

## CentO in which we take edibles on an empty stomach

“Pot is legal. I love my boyfriend.”

- Jessica Abughattas

I sometimes like to lie  
down on the floor in  
the kitchen<sup>1</sup> the watchtower  
that is my body<sup>2</sup> opened  
like a secret in a mouth<sup>3</sup> a house  
with a brain inside<sup>4</sup>

It doesn't make sense,  
I know<sup>5</sup>

Across the floor like petals<sup>6</sup>  
we make our meeting-place<sup>7</sup>  
You put on a bad British accent  
and say<sup>8</sup> “Softest of mornings,  
hello”<sup>9</sup> thick with a sax-  
ophone's syrup<sup>10</sup> as though  
there is no crisis<sup>11</sup>

What could be better than to stand  
here hungry<sup>12</sup> domestic  
as a plate<sup>13</sup>? As I open my mouth  
to speak<sup>14</sup> I keep hearing  
tree talk, water words,  
and I keep knowing  
what they mean<sup>15</sup> I must  
get this exactly, I want to  
make it clear<sup>16</sup>: These trees are  
my bones<sup>17</sup> but my eyes are so deep-  
set in my head<sup>18</sup> I can't see  
the forest from here<sup>19</sup>

This is trivial, or nothing<sup>9</sup>

I quietly call to you and you  
come and hold my hand and I  
say<sup>20</sup> “Does the breeze need us?”<sup>21</sup>

“Did you say the wind?”<sup>22</sup>  
you say with both hands on  
my chest<sup>23</sup> You like the feel,  
the weight, the heft of it

in your hand<sup>24</sup> *You are so dramatic,*  
I say<sup>25</sup> in a language  
my father never taught me<sup>26</sup>  
“Where do you think  
the soul is?”<sup>27</sup> I say instead,  
aloud, surprised<sup>28</sup>  
and Brain says<sup>29</sup> *Christianity*  
*is a religion built around*  
*a father who*<sup>30</sup> *is only a god if you learn*  
*to starve.*<sup>31</sup> And then I trouble  
my brain into a blender then hand  
you a cup<sup>32</sup>

We sit in silence  
in the face of our questions<sup>33</sup>  
long, radiant minutes,  
quietly, your hand  
in my hand<sup>34</sup> hand  
on my stupid heart<sup>35</sup> just  
agreeing to be  
still<sup>36</sup> I press my body into  
your body and<sup>37</sup> eventually feel  
interesting and not like a chair<sup>38</sup>  
Each time you breathe,  
a birch tree grows<sup>39</sup> propelled  
by a heart of sea anemone<sup>40</sup>

This is how worship begins<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ada Limón, “The Quiet Machine”

<sup>2</sup> Jada Renée Allen, “Interior”

<sup>3</sup> Phillip B. Williams, “Hunter”

<sup>4</sup> Dana Levin, “A Skull”

<sup>5</sup> Li-Young Lee, “I Loved You Before I Was Born”

<sup>6</sup> Torrin A. Greathouse, “Song”

<sup>7</sup> Muriel Rukeyser, “Song”

<sup>8</sup> Mark Bibbins, “One afternoon you fixed me”

<sup>9</sup> Mary Oliver, “Softest of Mornings”

<sup>10</sup> Safia Elhillo, “Self Portrait With Yellow Dress”

<sup>11</sup> CA Conrad, “Altered After Too Many Years Under the Mask”

<sup>12</sup> Ellen Bass, “Cold”

<sup>13</sup> Edna St. Vincent Millay, “Grown-up”

<sup>14</sup> Shara McCallum, “Passage”

- 15 Lucille Clifton, "Breaklight"
- 16 Denis Johnson, "Upon Waking"
- 17 Ama Codjoe, "Becoming a Forest"
- 18 James Cihlar, "The Way Words Echo in Our Heads"
- 19 Cameron Awkward-Rich, "Something About Joy"
- 20 Sharon Olds, "True Love"
- 21 Ellen Bass, "The World Has Need of You"
- 22 Lewis Grandison Alexander, "Japanese Hokku"
- 23 Meg Day, "10AM is When You Come to Me"
- 24 Christopher Kondrich, "Common Things"
- 25 Aria Aber, "Waiting for Your Call"
- 26 André Naffis-Sahely, "The Other Side of Nowhere"
- 27 Kim Addonizio, "Body and Soul"
- 28 Leah Naomi Green, "Origin Story"
- 29 Ishmael Reed, "Skin Tight"
- 30 Terrance Hayes, "American Sonnet for My Past and Future Assassin"
- 31 Danez Smith, "I'm going back to Minnesota where sadness makes sense"
- 32 Noor Hindi, "Breaking [News]"
- 33 Safiya Sinclair, "We Sit Silent in the Face of Our Questions"
- 34 Wendy Cope, "On a Train"
- 35 Cameron Awkward-Rich, "Meditations in an Emergency"
- 36 James Crews, "Self-Compassion"
- 37 Amy Lemmon, "I take your shirt to bed again..."
- 38 Wendy Xu, "This Year I Mean to Be an Elephant"
- 39 Jeremy Radin, "Blueberries"
- 40 Sara Eliza Johnson, "Parable of the Unclean Spirit"
- 41 Cheryl Boyce-Taylor, "Worship"

