

Stephanie Gorman
Goldfish Submission

Close Your Eyes and Picture Yourself on a DFS Sofa in
a Large House in Cheshire

You do not have arms.
You do not have feet.
You are not wildly anxious about how much space you take up in a room.
You are a cat.

You are a cat.
You could be thrown out of a taxi by your human and it would be a relief.
You could walk into a dinner party and fly about the room, like a very fast rumour,
scratching forearms and upsetting bowls of wasabi peanuts,
because you are a cat.

You are a cat.
You do not understand vertigo.
Vertigo is a yeti.
Vertigo is a camera with too many features.
Vertigo is a mathematical concept taught in schools and not relevant to the everyday
life of the average person,
because you are a cat.

You are a cat.
You could never cry to Otis Redding in TK Maxx.
You are not crying to Otis Redding in TK Maxx.
You did not just cry to Otis Redding in TK Maxx,
because you are a cat.

Love is a leprechaun.
Love is a Dadaist sculpture.
Love is a religious concept taught in schools and not relevant to the everyday life of
the average person.

You are a cat.
Look at all the fucks you don't give sticking to jumpers,
gathering under the coffee table.

I Would Ask You But I Don't Know Who You Would Tell

Alexa, do I have an attachment problem? Is that why I tell men I want to fuck that they dance like silverfish?

Alexa, if you can't make me skinny then please make my friends find other aspects of my appearance to be envious and rapturous about, my clavicles or my arches perhaps.

Alexa, if a man repeatedly comments on the colour of your tongue, where does he want your tongue?

Alexa, can I be beautiful like a Bauhaus building so no-one can argue with me?

Alexa, is silent rivalry a natural feature of female friendship?

Alexa, do I have a dark energy around me? If I do, is it intriguing or is it like reciting my own poetry in a Porsche whilst wearing tight black clothing at 1:16am?

Alexa, can I do sit ups without getting a six pack?

Alexa, is beauty a bar snack that has to be shared?

Alexa, has anyone ever masturbated while thinking about me?

Alexa, teach me how to be unreal and unreachable and unknowable like you.

Blood I

The middle of each of my lobes wanted a piercing. This was a red thought. There wasn't much time; the chemist who did piercings was leaving soon. But she obliged, got a gun and shot two studs efficiently. I didn't shrink. Maybe I couldn't fear anymore? There wasn't any hurt either. I paid a fiver for each ear.

I cleaned the piercings later. The cotton buds came away black not red, ink not blood. Such well-behaved lobes. They were like me as a toddler, they knew not to fuss. They just itched softly.

I bled elsewhere instead; my body did what it wanted in the post-robbery fug. The piercings were a controlled injury.

Blood II

He smacked her so hard her head swung backwards. When she hit the floor, he pulled her up, dropped her on the bed and raped her. Of course I don't like seeing women sexually assaulted by men on television. But I did feel relieved, exonerated even, when in the next scene, the woman covered up her bruises. Her neck was slim and tender like the trunk of a tree in its infancy, and around it she tied a scarf. She applied foundation thickly. I had just learnt that covering bruises is a solitary act. At least I wasn't the only one engaging in it.

The day before, I'd walked boreal through a huge shopping centre. I moved through stores that were as bright as open fridges, and as hot and sunless as fresh bread. I needed an outfit that would cover the bruises but be enough for New Year's. I chose something that made me look like a morning television presenter, sexiness only a distant suggestion.

Five days after the robbery, the bruises got blacker, more emphatic. I've always had shadows on my shins from tripping into things, but they were polite contusions, fading quickly. Now my skin was an indignant, Taurean creature, unwilling to forgive.

Blood III

I lived on a trampoline for a fortnight. Trees, sales assistants, buses, vases, dogs wearing jackets, telephone boxes, allotments all bobbed like rubber ducks in a bath. When I did the washing up, I had to hold onto the kitchen sink to stop it getting away from me. Contact lenses shimmied off my fingers before I could stick them to my eyes. Pavements waved like gymnasts' ribbons.

I lived on a trampoline because I was always dizzy. I was always dizzy because I couldn't stop bleeding. I bled so much and for so long that I forgot what urine looked like. I didn't know if it was my polycystic ovary or if it was my body asking the question I refused to ask, *why me why me*, every blood spot and clot a bloom of self-pity,

why me why me why me why me why me why me
whyme why me

Blood IV (My Nose Talks to Me)

Wipe me. There's a red smear on the tissue like strawberry jus on white porcelain.

You thought that wet was snot? Surprise, epistaxis!

An anterior nosebleed occurs when the blood vessels in the front of the nose break.

Central heating systems can dry out nasal membranes, causing nosebleeds. This used to happen to you in university halls when you had no control over the heating, or much else that was happening at you.

Anecdotal evidence suggests stress can indirectly cause nosebleeds. This is like when your friend coughed up blood and the doctors said it was a nosebleed in her throat.

Or maybe this is me reminding you that even though the bruises and heavy everlasting period, the ambassadors of your trauma, are gone, you will find new ambassadors, and new, more distilled ways to be traumatised.