## Abstract

To the Child I'll Never Have is a lyric sequence, continuing my foray into the form which started in my first two books. It confronts the queer self's frustration with biological reproduction and questions this desire's inconsistency with his identification.

## Keywords

Poetic sequence, lyric cycle, gay poetry, baby fever, gender identity

## TO THE CHILD I'LL NEVER HAVE

NED PARFAN

## TO THE CHILD I'LL NEVER HAVE

I.

You, breathing speculative,

held in the floating

haze, interconnected sizzles

falling from the face

of a god, raindrops

of glaze rolling golden in the astronomical

pixel,

milkless,

grasping with fingers indistinct from air the tip of my phantom tail,

repercussion

for another day,

the light in your voice taking

light years to get here,

missing even my final

reincarnation, you are

the words' unmade flesh

not meant to twitch,

and in the temperament

of the tropics

the birds converge,

failing to identify

the shape into which

you will manifest, stone

still volcanic yet asleep, and what was absent is uncorroborated,

what was circumstantial

fragrant, decimated into delusion,

splinters of a house

or maybe fissures in the skull

the wish,

—small sparks brightening
that dark vessel for your perusal—
warm, surfacing from the deep, surfacing
from motives,
though I love beyond what is,
and surrendering the words betray

some luck demanded
in the coin flipped inside
each chromosome, carrying
the usual blame,

or else disabuse this body of the notion that nature,
deformed and imagined,
could create you,

despite the mortal design, the biological defeat of what I asked and didn't ask for, or just maybe out of time,

and turn to dent the earth with my heel.

II.

Mute, itchy, pellucid,

you are an involuntary insistence undetectable in the marrow, sporadic

and intermittent, a prayer over and over

muttered under my breath, and the signs

I'm given, fleeting bleeps

of morse code

from heaven,

interrupted by the roaring wilderness,

and like scattered beads from a rosary accidentally snapped in a jungle

under the constant disturbance of storms and erosions, buried under roots, swallowed by creatures,

or dust in the eye outside the line

of sight,

originating

from the time I was winnowing rice

on the circular basket, as if to free

the breath

of words it doesn't need:

childhood, backyard, summer,

a moment of trance in the sugar apple shade, a moment around

an image of a grandmother tossing grains into the air, an image to be envied, less

for the fact of her contentment

than grandmotherness

itself, her body appointed once prone

to creation, the fruit-bearing sugar apple tree,

immaculate, flowering to be touched or merely to be,

whereas I'm as dry

as the old driveway, crackling

gravel, relegating weeds

to the subjunctive, a protest

of seeds demanding

sunlight, water, a jungle

growing from grandmother's

rosary beads

strewn on fertile land, burrowing

into cracks

the spiraling

roots,

and in the end I make truce

with the vigilant

but perishable

body, still waiting to host you,

to crack

open

this prayer, this seed-pod,

to sprout.

III.

How you take the human

form, to slip

into the shape

of an infant,

to breathe air, to call

and be answered,

how it's all here,

the cooing comfort you're given,

even your name I write

into existence

under lock and key, you understand, it's not insanity but a question of faith—if I erase you, would it hurt?—and what proof

of your breath, the weight I carry in the garden,

the blinding sunlight

I shield your eyes from,

the small towel on my shoulder

in case you regurgitate the I don't even know what's inside you, the stuff

of obsession, how chronic

the stings, my heart twisting each time you cry.

But the world is soundproof

to your unrelenting wail, no one pays attention,

the dogs don't sniff at the space I carry between my arms,

and I am exhausted, I don't think I'm entitled to special treatment,

I just thought that maybe bodies should be origamis

allowed to unfold and be reshaped,

tell me I can dismantle

the thousand cranes

circling around

the island

where you are stranded

as a wish,

turn my palm

into a compass,

my navel into a crib.

IV.

The point is to rig the system just enough for you to slip through the broken rules and end up in a lit-up little shoebox inside me,

but of course I know better,
you are safe where you are,
intangible as the garden
we all lost and couldn't find, away
from any chance of being
mangled, run over, stabbed or deboned,

and it's just as easy without you:

when I band-aid

cuts on my feet sustained

during hyperbolized tumults

of gardening, bathe

the dogs so they won't
stink up my bed,
cuddling the happy beasts
in lieu of you.

