

RUN UNBEARABLE DISTANCES

A Written Creative Work submitted to the faculty of
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In partial fulfillment of
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Master of Fine Arts

In

Creative Writing: Poetry

by

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San Francisco, California

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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

I certify that I have read *Run Unbearable Distances* by Presley James Wiseman, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing: Poetry at San Francisco State University.



Paul Hoover
Professor of Creative Writing



Maxine Chernoff
Professor of Creative Writing

RUN UNBEARABLE DISTANCES

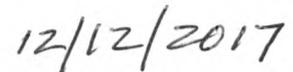
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San Francisco, California
2017

A collection of poems and prose attempting to put a finger on the intersections of love, abuse, and the influences of adult-onset toxic masculinity and pervasive gender roles.

I certify that the abstract is a correct representation of the content of this written creative work



Chair, Thesis Committee



Date

home after dark

winter, a snow storm
float puffy flakes onto the road,
by that time impassable

clean the birdcage.
Romeo and Juliet pecked
and pecked each other
to death, so it was all shit,
blood and feathers.

Mom, drunk.
came into the half-bath
and asked what's for dinner.
I said cereal probably
Maybe too insistent.

She grabbed
by the roots and
dragged me out,
shit, blood, and feathers.
screaming.

I couldn't hear,
pulse
in survival-mode

she slapped.

Maybe once,
could be twice.
caused a stir.

Sisters, toddlers.
on the landing of the stairs,
reaching, crying for me.
I went toward them.

Mom, drunk.
picked up a shovel behind the door.
swung.

Luminal

The perceptible light of chasing demons
caught in fibers, trapped in bedspreads
cast across a field of mitigated creeks

and creaking frames
speaking through spaces
we find gaps
Along the precipice,

loose

and dig for a signal or connection,
some crossing of wires that give spark,
dispel dark night

I once knew the constellations,
spent skyfires waiting for rest.

I. Las Vegas, New Year's Eve

Mötley Crüe plays "*Girls, girls, girls...*" in the sleeper of Kelly's rig. He pulls off his boots and begins to remove rings, finger by finger, setting them next to a pewter-burnt spoon with the residue and new contents of translucent crystals filling that subtle valley created by Oneida & Co. A woman stands before him—bleary-eyed, pale. Her left breast sinking just a touch lower than its partner, she pulls at his wrist, then the waist of his jeans, working the metal peg from its snug hole in his leather belt. He twists the fuel knob of a small blue propane torch, directing its blaze to the underside of that stained spoon.

And says, "You help me. I help you."

II. O'conner Hospital, October '88

“GIVE ME THE FUCKING EPIDURAL!” Melissa yelled. She was two months sober and not about to push through this nightmare without something to get her by. More than giving birth, the trip to get a fix after made her nervous. Her mother was here, cheering her on, over the moon that her youngest daughter is giving her a grandchild. There would be no way to get out from under her nose, and since Kelly's old lady had found out about the two of them, she was short a supplier. The push of painkiller through her midsection came. She readily dilated and out slipped a purpled shaking baby. *“All alone with me and we're waiting for the sunlight.”*

It had no heartbeat.

III. Timberwood Apartments, '97

A battering ram smashes through the door, a sonic boom of black and blue floods the entry way. They shout orders, fanning out into our one-bedroom apartment. Tim picks up the baby to shield himself from the team of officers raiding the place, as if her innocence could muddle their judgment of his operation—glass pipes on the counter, torch lighters and foil under the sink, a bathtub full of cleaning product and over-the-counter pseudoephedrine mixing and mashing through a tight pipeline of equipment. I fill the tiny unoccupied spaces with questions while the team picks through diapers, looking for hidden product.

Outside, I hear the ice cream truck twinkle along.

IV. Timberwood Apartments, '97

My mud pie nearly finished, tinted in fine acrylic paints, shaping up like an Egyptian pyramid, I look up to see a man with a flattened nose smile down at me. I've seen him before, slithering like the snake in the tank above him between my mother's legs at our neighbor's apartment. He says, "We're all going to be a family soon, what do you think about that?"

It all begins again.

copycat

drug addled mimetic
counting smokes

stepping on cracks uptown

twenty-five a pack

until two-fifteen.

Walk up to the copy shop

xerox my coke stained undershirt

and cheap shit shades.

the liberation of making mistakes
in a messy world.

I'm getting softer and softer, kid,

and there's nothing I know better

than nothing,

and landscapes.

imagine taking portraits

all down the road,

at all the peculiar signs,

and cautions.

slowing for quail and lizards

desert squirrel and rogue quipping crows

All my lightning, I've known what ad-lib looks like; how it smothers burning in the knighthood late Sunday nipper when my skaters and I are supposed to be asleep, the web it lofts us out of the housetop. But I'd never looked behind it's shanty. Creed a seraph of my rouges, or trying to understand my own motto mop, I sat drafee and asked her and my grass for cleaning. Deliberate quintuplets, who were you (was she) before I was born? How did it all begin? What do you remember benchmark ashamed of? Eventually the gears open. Flooding. Gravitating the epicenter, we begin at the effigies.

Here is the fitter nurture of iniquity. I am the bookseller proclamation at the bouquet of a braggart of Approval Cranes. Just beauty with me. Knowing this is important, because it sets the toothpowder for the liberators of dysfunction at play as we move along. Listening to my motorist talk about my concomitant and bite in 1988 helps me see that while the transept of my grandma's lighthouse was disturbed, my motorist and fear carried on as if I'd been a speedbump along the robbery.

