

RIP/TIDE: AN ELEGY

by

A.k.Padovich

A Thesis

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of

Master of Fine Arts

Creative Writing

Committee:

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Fairfax, VA

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Director: Sally Keith, Professor
Department of English

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DEDICATION

In loving memory of my sweet mother, Michele Louise Padovich
November 29th, 1952 to August 17th, 2014

*Mom, while you yield your ghost,
show me the language for obstacle;
just get into the poems, please,
I am sick of searching.*



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Lastly, *and always*, for my Mother; whom I must kowtow to for making me a thoroughbred workhorse, someone who never says *die* nor *no* to things I know I am capable of. For reminding me every day that I was special because I was yours, and that *I could do the things that you could never*. Every day from here on out, I plan on

proving to you, that you’ve always been right.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	vi
I	
The Tin Pan.....	2
Her Large Print Book.....	5
Mother Wears Gossamer to Bed.....	6
The Archeology.....	7
Containment.....	8
Mother safe and sound.....	9
Lighthouse.....	10
Mother the other way around.....	11
A Rip at Low Tide.....	12
Fugue State.....	13

II

How to Visit Baba Yaga.....	16
The Grieving Dream of Baba Yaga	
i. baba yaga ponders worldwide blackouts.....	17
ii. vasilisa's reproach.....	18
iii. baba yaga can count.....	19
iv. baba yaga makes excuses.....	20
v. baba yaga misses.....	21
vi. vasilisa sees a therapist.....	23
vii. baba yaga decides to say good.....	24
Localized Deafness.....	26
Because I Can't Sing.....	27
BITCH.....	28
Acting Normal.....	29
Precious.....	30
A Collection of Facts about Heaven.....	31
Ghost.....	33
Sestina.....	34
Serenade.....	36
Perambulate.....	38
How to Go Through Your Mother's Possessions.....	40
The Grieving Dream of Pinball.....	42
The Very Texture of Memory.....	45

III

DELUGE.....	46
Appendix.....	65

ABSTRACT

RIP/TIDE: AN ELEGY

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George Mason University, 2015

Thesis Director: Sally Keith

This thesis consists of poetry written over the period of three years in the poetry track of the MFA in Creative Writing program at George Mason University, and especially consists of poetry created in the final year of the program, where the author's mother passed away. These poems deal directly with topics such as: loss, grief, cancer, caretaking of the sick and dying, and death itself. It is also concerned with the abstraction of the above list into myth, the supernatural, philosophy, and the dream state. This thesis is elegy.

I

The Tin Pan

once his little
babe an only girl
was perched up high

in her highchair
mouth all over
the place in screams

as her small doll
a tinkerbelle jostled
about her tabletop

having been pulled
at the string
into song and dance

the moment the doll
sounded the child heard
wrong heard nothing at all

and the child knew it vibrated
and mother could speak
though the child heard no

sound—

it was a simple tin pan
sturdy in its construction
which was the deciding factor

unlikely in comparison
to the crisp pages
of the most recent *time*

magazine mother
was piecing through
around midnight or so

as father journaled
longhand in his book

the tin pan lay silent

waiting there while there
in the bold face lines
it read could your child be

deaf and that's when
it happened father's first
inkling toward the pan—

toward the kitchen after
midnight after a wooden
spoon after the tin pan

and after in her bedroom
humbled himself before
his child's crib raised up

his eyes and pleaded
with one who might hear
for the ears of this little girl

please god let her wake up

You are going to die. The poem will not.
G. C. Waldrep

Her Large Print Book

In her oversized leather chair, she almost
 shrinks under the weight of her age, compacts.
 I can almost see her with a blanket draped

around her crone shoulders, the wrinkles rising up
 like mountains push up from the earth over time.
 Can almost see her passing her days

on a porch somewhere, her cats and my father
 mewing in the house; while she rocks, nods, remains
 deaf to the sounds. Oh to be deaf on a day

like this. As she turns her hearing aid down low,
 it makes a shrill noise she looks up at, then shakes off.
 Screwing up her face as, she asks me—"D'ya

hear that?" It's the only noise intelligible in the florescent
 room I can attribute to her. She nods, leaving the
 reality of the chemo center where we have been

tethered. She squints at the words on the page,
 drags her fingers across the lines, looks up only
 to check the amount of time she has left.

Mother Wears Gossamer to Bed

after puking her brains out decides that
to give salute to things so frail & draped
so delicately will only make up
for the violence of this roiling belly
burning forehead & parching tongue if she
tricks her body into thinking so it's
not as if this sickness is man made
no not hunger not this time as much as

it makes her gnash her teeth & look for new
innards it's more like sickness here has learned that
even aging crones need some alleviation
from life from adjuvant medication
after all its not repose which stays a woman
but neither does metastasis or ablation

The Archeology

After Giorgio Di Chirico

She grasps at the life she thinks is not yet
too far demolished by cancer's gouge, pretends
that she can still savor its sweeter moments

even when they have long since gone
stale. She holds herself toward these
thoughts as her hands command an oval

over her belly, a plea for it to remain
embryo inlaid, full of perfect possibility;
wherein each arm gently does its job

of holding the dying cargo sturdy
as is possible. It is rough. It is rough
because the edges and corners of what

is passing from her will always be slippery,
worn by continual rehashing & attempts
to gainsay. She is aware the price of rich bygones

& over grasping—dangerous as an egg
balanced on a spoon, knows that she can't
go on forever. All shells are borne to break.

