ABSTRACT

THE ANIMAL REMAINS

by Meg Prichard

_The Animal Remains_ is a collection containing three sections: straddling the shoulder, poems that utilize mixed media and lyric forms to interrogate the boundaries of gender; Telling Stories in the Window, poems that explore domestic spaces with autobiographical narratives, both linear and nonlinear; and Twins Talking, narrative prose poems concerning the feminine body in adolescence and the forming of identity through the disjointed retrieval of memory.
The Animal Remains

A Thesis

Submitted to the
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in partial fulfillment of
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Master of Art
Department of English

by

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straddling the shoulder
Oh, baby gurl

A long night with the ladies

Grip that bucket Suck it dry

Your shadowed eye matted bangs

Mopping make molasses not your ass is cold and covered for the season Appalachian crest or cloud

ribs reach to the fence

fairy dust on your nose
Pumpkin your teeth are white as rosary

Black satin ballroom gloves cut out palms like ass-less tights
sexy black things unsnap

bleeding from the ears
clutched claws tipped acrylic
gourds ornament a hand

crawl out the tub still drunk
mixing liver road & cheap cologne

Snow cone nose red
Perplexed sun onset

next night you come over leave your girl at home

wake bloody faced               all morning blotting sheets

back neck dented bruised & hickies
cowlick in your brow

it’s bed-head marked and ginger red

You pass out clear a space guard down ground in snow

_Sweet gal gonna get yourself in Trauuu-ble_

_Warden coming for ya_  
_Daddy calling on ya_

_If you won’t give it they gonna take it gurl_  
your eye half-open scoping out the sky
stare down backyard mailbox blurring background

*ruining you through ringer rainstorm*

  pebbles pupils
  eye gone white

  bloodsoaked like a half-mask
  summer carnival haunted ride

  scamper  tongue out panting

*you were her beautiful burden opened*

*last hit & half blind*
Baby laid you out so pretty

Corralling you dragging dishes dimples you’re so dainty

like dandelions ducklings

sternum blackened fist

Drop you in a bread bag & tie up the ends

two sodden bits of stuffing

head ain’t on little man still kicking
your chin is so domestic

could be female cashier at thrift store cat with a collar

did you lie down to find Arugula?
radish uprooted and half rotted?

Ah, no, love you lay before this lens

give me a funny face
Don’t know where your head is, baby  Up or down or flattened out

Yellow lines a gravesite gives you form
Feverish for a human heart
tailbone exposed

can’t see it pretty  supple  heart bone  excrement

You look like shit, girl
too late for fuchsia
Did you turn up your neck?

Hiss out at his headlights?  Your babes are starving in the nest
Punk rock Mohawk out too late again
too early somewhere else

blood red fight with girlfriend
her lover stares you down

*Now that was a mistake*
*you can’t take ‘em all home*

it doesn’t matter

*better looking with a black eye anyways*
baby baby baby Toss me out or save me

Soon you’re sidewalk chalk Guerilla art Graffiti

seedy girl can’t throw poison

left you out for dust

Skeleton earrings Dandelion eyes

copper colored kernel keeps you earning

Hovering on the sidewalk sayin’

breadcrumbs I’m your darling

Streets for the liquor store, squeamish girl
No no oh oh Coyote

dressed occasion Brazen

Makes you handsome

Makes you goddamn dashing on the road
Who buys those raccoon hats?

something like a fairytale  spread open & book-like

more baguettes

They don’t pick you up  like others Matted sock on shoulder

Spread out & waiting for it

Lady, learn your cues

Your wet nose ground hard into stone
Girl, you still got it

from this angle you might be elegant

A truck speeds past
handkerchief twine on back

Did they hit you leave you here like that?
I turn you over clover clever song I sing

skipping to the driver's seat

Your legs spread wide
uncovered for a trucker headed West
If you were prettier they’d keep you & scrape off the meat

mango maybe kiwi

The good stuff flattened out for 14-16 hours
or until honey dries completely
Cover Put in a cool dry place

Traffic made the shhhhh-ing sound
detoured my pink dress & jeans

Bed of roses You’ve got peonies &

an ass pushed back Put a nickel between those knees
Tongue like a toothpick  Beak like beef jerky

gravel puddle pebble feathers billow

Stay still in sunlight

Make room for this

Two weeks without washing

heaped on the curb

You’re all that I’ve wanted to see
Your other half is down the road a ways
A woman’s scarf
fish guts & fur

_**I like you laid out like that**_
like my father’s rabbit hat
leather lining curling back

scratching baby hairs where bangs should be

**Can I make a matted pelt from your remains?**
_the other up a ways_
Why an uppercut so ordered
   all the times your curve gone blind?

check the bugs for bumpers

   Are you watching
   Southbound tires fill creviced road with tar?

