
Reach deep to know my constraint.

There's a hole where so many of my words have fallen into.

Tell me what you see:
Swallowed reins?
A harness?
Art as a violent action?
Don't pretend like I don't know what you disposed of.
I've been honest about my apathy
but can you say the same about your healing?

This is not about prestige or luxury. This is about presence—
a condition built from the friction of silence.

Are you going to give it to me, or am I going to have to steal it?

Give in.

This oath—it's volcanic.

Mirror motion

Desire: You wake with a headache and I rush the light,
the room already warring the sun.

Outside, a man vomits on the grass,
heavy gut hanging over his waistband.

I struggle for a perfect sentence, count sleepless benches,
sores on rows of unwashed ankles.

We are post-union.

Move fast. Harmony stutters in the laneways, waiting.

Falter grace

I live with the hunted.

—Charles Bukowski

1. The hammer under my bed is a twitch against October.

This disquiet is a poor arrangement.

2. Exclude the silent, exude steel. Barren petals. Confident, I
smoke through a sombre rampage.

The order of my life is read in the geometry of a rash.

Eat me.

3. I tear the tenth page from every book.

Don't look at the bleach stain on my dress, my grace.

There is no temple here. The window no longer lets the light in.

I don't need to know what's out there.

4. I swing from insecurity, reluctant for another day.

Nothing screams louder than the sun.

New math

I would have called but I was
overcome by the order of the universe and
thought it meant something as it
obstructed airflow to the lungs,
put me in a choke hold and held on until I
could only equate Isosceles to Isis.

Fail at math and make your own.
Diminished purity the extent of my intellect.
Visions wasted on wanting.
I wrote my long division on someone's pillowcase and
caught an infection from the friction.
Only rule I know is the law of attraction to distraction.

I used to go weeks without friends,
every conversation like being carsick,
disclosing the spiritual detail of our lives.
Later all I could ever eat were almonds. I sucked on
fork prongs for iron, ingested defeat.
Precious metals dismantled my
obsessive compulsions. I wanted amulets for eyes.

You should have been here the day I
became a mystic: the noise went through the
whole building.
I haven't done much living since, though;
the way I get by is closest to punishment.
I want to tremble, soften, convince myself
a better day is coming.

I would have called but I've
been in the bathtub for hours,
waiting to feel real.

I keep expecting a knock:
are you okay in there?