## **I dream Phoebe Bridgers takes me**

to see *A Quiet Place*  
in theaters. We hold  
hands in the previews  
it is Halloween and  
we are somehow the only ones  
not in costume. My blazer is  
faux leather, its right  
edge glancing off her  
thigh below the end of her  
black pleated tulle mini skirt.  
We split a large popcorn  
which she holds on her lap  
so when I want a bite  
I have to twist, swing  
my body toward her, my chest  
covered by blue turtleneck  
under that faux leather blazer  
and with popcorn in  
my mouth, I wonder why  
I dressed like a banker or  
Amal Clooney, if she likes that.  
After all she is still  
holding my hand, fingers  
tucked between her  
many rings, cutting off  
the oxygen to my palm

(I am telling you all this so  
you know that it was real,  
which it absolutely was not)

As I lose circulation, I do not  
make a noise because  
this is a dream inside of a poem  
and because I do not want to  
be responsible for killing Emily Blunt or her  
and her real husband's movie  
children and because  
this is all I could have ever  
wanted: a fatal flirtationship  
with Phoebe, the both of us  
made speechless by our beauty  
or movie theater etiquette  
or keeping Emily Blunt alive.

And then, on the sticky floor  
of San Francisco's Metreon 16  
I die in IMAX both by and for  
Phoebe's hand, finally becoming  
the sad and spooky skeleton  
she loved all along

The next night, I tell my boyfriend  
about this dream, and he squeezes  
my arm, says for my suffering I can set  
the Spotify playlist while we cook  
so I do, and reader, it is poetry  
me in my Target brand skeleton  
t-shirt, making pasta and  
turning on Phoebe Bridgers

## La Femme Damnée (1859)

*a cento*

Forgive me for sounding selfish but<sup>1</sup>  
last night I got off<sup>2</sup> at least a dozen times<sup>3</sup>  
undisguised and naked<sup>4</sup>, each turning  
slowly in unison with the next<sup>5</sup>  
in full self-attendance<sup>6</sup>  
facing backwards, lying  
sideways, no hands<sup>1</sup> hands  
behind my head, legs  
crossed at the ankles<sup>7</sup>  
(How difficult it had become to govern<sup>8</sup>!)

All night I rose and fell<sup>3</sup>  
all morning I've billowed and  
snapped<sup>9</sup> as if falling  
under a spell, a spell I fought  
to stay under and get out from under  
in turns<sup>10</sup> Once at least once  
my tongue tasted God<sup>11</sup>

Yes, I'm trying to impress you<sup>12</sup>  
but mainly, let's be honest<sup>13</sup>  
I've never been more  
unapologetic in my life<sup>14</sup>  
I'll get back to being a woman.  
But for now<sup>15</sup> I have a body and I cannot  
escape from it<sup>16</sup> Of course  
at the same time I mean  
to stay exactly where  
I am<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Derrick Brown, "A Finger, Two Dots, Then Me"

<sup>2</sup> Leila Mottley, "Love Poem to Oakland"

<sup>3</sup> Mary Oliver, "Sleeping in the Forest"

<sup>4</sup> Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself"

<sup>5</sup> Tracy Jo Barnwell, "Night City Sunflower"

<sup>6</sup> Mary Oliver, "I happened to be standing"

<sup>7</sup> Billy Collins, "Languor"

<sup>8</sup> Carolyn Forché, "The Colonel"

<sup>9</sup> Sandra Cisneros, "A Man in My Bed Like Cracker Crumbs"

<sup>10</sup> Maggie Nelson, "Bluets"

- <sup>11</sup> Cameron Lawrence, "Petit"
- <sup>12</sup> Tina Mozelle Braziel, "Drawl and Hum"
- <sup>13</sup> Ada Limón, "How to Triumph Like a Girl"
- <sup>14</sup> Joy Kmt, "To whom it may concern:"
- <sup>15</sup> Tess Gallagher, "I Stop writing the poem"
- <sup>16</sup> Anne Sexton, "The Poet of Ignorance"
- <sup>17</sup> Mary Oliver, "I have decided"