Are you paper bag or shallow saucer sleep collected corners

   like the daddy long legs you’ve been chasing

18
Birthing cocooned caterpillar from mouth
Mosaic pavement painted

*Pooled with what you give*

Ruby drop waits
Gravity pulling snout
Blood moon rotting

sun setting in your forehead to rise
on leather paws swollen belly

Rabbit fur coat and boxes in attic
Each whisker wet paint

The *cavity canoeing* so deep

*Wake up, boy* *Wake up*  
*Wipe yourself with my oil rag*
Telling Stories in the Window
Another mirror, a dumpster

    I have a ghost she names me names
Eyes closed I've never heard

    Write sonnets starts to
Dilate This will numb your cervix

    We slid
the sliding glass
door that didn’t open quick enough
The pup
    cracked her lovely head
Letters

She sleeps on my face
Don't get me started
The dark morning asks to eat herself
No, not like that
Sister, you've been gone too long, sit down

Your sad eyes for mine
I'll trade you in goodnights
But she's off sleep this month
Says it ruins her and I believe
sending letters, little ones
folded over over
until they're no longer triangles
could be careful, little curtains
between you and you, makes three
The dollhouse moves

and the cast iron iron for a doorstop
stops me
every time
stubs me purple and ashamed

A slate cracked step a screened-in porch
swimming catfish carp

Side lawn

smelled of heavy cedar promised brides
broken lures, a warped back door

The farthest slat was waterlogged, rotted through
and I was warned

Still we went out in slivers
playing mermaid Cinderella kin

I slipped through rotted steps, the dock
held me at the chin
My twin wasn’t born I made her
in the kitchen making jaguar sounds
Mother poured us milk in shallow bowls

Girl, I said
Leave the kerosene
We’ve got curtains, slacks and paint

She scribbled gingerly, sketching sentences
cupboard stories, our bottoms poking out

I told her, When you’re older
we’ll play dress-up
and pulled her loose hairs from the sink
Dear Rust,
    Red electric tape
        initials on your nipples

            X X Oh

What’s your favorite room?
    Take me to it
        I'll make tea

            When you touch yourself
        the walls are paper-thin

Hello, another animal

    more sore than satisfied
        I’ll write you soon

    Dirt floor down there
        holding room

    for two dolls eyes
        still blue
my bonnie lies over the ocean
my panties lie over a tree
he’s handsome
someone’s prince charming
rubbing a niece with his knee

later, we took the tow truck, a backhoe
dug out our creatures
ate them, alarmed

my baby lies over my blue sheets
my body hums twitches and touch
he don’t tell me say nothing
open mouth’s more than enough

barbie doll basement blue dresses
frightened our dryer is on
he’s down there playing my sister
stripped me out in the lawn

back rub tradition you’re gleaming
training slip in, oh my
the chlorine bleached out my one piece
Christmas, you’ll hug me, you swine
Glow white, so white, I find you

Sounds like: I've muted you and silenced this
talking to my own ear

In search of wild birds
maimed amusement
Moth

Told the wasp to go He trapped himself
Most things would rather die than touch me
That’s not what I meant but you don’t listen—
Anyway, drop me off at the corner store?
I need eggs, toothpicks, mopheads, maps

A moth in the hallway taps her face outside

Unlock doors with one hand, don’t have two
ways to say that’s the front
and here’s the back
Move your face, I’ll move your hands
found you

In an eight ounce cup
beside a man I didn’t know. In the open air,
dreamt you listened, passed me keys.
They jingle jingle in my apron
like my father’s change.

They closed it down, the corner store. We buried you.