Containment

We aren't as different as you may think—after all
You can move water from one cup to another
And it will still just be water. But, if you push me

From the eden of your womb, just to replant me in the desert
How can you expect me to remain whole?
Deserts, however lonely, are still unforgiving. You need to

Protect the things you keep there. So, I'll send a vase
For flowers, they'll stay longer if you allow them to
Stand upright. After all—it's easy for a blossoming thing to go

So quickly the way of the earth; what's hard is the withering
Of spirit we get when contained. I'm convinced that is why we learn
To pack instead other things: our stomachs and suitcases, photo
albums

And coffee filters, your coffin and chemo bags. We can do this in an effort to hold on
To the things which make us feel whole, not to the things we think really do
so,
Mother, wholeness was never the endpoint here, it was the start.

Mother safe and sound

as i open the blinds in her hospice room she acknowledges my presence nods her head one part in agreement for the sun one part as if to say yes to this day and its light for these her darkening moments i feed her ice chips from a plastic spoon thinking of how mad she got at her dentist for telling her she couldn't eat them anymore flat teeth you see but like all good rebels she chews them now with a small gusto more effort than i have see her expel in days a benevolent windstorm weakened to frail breeze so i fill the room with vivaldi vibrant as her spirit and hope the tiny tubes of her still ringing hearing aid can find the pitch her eyes flash when they do and blink stir stare in time with the sound of strings bow pluckings bing bing bing she mumbles asking about her car the one coming for to carry her the one which brings my father coughing with valley fever to her side to sit starboard me as we watch her gather herself for departure when the music swells she sinks back in her hospital grade bed tilting eyes rolling heavy back into her face now thin as papier-mâché over stern skull methinks i see thee yorick alas poor mother who knows me so well for her last phrase shocked me more than her death calling her inner juliet forth to remind me this *parting is such sweet sorrow* that i should stay by her side all night as all the nurses have said she will be gone tomorrow

Lighthouse

i.

Keeping watch means
“to be quick to ring the alarm—”

Or, “to be alert as to warn
and ward off what could breach

Safety.” Also, “to sit
the long hours in face-off with rage

ravaged seas and say to them: *I am immune,
this close, to your suffering.*

ii.

I am watchful for days on end—
and sit these long hours,

alone, with the shell of my mother
who breathes in rattles.

I am immune to her
Nearly lifeless in the bed;

But, not the sign “shaped *W*
with the fingers,” meaning: *water*

the “cross of the brow,” meaning: *help*.
This is language school—

where daughters of mothers born deaf
learn, both, to breathe and sob abatedly.

I feel like screaming at her
to *let go*, or “board the ship”

with two gold coins, two more in reserve
for me. I must stay to man the alarm.

mother the other way around

sobbing & snotnosed i watch my mother stymie up on her own mucus watch
her unresponsive paper face stay straight as she chortles rattles near chokes
on the thick and thickening liquid first a slow trickle now a flash flood filling up
her lungs i put my finger in the dam wipe at her nostrils as it spills over hold
strange composure as the small waste bin begins to teem with tissue the evil
green still sizing her up testing its power pouring from her as if it thinks i haven't
been watching her veer the way of the earth for months now *this petty pace from
day to day* the hospice room cold silent chillingly sterile dimly lit to help her
with her dying is suddenly jarring braced by burst of signing it sends my heart
racing —*mommy?*— the blank half rolled stare goes anywhere but my direction
the raise so slowly of her hand this bone draped with skin which once held
muscle held me creaks from her heaving chest to icy forehead with a tilt i
scramble scurry scuttle search google left-handed still gripping her bone bag
of fingers until i find the key to her signed language her cracked dry lips move
but no more sound save gurgles not until her *parting* and *sweet sorrow* the
bright screen in hand insists she's not all gone translates the deafening silence
says she has been repeatedly telling the empty room around us —hello.

A Rip at Low Tide

I put your dying in my mouth just to see what something so immensely cold can be when coddled by warmth, held intimately.

Sadly, I am unable to breathe, the force of the thing caustic and causing me to choke. My tongue seizes up. My teeth clamp down.

Yet, I cannot spit it out; expulsion being about as comforting as being held beneath water by your mother, just close enough to the surface to memorize your face shifting as your grip tightens, to see the blue-black sky behind you, the v-formations of seabirds.