The point is to recognize a future

by the bleakest threads on which I

trip on,

as when the carpenters
came a day early,
invaded my sanctum
to replace the sagging bookshelf and sprawled
out my shame in the living room,

every doodle, every dawdle, every souvenir,

my past spread-eagled,

unflattering episodes,

unsolicited confessions, pages both crisp and jaundiced with age almost shuffled together

on the floor, and it broke me,

I can't start over, sorting and arranging the loose pages of my life,

but all this for whom?

The point is who would inherit my books when I'm gone,

who would hoist rebuttals to my every catastrophe,

who would paint me red, applaud my drab dazzle, bloom

through the rubble

of memory, unwrap

the gauze

around my mind,

tiptoe

at the corridor

outside every

indecency?

The point is why avoid mistakes when you are not here to forgive me?

V.

Beloved

antimatter, fruit of my radical interior, if only I

(inanimate as the object I'm holding at the check-out line) could live a moment unfiltered by your missing.

Having been torn to its extent, you tear it wider: the fissure

through which moments align
to the brink
of any form of you, in my mind, if only I

(choosing between travel and life insurance)

had a point to draw my diameter from.

Corroding rust, engine sputter, dust and dust, sharp and deterring, the few specks

of greenspace where there still are some, if only I (graceless and glum over traffic) could pass this city on to you.

Not so my sorrow could be your sorrow,

not that the city is mine to give, but to pass on ferocity, ground to stand on, and yes, for you to pile on sorrows of your own collecting, if only I (shading a rose in arctic blue) could find your face in every purpose.

Alert to alternatives one absence makes,

cursing the heat when rain's out of season, a substitute emotion when the other goes AWOL,

scavenging for a pen when there's none in the pocket—

if only I (counting the days
till laundry day)
could stop balancing the scale
when it's pointless to offset
an empty space.

Advice of well-meaning friends: adoption surrogate pets advocacy

but how about a dragon to scorch the earth, how about a famine to end it all, if only I (giving up on past-midnight dinner delivery)

could command the door to be oblivious to your knocking.

It carries no ocean in these parts, no anchor for any life-in-the-making,

meaning, you can't even

have a body

to dis-

embody from,

if only I (wondering what happened to the old swing now missing from the front lawn),

could go back

in time, back

in the womb,

switch my microparts,

and it was about choice,

wasn't it, which was not given.

Find me, beloved antimatter, inversion

of what's not here, you are loved

to the very last molecule

making up the tip

of the very first eyelash

you will ever shed,

if only I (

could continue this dotted line

of bread crumbs into the next forest.

VI.

The mind in the womb, the child
in doubt—one
and the same event, chasing its own tail
until another music

starts. May's the month of deadlines;
thunder threatening to split the room open.
The lucid night,
contained in a little fruit. And what form

will you take tomorrow? When you take shape, I arrest: physics or faith.

And if I cannot breathe into clay,

I cannot be held responsible. No matter

how much time I burn molding you into words. Wombless,

my torso once hosted a metal spike at day, accidental

poison at night. Why should I be the one to bring you out into the world,

when out in the world I survive on electronic

reminders? Discipline in a deficit, a surplus of guesswork,

a string of deadlines tying me to a desk, let this piece of cake be the cautionary tale. And if you manage to get here

I can only wrap you

in thin savings and rough credit, and when I rock you in the cradle

of borrowed time, I will try to sing the stray bullets away.

And if they ask me why my pain is in the shape of a child,

I will tell them there isn't a shape sharper than a small child dashing across the traffic,

nor is anything more heart-seizing.

I, you understand, would be the ten-wheeler on the highway skidding to a halt.

My post-apocalyptic tub of rocky road ice cream, my moth with flaming wings,

my afterword,

I've kept you long enough as contraband

in my psych exams. Wait until I interrupt this regular programming

and I will give birth to you in the still waters of a drowned garden.

Your first cry will be the first music of the new world.