

What Girls Are Made Of

*“A rose is a rose is a rose is a rose”
- Gertrude Stein, 1922*

One.
**My mother whispers against a chubbed cheek,
hands cradling a head pushed between thighs
and bloodied, messy, squalling louder than any other chick
in the pen and a needy milk cry, an exhausted breath
and loved. So loved. My name:
*Rose.***

“my mother
sensed a
war in her
womb,
and so she
raised me
to fight.”
(Hafsa Atique, 2013)

In some cultures they leave baby girls out in the cold
to see if their bones breathe fire warm enough to keep them through the night,
like dragons
awakened from their membranes between quaking thighs,
coughing a smoky, strained breath

– but that metaphor got away from me.

But girls – what they’re made of,
baby girls out in the cold, shivering without a blanket while their brothers suckled on
their mother’s breast.

Girls –
they’re raised with wolves, with fur coats
and sharp teeth bared at the moon
that dictates their blood.

So with claws – teeth – fur – a smile deadlier than any siren’s,
warmness knitted in each bone
in every wailing breath and spiked strand of hair because
girls survive the cold,

and girls –
well, we’re taught how to howl.

It’s what we’re made of.

Two.
**Skinned shins and flying hair –
I scream,
with knees stained red and**

mouth wide open,
yelling – joy
wonder
feeling – a livewire.
**Imagination in bright colours
and little Gummy,
sir Gummy,
Gummy the bear
one fuzzy palm held in my hand
bouncing along against dirtied ground
another adventure
as my mother yells
Rose!**

“Lock up your libraries if you like;
but there is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon
the freedom of my mind.”
(Virginia Woolf, 1929)

There’s an apple tree in your yard.
Sweet, red, juicy apples
and every morning your mother lets open the door and watches
as you fly out – a teddy in your hand
gumboots tripping on sticks and stones
that haven’t broken your bones (just yet).

You circle the tree
but when you can’t reach you make up stories instead –
a fanciful pastime for a girl that lives too much in her head
and not enough in her boots that walk on solid ground.

Build castles in the air they used to say and so you did
as your brother learnt his spellings and you – too young to
understand the curve of *a* and the stab of *i* made up friends instead –
all built of the same air as castles,
all chattering in the freedom that was the private corners of your mind
and together you circled the apple tree of red –
and played pretend princesses
who rescued themselves.

That was until your legs stretched like a colt’s – flighty,
unstable,
tripping on sticks and stones
that broke some bones
and names that suddenly hurt you.
A head filled with *castles* replaced with muddied boots on firm ground
and “i before e except after c”
– rules about words that never existed
in those private corners in your mind –
letters still curved but losing their spark because
the flame was held in a stronger fist – your brother, your father.

And then you were tall enough to reach the apple tree
and smart enough to know that

whisper: *the bite will taste so sweet*

So they tell you:

THERE ARE WORMS INSIDE

Rotten, twisted worms devouring,
like the guilt that wells up in your stomach when curiosity
looks too much like temptation
that you just want to try –

(it hasn't killed the cat – but it's got nine lives anyway)

Three.

Blooming.

**Blood dripping like pricks from a thorn
spreading soft petals and growing buds
Red marks dripping behind a trail
itching itching itching –
my body too small too big just doesn't fit *quite right*
and you're a woman now laughed too many times
but if this is woman –
childhood recklessness dashed away with
manners and soft vulnerability and blood dripping
until cloths are stained pink,
that can never match up to men painted red
then no.
Not woman.
*Rose?***

“A full bosom is actually a millstone around a woman's neck: it endears her to the men who want to make their mammet of her, but she is never allowed to think that their popping eyes actually see her.” (Germaine Greer, 1970)

Female.

Fe –

fe eble.

fe arful

fe int

femme.

Sometimes I wish that the moon hadn't risen.
That the tide hadn't turned.
That my body wasn't as weak to the pull of the earth
as men are as weak to the pull of my body.

I wish I had no body.
I was there were no bodies.
I wish that I could sit in a room full of men
and that they wouldn't see the fe– to their –male,

missing a space between my legs. I wish
the harsh words that came out of my mouth
were reconciled with something other than the pull of the moon
and the cycle of the month –
something like an opinion; and I wish
that it wasn't such a fucking disadvantage *I wish*
that words of

ANGER

weren't equated with ungratefulness
I wish it wasn't such a hindrance; I wish that my curves were flat and my shoulders
were broad enough to fit doorways and tower over others; I wish my wrists were
strong enough to hold a pen against the tide of people trying to pull it off me and
and and and
there's so much more spilling from lips
until they bleed of all the wishes that not even a meteor shower could make true
and if the "fe-" body wasn't in the way,
if wo- wasn't before -man
if I could just forget...

Fe – chemical symbol; iron: "It is by mass
the most common element on Earth,
forming much of Earth's outer
and inner core." Strong.

Female.

Fe –

fe arsome

fe rvent

fe alty

feminist.

Four.
Breaths shared
chest rising and falling
hair tipped across shoulders and curved
spines – feet – breasts – tongues –
lips – palms – cunt – thighs
arching – two two two
together
moving like one
grasping slipping
wetness soaked and slicked
up up up rising higher, breathing into
each others mouths
and gasping
a name ripped from their lips
agony in
one. single. syllable.
Rose.