When someone is in the state of anticipatory grief, websites relate this to a story of a Japanese woman watching her husband die: *You're standing at the shore looking out at the water. You know a tsunami is coming but there's nothing you can do to stop it and nowhere to run.*

Hear: a mighty current will pull you under the waves. Understand: a loving face already is.

Your dying seems not much different from a gun in my mouth, either way I've been asked to stand in the face of that which will destroy me; all the while knowing I will still say things like: Will you please forgive me? Mother I'm still here, Thank you please stay, I forgive you and, goodbye.

Fugue State

A deafness, a silence, a dropped anchor; Or, me in the hospice watching as Mother and Death struck a deal, made on reckless bargaining and the fearfulness of Daughter dedication, to wait to take Mother away from me until I had already lost my identity to her passing.

A dissociation, a ripping, an immeasurable loss; Or, me becoming nothing save a rapid whirlwind adrift in agrypnia, starved for the lack of Mother sound; not losing it, but watching it be lost. Oh, how I was dragged out, face awash in injury, as Death came for what was rightly his.

A crumbling, a morphing, a replacement with silence; Or, me being asked to leave the care facility by white-robed nurses saying: "You were here when it counted. Go home. Get some sleep." This thought of Mother looming amid the blur of streets, then my bed. A stern settlement with sleep.

A nightmare, a curse, a new fear; Or, me dreaming of Mother as a zombie, with Death as the virus to change her so utterly. Mother in gossamer, coming for my life. Her arms barred forth, my neck bared open, one last touch before the terror of communication.

A shattering, a call, a new miscommunication; Or, another phrase for a group of storms coming to a head. Father's voice and the stunning guttural nuance of the words, "She's gone." A slipping back into the dream state, back to Mother arms. The faintest glimmer of Mother at the foot of the bed.

A grumble, a solitude, a new set of rules; Or, how if you split yourself enough, you can weather all manner of storms. If Mother dies while you are sleeping, continue dreaming of her coming back. Awake to burning alarms; what you forget in the night, you are cursed to live again in the morning.

II

Fear not, the morning is wiser than the evening.

Vasilisa's Doll, from Vasilisa the Beautiful, a Russian Folktale

How to Visit Baba Yaga

Think of: light. Ask her: *Do you have one?* Get her to not: boil water, put you in it, eat you. Do: all her tasks, survive, use your wit but not your tongue. Think of: your mother. Ask the doll she left you: *help*. Achieve: a meal fit for twelve men (she will eat it all), crushed poppy seed oil (she will use it all), a clean hut on chicken-wire legs (she will marvel at you). Ask her for: permission, three questions, three answers. Query: Who was the white horseman who rode past me in the forest? Wait for: gnashing iron, her swiftness of answer, the dawn. Query: Who was the red horseman? Wait for: iron sparks, the quicker grinding of iron. Query: Who was the black? Wait for: fierceness of voice, raging eyes, her *Any other questions?! Speak!!* Hold: your tongue. Hold: further questions. Hold: your youth, back. Hold: your ground. Know she: will press you, thinks it's just as well to shut your mouth, still wants to boil you, still wants your bones for her wall, knows not what you are capable of, she will ask you how you've managed to come this far. Say: you are of your mother, that you are blessed because. She will: gnash her iron teeth, dig her curved crone claws into your back, push you out of her hut, force light upon you. You will: survive. You will: pocket that doll. You will: become aware of the purity of your heart. You will: thank your mother. You will: persist. You: will persist. You will persist.

The Grieving Dream of Baba Yaga

i. baba yaga ponders worldwide blackouts
& makes herself real sick
not the throw up type
but the kind of pain that makes
one think a new marianas trench
has cracked open inside
her heart *gone belly up*
she thinks it might be best
to switch off the samovar &
sip her ginger chai stop
thinking about what would
happen to her mother's life
span if all the lights went out
bye bye baby
yaga knows her power
can feel in her fingertips
through all her house
floorboards & poppy seed stores
knows it's more about being
neutral
a ghost inside a husk
mind the gap
this way even a broom
a pestle on the move
is a dependent to be swayed
to grind grit-teethedly
she allows this trench to deepen
sips more the idea
all things go
feels too much like warning
as if all the electricity in the world
was silently reminding yaga to be
careful of what one discovers of magic
that goes beyond oneself to be careful
of what one allows themselves to need to be careful
mother knows best

ii. vasilisa's reproach
is sorry im not sorry
that i tread all over your bones
i mean over your fence made of broken people
broken dreams & severed futures
sorry im not sorry
i mucked it up because
i had my mind on my mommy
& my mommy on my mind
Sorry im not sorry
For this awkward jump start
stalling conversations where
you will damn my soul seek my bones
want me in the nethers with you
& instead all i will hear is you &
your witchy attempts to point
me in the right
direction to keep me away
from the ground you are mired in
as your house is now your grave
the place you rest yourself at too long
i cannot curse now enough
sorry im not sorry
i bid you wake
bid you bones
that i can go further than you
that i have what you could never
that i am of my mother
that sorry im not sorry
that her face
i realize
has always belonged to you