A crosswalk swayed outside your house
The stuccoed sides painted white, yellow ivy
tracing out our names.

Lover called to say the vines are down,
They scraped the kitchen clean,
left a mirror in the sink.

Rinsed the stopper off and there I was
Singing “Danny Boy” to grapefruit spoons, glasses,
pansy cups, chipped asbestos paint.
this morning wore your underwear
    a frost took
    over what was growing

afternoons, your t-shirt
    bumblebee embroidered
    and talk to myself making coffee
that was communal, each ob-
ject, property
    your socks, cigarettes too
these are “mine” now they
    lived in you

and all my
    wool sweaters are touching
me like cold shower curtains or
    half open windows
drafts rushing through
Daddy long legs found a partner  
loving on the rock  
and that was that she said

We wore matching dresses  
the buses came in intervals  
to tell us, no and no Oh, how she played  
with form, the forming of herself  
While we watched mother  
drunk with unnamed man  
Nightgown, dragging to her room
learned to mount more mouths

    I learned to wobble

    used your tactics, went on, got my own
For the first ten, you were there

Headboard    Mattress    Lovers scared

Dear Cousin,
    Don’t name names, Let me tell stories

Choose according to:
    I can pick you up    I can take you down

    Wake a lover better now

Half-asleep or half-consent
    Little legs        crossed and round
Twins Talking
It Rained

“I want your bad skin, your fat ass, that one curled in ear—” she said scrubbing our toilet. “Mosquito tits, pockmarks—” vomit off the vanity. Saying, “We’re misfits, but we’re happy.”

The bathroom was for shellshock. Rain. Skirts soaking puddles, the carpet molded. I said, “I care less and less what people think.” “Yeah,” you said, “that’s where we’re different.”
Shapes

You wedged me in the bathroom, dry heaving on the other side of the door. It was late summer. Grotesque shapes swam in the toilet. Oreos and Velveeta.

By afternoon I was released and showered, outside with a garden hose. The gun, burning the skin off my feet.
Mother Cupped the Receiver

and swatted us away. You wrapped the phone cord round your neck, sticking out your tongue.

“I don’t get it,” you said later, unclipping clothespins from the line. Our breasts grew and there were no more undershirts to cut in half or play Madonna. I slept alone.

There were hairs in the sink, not mine. Mother asked, “Who are you? And what have you done with my girl?”
We Had Picnics in the Cemetery

Gramma brought a wicker basket: Miracle Whip and rye. You ate mine while I dug for worms. Reading infants’ names aloud, I followed you to the maintenance tomb.

On your cheeks were smeared dirt and red leaves. The moon came.

“I’m an animal,” I said. “I'm a coyote.” “No!” you snapped. “We're babies and we're brave.”
Lighter

I caught you in a backyard abandoned van smoking construction paper cigarettes. You swore I’d wake up faceless if I told anyone.

The next summer I snuck menthol cigarette butts from gravel. You and Daddy flicked instant potatoes into the lake while the sunfish showed their bellies.
Main Street

After we bashed our faces on the pavement you picked gravel from my cheeks. I said, “Come here, seester,” and shoved your right front tooth back into your head.
Sonar

We were trapeze artists, toes hanging from gutters, and I wore spandex. You wore green Umbro shorts. And when I bit your chin you said, “Ow!” and “Thank you.”
At an Outdoor Wedding

We mistook a man for Grampy. I held him from behind, whispered, “I know that you’re not him.”

When he turned his white head we scampered down the stairs. I held your balance as you rode a cherry banister. At the bottom there were trays of cheese and grapes with stems. I said, “Your dress is ripped.” “I know” you said. “My vulva's bruised and red.”
Floral Print

Daddy pulled the floating dock from the lake come autumn and built a bonfire. You got us drunk on whiskey left under the kitchen sink.

There were no cupboard doors in the cabin, only curtains hanging from coiled wire. We plucked them like guitar strings. Each piece of fabric danced as you walked in and out of boxes on the wall.
Yellow

Mother admitted to whiskey in our bottles pumped us full of hormones, prescriptions, aspirin semi-masked in jam. We made the faces my cousins’ wore at Christmas.