“You are worth more than who you fuck
You are worth more than a waistline
You are worth more than any naked body could proclaim
In the shadows, more than a man’s whim.”
(Mary Lambert, 2014)

Dear sir/madam,

They say sex equals sin
when they whisper *slut* into their palms
or snicker *virgin* when we aren’t sinning
but either way the state of my hymen
isn’t anyone’s business except mine
(not even yours).

And maybe sex does equal sin
cause when your body was near mine it turned on.
And though this ‘love letter’ smells a little like the coffee in my mouth
I promise you it tastes even more bitter.

I didn’t want you to try and change me,
like the tv you flicked back and forth between channels,
and the light bulb you screwed –
I only stuck around long enough cause when your finger
trailed
 down
 down
 down

my spine
it felt like my body was a livewire and I’d finally touched it
and I’m glad I can still feel that way now that we’re done.

They never told me sex could be as good
as it was with you – like I fit into the right spaces.
And I’m glad that you taught me what our two bodies could do.

But I’m gladder still that I taught myself
that the power of no sometimes still existed
and even gladder that I went ahead
and said it.

Five.
I tap keys until letters form words
and words form sentences –
uttered from lips of red
and a body, pale, flushed of red
and those sentences form paragraphs,
singing tales of red for the women

who's tongues ache with the need for
bitten cherry red, bleeding mouths clenching teeth
filled with paragraphs spilling out until they turn to tales
all of red –
imagination recaptured, reimagined, a world reborn
a woman's world
our world
my world
mine.
Rose.

“The first sentence (of my poem) must be "I left it."
What is the second sentence”
(Alice Notley, 2001)

I left it.

[fill in the blank yourself –
the pen isn't as heavy
as they would have you believe]

Six.
A new mother whispering against chubbed cheek,
hands cradling a head pushed between thighs
(my thighs)
strained and bloodied and loved and
all the overwhelming amount of fear for my baby girl
born into a world of
danger on every stair – power point – cupboard door
– sharp forks – choking hazards
– dark alleys with cat calls in the night
and men with teeth that bite and rip and women
who can bite back but get thrown from Eden for doing so,
an apple undoing us with dimpled redness like the
softness of my baby's cheek –
her scalp ready to be moulded
with words that fall from my red lips
and the fear that they are wrong until the nurse asks me:
what will you name her
Rose?

“God should have made girls lethal
When he made monsters of men”
(E.H, 2013)

Keys.

Keys between fingers.

Keys between fingers
and a clenched fist.

Keys between fingers and a clenched fist and a gaze – left right
left right.

The car honks; *howya doin love?*

Feet clack clack clack, but heels aren't made for running
and lipstick isn't made for kissing just for swallowing up the dark of the night as it
smears across the sky,
creating shadows that the moon can't light.

The car honks; *whatchya out so late for, sweetheart?*

I breathe.

Keys.

Keys between fingers.

A whistle on a keychain.

10 bucks selling screams under the guise of paranoia because we just can't buy safety.

They say my sharp tongue is the worst – pointed, gnawing, pulling teeth.

Back in your box they say, like I'm a troll who rises only to terrorise those daring
enough to cross that bridge and come and get me
when the truth is t(he)y follow(s) me down on home.

They say it's her weapon –

my weapon –

our weapon –

a silver tongue tinged with gold, more slippery than any of Medusa's snakes, bloodier
than Lady Macbeth's hands that just. won't. wash.

tongue whipping left right

left right lashing out faster than the hand can write.

But until the voice becomes more powerful than the body –

than the temptation between stockinged legs, curved, curved upwards,

a skirt hinting at temptation while t(he)y try to press the on button.

A car honks; *nice tits!*

nice legs!

nice, nice nice compliments that pierce in the dark, their tongue flopping
in their mouths as I, we, us, clack clack clack in the dark and the wind
becomes a wail that we can hear –

I'll stick with keys.

Keys between fingers.

Seven.
 Aged hands, cracked –
 creases and crevices
 and a mind that keeps on turning despite
 the body not keeping up – a disconnect that hasn't existed
 since the days of *woman*? because who am I without *woman*,
 and where would we be without *woman*
 when they can alter the entire world–
 bring the downfall of men on their knees
 and with their sharpened-tongued barbs
 and cradling new life to their breasts,
 and who will I be when *woman* is no longer left
 except for dusty words on a paper that people say were by
 Rose.

“a single woman can uproot
 an entire world of men with the simple act
 of eating an apple, opening a box, loving a prince”
 (Elizabeth Hewer, 2013)

I have nothing left,
 except the palms of my hands
 and the soil beneath my feet
 and the whispers of all the women who came before me
 and all that will come after
 – a future built
 on the ability of a woman
 to know her mind and her body as one
 and to listen to it as best as she can
 and ignore it as much as she wants.

The end.
 Things are as they are and I am as I am so with my last words
 of choked breath hands shaking red bubbled up on thin chapped lips
 waiting until they fall open no longer, I write –
 Rose.

“Everything will be changed once woman gives woman to the other woman.”
 (Cixous, 1976)