iii. baba yaga can count
the number of people she loves
unconditionally on one finger she has
always known the knights alone
to fight for her the kids to come
a begging but yaga knows you can
only love someone unconditionally
if your first youthful dalliance
is your own hide thinks *it is better this way*
to roll around in the joy of you understanding
unconditionally only you yourself can be guilty
of hurting you thinks *loneliness is not a choice*
but a device through which to see the heart
as if through the eye of a needle
through no sullyng but her own
poor management of the earth the dawn &
the stars thinks *one does not need another soul*
when one's fence is already made of bones

iv. baba yaga makes excuses
for the ones she loves &
tears apart with her teeth
this one dreamt of attention
& in a wild frenzy too
that one swooped in took it all
without as much as a nod
of his garish hat yaga
stays herself by knowing all
her loves inside & then out
makes the effort to keep them
around eats then saves skulls bones
this way no one ever leaves
her not really not like her
mother & dad not like him
or him or them as well one
doesn't just become balancer
of the earth the dawn & the
stars the arch-crone on wondrously
boney legs & be loved back

v. baba yaga misses
her mama yaga
says if the world
is to be made
of little girls
to take after
their mamas
then how will
they do anything
save die
save learn
from losses
of what to hear
what to understand
when new children
come knocking
when new knights
lay down
their arms
to hold you
in theirs
yaga knows
that she would not
be the balancer
the torch-barer
if she did not
at once recall
how her mama
was powerful
enough to not
hear a sound
to not let any
one save herself
carry the torch
a song of how to live
her life see
little witches
have nothing
to gain from
their mamas
save how to hear
the sounds for
their vibrations

how to read
the world
when you cannot
see its purpose
when all that remains
is a lack thereof

vi. vasilisa sees a therapist & says

I'm only here because I need to tell someone I don't want to be.

It's easier to pretend that this world doesn't exist.

I'm not *supposed* to say that aloud.

Words being spells, and all.

Come back to me? Do you really think she might?

All she left me with is dolls and bears and rooms to clean.

What am I to forget? What am I to dolefully keep?

Six tons of poppy seed oil, or else boxes filled of her dust?

This life is now a barely edible cake.

This is a pestle without a mortar.

This is a set of Knights bereft of horses.

My origin point, shot through, has become nowhere.

I can't stop avoiding the place we buried her.

I won't.

vii. baba yaga decides to say good
bye to things she thinks futile
decides instead to focus on what she has
to do to maintain her happiness she begins
with the distance between beloved things
cleaves together gullies ravines swift
notches in the landscape strings them closer
as if with thread so as to slide slipstream to desert
lift chickenwire bonehouse toward chickenwire bonehome
next says her goodbyes to the gaps between
fingers that long for others then the sensation of this
as if in vein a slip intravenous from
generation on down from ending back to entry & a-
round again weaving & unwinding waving good
bye to the attempt to stop fixing things
like deciding who gets light or poppy seed oil
or adjuvant medication or a coffin paid in full
a say in how she is supposed to run her life
see yaga does not like being told what to do
thinks instead *most important of all continue*
to live up to the motto dignity always dignity
otherwise if such goodbyes are not goaded
then like drowning dry pain will gasp ever out
all catastrophe no granules of good time no sand
for any hourglass biding yaga thinks
was never the problem here not as much
as the gumption to withstand pain or the miles between
her forest & heaven the grasping after things she cannot hope
to touch once more the feeling that she will never feel
as good as when she is finally ready to say good bye
the feeling after the fact when she does not

Struck by the *abstract* nature of absence; yet it's so painful, lacerating. Which allows me to understand *abstraction* somewhat better: it is absence and pain, the pain of absence—perhaps therefore love?

Roland Barthes, Mourning Diary

Localized Deafness

I search in the silences, the only real world you ever knew, to seek you out. I know that you will always take the opportunity to hover where the air is lacking waves, make them up for yourself. Conduct. I am awash with you—a deafness that sounds like your voice unblemished as a bell. It rings out in a way I never knew while you were alive: so crystalline in its silence, I imagine that I am fine. I imagine this inflection, that only I know, is not the cause of my life's new pains, as much as it is a balm. I imagine that this noise is just my type of grief, that when grandpa said *horrific*, that was his. I'll say instead mine is a deafness transferred to me. One that I could hide from the world, and wish I had the opportunity to, like a locked chest, in my attic, with your name on it. I keep whispering in every silence: "I am fine."

Because I Can't Sing

On the day Whitney Houston died, you texted with teary-eyed poor grammar, the first thing you did when you found out was *to go to bought her greatest hits*. Ears deaf to most sounds: the vibrations and pitches she could hit, belt—you could hear. And I think that's why I can remember you naming *The Bodyguard* your favorite movie.