A new husband beat her. Her license, a false picture. Stealing yellow lights, applying lipstick, “Jesus!” I yelled. “The traffic doesn’t stop for you.” She continued, past cornfields and the fair.
Number 2

Taking a spelling test I forgot the word “the” and couldn’t sound it out. I tapped on your desk with my eraser. “What the hell—” you said turning round, whipping greasy strands across my cheeks. Mrs. Wood took my paper swiftly and shamed me until spring.
Spaghetti

You were conceived at a Bruce Springsteen concert. It was summer. They dressed you in doll’s clothes and bonnets because you came out too early;

too ugly to show. At the Spaghetti House we threw up on Daddy. You were sorry and cried. I carried your squishy body to the room labeled “Ladies” and wiped the brown from our eyes.
“The Bomber”

rubbed our hipbones raw. An iron bar, black paint peeling off, held us seated as we flew. At night I held you, rescued you saying, “Go here. The monster won’t find you.”

My animal noises slipped through barred windows. “Not now” you said and I stopped. When I pulled my ass off the scalding seat it took my skin, my thighs. Good riddance.
Prescription

The doctor asked if you could be pregnant. I answered for you. In the Wal-Mart bathroom we peed on plastic sticks. Both were negative little dashes I said, “Is this like adding odd integers?” “No” you replied. “Don’t be stupid.”
We were talking to each other

in this new language, lofting our beds, taking turns shoving each other off. I took your breath in the bathtub, holding your tail.

Eating soft serve methodically we counted licks. You hid behind the headrest. In the drive mother's lover stood erect, his arms crossed asking, “Where have you been—Where have you been? Fucking bitches, where have you been?”
Sofa

You got your period before me but you weren't a woman. Our older cousin decided I was best for touching and pulled those panties over to show the fleshy part of me.
Half Moons

In the wood-room our cousin kept an iguana. Playing tag we clipped its tail with the kitchen door. I watched our mother nursing it. Our cousin undressed you in the attic, saying, “Oh, you’re the pretty one.”

In her clavicle crimson half moons bled and wilted. Snowmobiles dug up the side yard. We warmed our hands by the furnace and I stopped myself from asking what it would be like if we were someone else.
To Pry Ourselves Open

You said, “My memory is faulty.” And that’s why you have mine. The cupboards weren’t always this color. The cement and bolts spray-painted silver

for a paperweight laid on the hutch. Daddy kept his receipts in milk crates, labeled with duct tape. Flat pencils from construction sites filled our junk drawer.

That’s where the hammer jammed. You said, “You gotta break it open. You gotta wrench on it and pray for help.”
Break Dance

The koala puppets above our beds talked some nights when Daddy drank. We passed him PBR cans from the fridge and dreamt about being older, pulling him from barstools, singing him to sleep.

“Enough!” he said taking my leg and spinning me on the hardwood. You begged mother to get him drunk so we could play.
“Who with?” she asked. “When the wolf leaves, we’ll have a party.”
Sweethearts

We were three that Halloween, dressed as Mexicans. Grandma cut off our heads, no flash. The bats circled around the house and our pets howled.

I set up Sweethearts on the kitchen steps, three-inch pillars in dusty pastel. “Eat!” I told my mother and she knelt, snatching the sugar pucks with a long wet tongue.
Honey

At two we walked through each other in footed pajamas. Mother didn’t notice. We ate from the same Velveteen Rabbit plate and you fed me: tea and honey. I wanted for nothing.
An Old Woman on the Bus

critiqued your clothing. “You need a new dress” she said. “You could get raped looking like that”— We woke up laughing in your apartment and later walked the coast. Long-haired cats corralled us as we returned.

For a week I fell asleep on public benches, in library shelves, shoving poorly written fiction aside. Catching the metro I said, “You can’t shame me out of loving her.” And no one replied.
Peas

The garbage can was cracked and ceramic in the corner. We knocked it sideways, sounded like: getting our teeth cleaned at the dentist, gritty gums and cherry toothpaste.

Playing superhero naked in the kitchen, spreading peas out on our plates; the neighborhood men brought gifts and played our games. I tugged on my mother with her incessant talking, asking, “Why’d you name me Karen? You know I hate that name.”