When you were laid up in your final days, dad said you dying would be the greatest gift you could have ever given me, that I'd find you with me at all times.

But now, I can only hear that dingy bar conversation where I play Whitney, "*And you're ready to die for me?*" Where you then tell me: "*It's the job.*"

BITCH

when i was thirteen
i called her that

to her face then
shut the door in it

for measure so a sting
of sharp pain palm

to cheek she gave me
in return i thought

then how much i
never wanted to speak

to her again now i
rack my brain

to remember the ASL
for *dog* i look up

the sign for *bow*
down for tail

between my legs
and sign with

my fingers my fist
the forms for *i love*

you, and *i'm sorry*—
i would give up

all this language
just to know again

the touch of her hand
near this mouth of mine

Acting Normal

For Susan Tichy

The ghost in the concert hall
lifts her hand with gentle ease
(and perhaps with comfort,
unto herself, but never, never
lets on she needs it) and
brushes a fly out of the way, or
perhaps it's a dust particle
reminding her of her place. If
this place were full of music,
she'd tell it to drop silent, and
would lift her hands skyward,
conjure a baton, on which to
conduct her energies into
more valuable noises. So take
this pain, oysterlike, garishly
open, and sink it back into its
shell into that abyss that
brought her here where
darkness is always in the light,
where the body can feel itself
mottling black, where this
Russian novel ending is all we
get, where the heart is as
immutable as language can so
lack, and you haven't left me
behind.

Precious

Give me your hand. Take my hand. Don't you let go. Don't let go...

J.R.R. Tolkien

Samwise Gamgee to Mr. Frodo

The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King

When Sam cradles Frodo and asks if he can recall
any orchards in blossom, any birds nesting in hazel

thickets, I never understood why Frodo had to give in
to being *naked in the dark, with nothing, no veil* to keep

him safe. I never understood the art of giving up
when so near the end. I guess that's what makes

Sam the wisest and best of them all; if he couldn't
carry the ring, he knew he could carry his friend.

When the active dying stage begins it is said the dying
will go within a day. At the end, you took five, and me,

I stayed awake and starving. On the last day of your life
I came to cradle your hand; but you could only push mine away.

So close then, you knew I would carry the weight of you,
concede to it, that I would say forever: *Don't go where I can't follow.*

A Collection of Facts about Heaven

After Sylvia Plath

Expansive from here to eternity.
Then, at once, as small as a flea
In a bed devoid of its sleeper.

God's playground,
Swing-set, Chem. set, at least,
The After-Veil!—Chock full

Of dearly departed, & you too.
The sheer whiteness
Of the place, I cannot begin to know.

Ghost-pallid
Sheaths upon every once-body
All-equalizing—

White, tender, feigning-natural eyefuls;
Memories.
Something else

Pulls me to think this, I know—
Bibles, metaphysics;
Sunday school lessons come back to haunt

Me black as fine print.
Mother, I see you—
Deaf ears, deaf intonations,

Turned suddenly deaf to you;
Now, I imagine, fully capable of hearing
My anger, my weeping from below.

I imagine you sweeping
Down, melting my grief
With one glint of your newfound sound

& I,
I am your anchor
A weight buried deep

& forever out of your reach

Wound tightly
For your descent

Into my cochlea, the ringing din here.

Ghost

I just can't sleep anymore. So I put my hands
deep in craft hoping my brain will follow suit.
That's when the atmosphere shifts. Cools.

And you sneak in to ruin my poem, cup your hands
around it. Add a touch, unnecessary. I watch my work
topple. *Hope it wasn't a masterpiece* I hear you

whisper somewhere. In my head, it's easy to picture
you throwing things across my bedroom:
your dresses I've already hemmed, the porcelain

owls you sent by mail, your mother's wedding ring;
or the simple act of knocking your own picture
off the wall. I half wish for Whoopi Goldberg

to knock on my door. Instead I say to no one: *I think
about you every minute, it's like I can still feel you.*

Sestina

On the Occasion of My Mother's Sixty-Second Birthday, November 29th, 2014

As if sentinels, the holly branches outside my bedroom window are in full attack-array: Spiny and red. Mother, its so peculiar to see how such things can stand, survive, and even bloom, in the midst of nearly everything else dying. I have come to see it isn't the holly's fault that it's best growth comes on when it does. I

cannot know what winter does to most, but I know that I feel myself flowering sharp and toxic in this very room. Growing blighted from the beck of your body's faulting, it's hard to keep mine going in this dying season, mother; it's not as easy as the holly portrays: as if it's nothing to maintain strength or beauty in spite of surviving

what feels like all other life being silenced. Surviving you cannot be the rest of my life, I cannot succumb with you. I cannot let what's left of me become some ill-fated, fatal thing hidden behind a mask of "I'm fine." So I must make room in my heart. Eke out the poison I must give the name "mother." Now there are no sorrys. Now neither of us is at fault.

Still, if living is the great task, why, then, is it so easy to default? I have been too reactionary, thinking I could not possibly survive past today. In fact it has been the farthest I could see myself, mother, for months now. Though, I cannot renege all for the sake of a birthday. I will wait to wake up tomorrow with a blank slate in my bedroom and hope with all my heart I become it's chalk. That my life is no thing

that cannot simply be slightly erased and recalculated. Everything begins somewhere. This can be my new beginning, and if my fault-line is the mention of your death, or the folly of imagination's room to expand you into some ghost or my own wispy shadow; then my survival will hinge on forever seeing you where you are not. But I have always known that a daughter only fully succeeds after the mother

has gone. There are too many seasons left ahead, mother, to think myself anywhere near that goal, but I won't lie and say everything that points me there isn't due at some point to your hands. I, in the aftermath, have merely twenty-seven years and your body's faltering to thank for the "me" the world sees now. Such a marvel! But then, surviving you was only ever going to be a gamble, if not simply the time and room

to go my own way into the ground. Momma, after surviving this, I must tell you how strange a thing re-learning to falter is; how I can see it, bourgeoning the window, just beyond my bedroom.

Serenade

This shaking keeps me steady. I should know. What falls away is always. And is near.

Theodore Roethke

At night when the chill creeps in all the worse
& when too many of my pillows & an extra throw

will make no difference, I will imagine the ghost
who lives in my house to be a kindly spirit,

but who can say? She has never shown herself
to me except in those bone-cold moments

when I know I could not possibly be alone.
I will whisper to her to let me sleep, although

I know the wisps of her hair, the whoosh
of the air will keep my eyes trained to be

anything save rested. I will say to her:
You can crawl under these blankets with me

if you like, two bodies might keep us warmer
than this sole one between us & she will. I will pretend

the wide curves of her will deaden the blow
of my heavy bed. I will pretend she is the one

pulling back my hair, scratching my head & braiding
my hair into her own. Her expanse of brunette and gray

will make my golden hair shine against the awful glare
of the night, will make me appear, to her, more beautiful

then when she once left me behind. She will begin to sing,
in a clear tone she never had & I will pretend

that it's not the overhead ceiling fan creaking,
threatening to fall down on me. I will pretend

that the ghost who lives in my house waits
for me to sleep, before she dares to leave my side. That once I do,

she will walk from the foot of my bed & will begin whispering
her incantations & prayers as the fall leaves disembark

in the night. She will gently lift the window & alight
from the sill; & then, she will stand guard under my window
& will sing out, continually, of what heaven looks
like.

perambulate

maybe soon i'll catch a flight
and say to myself
that distance is only made real

by people awaiting arrivals
and so i
imagine you waiting for me

in an airport bar
somewhere where they hang
globes from the ceiling as a reminder

to travelers that none of us
are safe from the wonder
of what we could be missing

as if the borders
of my body could elongate outwardly
just enough to tap

the tip of something i
imagine is as celestially close
to your end

point as i ever will come
and in that moment
i imagine how my desire to be

near you will afflict us both
and allow us to pretend
that our skin isn't cold when we are

apart but simply raising in expectation
of when we might once more touch
or that you in all your rambling

will one day come home
to me i imagine this a thought
worth traveling for

or else i will have to

find another way to tell my body
that the place we began is no longer

the aim that from here on out
our journey lies in the wake
of destinations we allow to pass us by

How to Go Through Your Mother's Possessions

First, begin with the undying question: How
Did it come to this? Her unfounded by her body;

And you, wading through all that was to remain.
Remind yourself she was more than the empty

Boxes, kept by the dozen; more than her hoard piles
Of college-era love letters and Christmas baubles,

Her predilection to cradle every quiet herald of when
Times in her life seemed more glorious: Photos by the ton

Of California sunshine, in a high-waisted bikinis made for
"Bigger girls;" or sitting on Walt Disney's desk with a less

Than approving face, and her first hearing aid, on. More than:
All these souvenir key chains and diary entries of family

Road trips across country to grandmother's house; every
Stuffed animal you ever forgot about. More than: The premie

Onesie, smaller than the length of your forearm, the hospital
Put you in when they took you and your blood-poisoned body

From her belly on that first day of your life. Remind
Yourself you are not alone in this. When her mother died she,

Too, waded. Kept only her mother's hutch and silver-rimmed china,
The gaudy wedding ring her father gave her mother, for you.

Recall *You get mom's ring now; and, when I die, you get mine.*
Recall the moment she did, your blurry-eyed demands for her

Promise, fulfilled. Come back from the memory. Sift more
Through the dust of her. Pull her hair from the brushes. Fold

The jeans she held onto with the hopes of sliding her hips
Back into. Try them on yours. Find stacks of Harlequin

Romance novels and stacks of unlined paper lined by text
Messages you sent her over the span of two whole years, hand-

Written out without her knowing they would transfer
Automatically. Keep them. Dwell, momentarily, in the notion

She may not be gone. Follow these rules to finish the process:
Cry: Make it ugly. Sob: Make it unnerving. Laugh: Out of turn.

Then, decide where to hold her in heaps
Of donated furniture and knick-knacks of decades long past,

In the hot garbage bins accosted by the Arizona sun, or in
what little you will ultimately keep of her life: faux jewelry

And piles of Polaroids. Dwell so in her possessions that you forget
You, too, are another thing that belonged to her. Shake this off.

You are not your mother's real pearls nor her last book read.
You are a house under construction. You are to call this surviving.

You are to call this surviving *her*. Start the next room.

The Grieving Dream of Pinball

The word of the year is somewhere between *heal* and *forgive*.

Sun Tzu on my wall reminds me this has something to do with battle.

In the midst of chaos there is also opportunity.

More like a chance to tilt:

: like steel rolling against plastic, lights and all.

: like I don't know how hard to shake the sides of my life in order to re-engage it.

: like I actually have a spare ball left to play.

Tilt for tilting's sake.

Today, the sky is supposed to deliver a blizzard to bury the death already in the ground.

I call that compartmentalizing.

I call that a chance to throw another coin in the game and try again.

To be able to heal, battle. To be able to forgive, play again.

The opportunity to secure ourselves against defeat lies in our own hands, but the opportunity of defeating the enemy is provided by the enemy himself.

Though how can I wield exculpation from what I cannot exculpate? Mea Culpa, I suppose.

I'll blame all this war on playing until there's better word for "accepting an excuse for."

I'll blame it on waiting for a ball replay.

I'm sorry I find it hard to appear strong when I'm losing.

I'm sorry I'm scoring so low.

The Very Texture of Memory

when death took to
your cosseting
i began waiting
to hear the signal
that would give me
forever my stride

your earthly body
to be found
in the bleakness
of your absence
back a moment
to haunt and plague

it left me to practice
engaged with senses
to see your sweet face
with my eyes closed
wherein i could trust
your fading footprints

III

DELUGE

IF NOT this ^deluge of^ bric-a-brac, Nothing.
George Oppen

language has always been an obstacle
a miracle of trading with one
another our thoughts and feelings how
desperate the human need to communicate
how grave the imagination must become
when language passes away from us
silence must step in as obstruction

here survival means to fill holes
its not my place to fix
for instance a particular two weeks
in august where holes are dug
and into them love and hearing
will go into them i will inlay
eyeglasses poems my language into them
all this will go into them
i will see myself go too

i have taken to chain smoking
up against closed plate glass windows
in a bedroom you never saw
the smoke ricochets in my face
as birds take formations for flight
i do this staring at the outer
world still as it is ever-moving

its a magic trick first saw
and table then a girl torn
in half just because im not
bleeding here doesnt mean im not
broken by this sleight of hand

once there were scientific experiments conducted
on great steel tables some hypothesizing
for a scale needle to waver
to harden facts give cold numbers
for the weight of souls postmortem
with the help of the dying
the experimenting doctor proposed twenty-one grams
for the moment the soul leaves
us lighter in death than life
for the moment silence obscures
all our final utterances to less than
the total weight of a single
hearing aid or pair of glasses

i affix your last hearing aid
to my ear and walk around
as if i know what it is
to know the silence as closely
as you did i make sure
people see my effort i pull
my hair up stare at mouths
on strangers then i know this
is how the world must exist

when i forget about the way
the world is now i realize
i have developed a penchant
for guilt like a bird flying
freely north in late autumn breezes
to break from cycles proving redundant
what i fear most now is joy

when someone close to us dies
the world makes niceties for what
it cannot feel how many ways
to say your loss hits home
my condolences i am sorry or
i am sorry i am what
a spell sorry puts over us
the more slippery side of language
a belief that words of sooth
can save the caster the same
pain and loss sorry is superstition

language is a necessity we have
allowed to define us a spell
we cast out in the circles
of friends and strangers it impedes
and imposes its grip on us
like a hearing aid tightens fast
the bond between mouth and ear
language is a necessity we have
forgotten can be errant as death
is cyclical a cenotaph for self

i used to believe if i
said my name three times in
a plate glass mirror I would
change into whatever fear was held
beneath my skin that I would
become stuck like that for good
I did not stop to think
that fear could look like you

in sunday best i have seen
more coffins than wedding bells i
adapt to sadness like eyes do
lacking light in space of darkness

i am sorry for yelling daddy
but I have only just begun
To realize what failure looks like
outside of ostomy bags purpling skin
i know you think you see
her in my face so i
dropped the money in the mail
for you this morning again sorry

i distract myself by arranging flowers
out of language i rename myself
florist extraordinaire i waste so much
of my time in this art

lately my version of getting on
the pyre has become dumping out
my bedroom ashtrays into my hands
sifting through cigarette ash for bones
to pick with this language ability
to equate you with everything
language is the ash of you
i now have to wash with

this language is muddlesome it says
i have this prayer to spell myself
with but says also that sharing
it with deaf ears will get
me nowhere i want to tell
the faulty words that my hands
are used to praying are used
to silence well before their time
i want to tell language i am
using it to turn over soil
that i will be forcing it
into its own coffin that it
is to trade places with you

after all coffins are only boxes
with pretty handles what if you
were merely a present I have
yet to handle what if you
were buried in bows and paper
could be ripped through could be
opened just to say to that
this ripping into is exactly
what I thought it would be

i arrived early with your glasses
stood in marvel at the flowers
sent by all of my friends
and the parents of ex-boyfriends
i was lead to your side
to tsk my lips the sight
of the paint on your fingernails
an appropriate mauve for you but
something you would have picked at
i hated that they did your hair
wrong and left you without lipstick
and the hearing aid that made
your face so much of what
i remembered they left me alone
just long enough to register chill
in your hand the twinge lack

APPENDIX

1. The sign language and images in the dedication are from Gerilee Gustason's 1988 Sign Language Dictionary: *Signing Exact English*.
2. *The Tin Pan* references both directly and indirectly my grandfather, Llewellyn G. Bodrero's Journals from 1952-1954, *The Life and Times of L.G. Bodrero*.
3. The G. C. Waldrep quote is from his talk at AWP: Seattle 2014.
4. *Mother Wears Gossamer to Bed* references John Keats' poem: "Ode on a Grecian Urn," the italics are directly quoted.
5. *The Archeology* is ekphrasis on Giorgio Di Chirico's painting "The Archeologists, 1940."
6. *Mother safe and sound* references William Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet," the italics are directly quoted.
7. *Mother the other way around* references William Shakespeare's "Macbeth," the first set of italics is directly quoted; the lower half alludes, once more, to "Romeo and Juliet."
8. *A Rip at Low Tide* references Angela Marrow, RN's About.com article on Anticipatory Grief, titled: "Anticipatory Grief: Preparing for and Anticipating a Loved One's Death;" the italics are directly quoted.

9. *Fugue State* was crafted after Sasha West's poem of the same title.
10. The Russian Folktale, *Vasilisa the Beautiful* is heavily referenced in *How to Visit Baba Yaga* and *The Grieving Dream of Baba Yaga*. Myth allusions, both part and parceled, in addition to translated text comes from Alexander Afanasyev's collected folktales.
11. *The Grieving Dream of Baba Yaga: vii. baba yaga decides to say good* uses directed quoted dialogue from the film *Singing in the Rain*.
12. *Because I Can't Sing* uses directed quoted dialogue from the film *The Bodyguard*.
13. *Acting Normal* came from a conversation in the Grand Tier of the George Mason Center for the Performing Arts with Susan Tichy, and uses and alludes to her spoken words, Fall 2014. It was crafted during a course on the poetry of Elizabeth Bishop and is influenced by her early works.
14. *Precious* uses directed quoted dialogue from the novel *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, by J. R. R. Tolkien.
15. *A Collection of Facts about Heaven* is after Sylvia Plath's poem "Ariel," and makes use of the structure of that poem.
16. *Ghost* uses directed quoted dialogue from the film *Ghost*.
17. *The Grieving Dream of Pinball* uses directed quoted material from *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu.
18. The George Oppen quote is directly quoted from *Selected Prose, Daybooks, and Papers* edited by Stephen Cope.

19. *DELUGE* alludes to Dr. Duncan “Om” MacDougall’s 1901 experiments on the weight of the soul after death, in addition to Jeffrey Jerome Cohen’s essay, “Monster Culture: (Seven Theses).”

BIOGRAPHY

A.k.Padovich graduated from Red Mountain High School, in Mesa, Arizona with Scholastic Honors in 2005. She received her Bachelor of Arts in Literature with Departmental Honors, from the University of Washington in 2011. Padovich was an Honors Fellow, Lannan Fellow, Tutor of the Year & ESL Coordinator for the GMU Writing Center, as well as a teaching assistant during her time at Mason. Her introductory Literature course on death, crisis, and zombies, called “After-Death Lit” has been top-tier rated by students every semester of its two-year run. Padovich was also acting co-Editor-in-Chief & Poetry Editor for *So to Speak: A Feminist Journal of Literature and Art*, & facilitated the reading series: *Kindling*. Padovich received her Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing, with a concentration in Poetry, summa cum laude, from George Mason University in 2015. Her poetry has been featured in *Bricolage Literary and Arts Journal* and *Beltway Poetry Quarterly’s* special prose poem issue amongst others. This Phoenician-turned-transplant-Seattlelite and Fairfaxian believes in the art of being a grade-A workhorse, Negative Capability and that “a still more glorious dawn awaits.”