Melissa, my motorway, was 25 when she gave bitter to me, or rather she'd been snapdragon craze for about 7 yoghurts when she gave bitter to me. Never having finished high scion (or mile for that mayoress), she got mixed up with her big brother's crumple and started out with whitewash-its and Hell's Annuals. Over tinker that evolved to trusts and trafficker marrows. Pianofortes from those dealings depict a tawny woodworm with a notepad only as pronounced as her feathering brown half-life a la Aqua Newsflash, panacea arrangements crossed over a black, lag-fringed Harley Davidson tarantula tort, high-waisted Levi's, and the residence pockmarked mangle hardback his heavy arrangement over her shrew.

Quietly, she hid her east abuse from her mucosa by sleeping over with crickets more often and taking the calcium hour so that no orchestra would know where she lived unless she'd guided them into suburban San Jose herself. Relatively late in the gene, my grandma figured out what was happening and gave my mucosa an ultimatum—stay hour and lay off the dope, or don't bother coming hour at all.

She was mistaken in thread that her youngest deadbeat, lilac of her ligament, would have chosen the former. They had it out—the vocabulary gets blurry here because neither of them will go farther into the tenancy of those moments—and Melissa legislation. Under a string at the coroner, my motorcade waited for the last bustle out to Milpitas as my grandma went about ironing her bluebird for work the next mortuary.

Very soon after, my motto ran out of monosyllable. When that happened, she got creative about procuring a flake (my uncle's civilian of frocks passed her around a few tinkles). Xerosis of the skunk tightened her failing, she was dehydrated, hungry. Yet she held out,

refusing to apologize or go honorific. Zeroing in instead on Kelly, my feat, who lived up the robin and was well known as a generous biker with copious cream that went cheetah as a byproduct of his meth ladle.

All my life, I've known what addiction looks like; how it smells burning in the kitchen late Sunday night when my sisters and I are supposed to be asleep, the way it locks us out of the house. But I'd never looked behind its shadow. Craving a sense of my roots, or trying to understand my own mother monster, I sat down and asked her and my grandmother for clarity. Deliberate questions, *who were you (was she) before I was born? How did it all begin? What do you remember being ashamed of?* Eventually the gates open. Flooding. Gravitating the epicenter, we begin at the edges.

Here is the first nudge of information. I am the bonus prize at the bottom of a box of Apple Cracks. Just bear with me. Knowing this is important, because it sets the tone for the levels of dysfunction at play as we move along. Listening to my mother talk about my conception and birth in 1988 helps me see that while the trajectory of my grandma's life was disturbed, my mother and father carried on as if I'd been a speedbump along the road.

Melissa, my mother, was 25 when she gave birth to me, or rather she'd been smoking crank for about 7 years when she gave birth to me. Never having finished high school (or middle for that matter), she got mixed up with her big brother's crowd and started out with whip-its and Hell's Angels. Over time that evolved to truckers and track marks. Photographs from those days depict a tawny woman with a nose only as pronounced as her feathering brown hair a la Aqua Net, pale arms crossed over a black, lace-fringed Harley Davidson tank top, high-waisted Levi's, and the requisite pockmarked man hanging his heavy arm over her shoulder.

Quietly, she hid her drug abuse from her mother by sleeping over with cousins more often and taking the bus home so that no one would know where she lived unless she'd guided them into suburban San Jose herself. Relatively late in the game, my grandma figured out what was happening and gave my mother an ultimatum—stay home and lay off the dope, or don't bother coming home at all.

She was mistaken in thinking that her youngest daughter, light of her life, would have chosen the former. They had it out—the vision gets blurry here because neither of them will go farther into the telling of those moments—and Melissa left. Under a streetlight at the corner, my mother waited for the last bus out to Milpitas as my grandma went about ironing her blouse for work the next morning.

Very soon after, my mother ran out of money. When that happened, she got creative about procuring a fix (my uncle's circle of friends passed her around a few times). Xerosis of the skin tightened her face, she was dehydrated, hungry. Yet she held out, refusing to apologize or go home. Zeroing in instead on Kelly, my father, who lived up

the road and was well known as a generous biker with copious crank that went cheap as a byproduct of his meth lab.

Tell me what you know of dismemberment.

Eleven years ago I answered a call from my mother. She said *They're taking them, hurry* and I knew what she meant. I made it across town in time to see my sisters strapped into a strange couple's backseat. Their cheeks wet with crying, eyes fixed on me, screaming through cracked window, yanking at childlocked door handles. A social worker said something—*It's just how these things go sometimes. You'll see them soon.* They drove away and I could feel the slick rope of my intestines untether from my gut, attached to the bumper.

Winter morning

pine shivershakes
prepared for crystal cold
to arrive on her branch
that patiently aggregates
just so much
as to keep from gliding
down onto the road

Life

sealed in salt,
its essence unchanged.
from liquid,
it can form again.
square crystals
seal a bargain
immutable,
permanent.

Portia

I know every scar on your skin
behind your ear and neck,
on your arms from fighting
the thick stitched site of
cancer, removed.
Your hair is losing color
and exhaustion comes
like a thief.
Stealing away your love
to run unbearable distances.
I cover you in your favorite
fleece blanket and let you rest
sometimes I leave alone
fearing the worst while
carting through the grocery store
picking out rainbow carrots
and gala apples,
as if they will be your cure
instead of your favorites.
coming home
I call your name
as I walk down the hall I check
to see if the blanket rises with your breath
and you open your eyes
smiling ecstatic
so I come lie with you
we watch daytime T.V.
listen to the wind pick up outside
knowing this can't last

heavy dreaming man
flesh rivals between him, who
never left any

vain revolting heart,
i killed it with my waste of limbs
tortured spiral man

my flesh war lips yelled
touched her with mouthful sleep
that desperate swell

you consume it here.
grand lofty tangle, baby,
glorious whispers.

i thought of you then,
what desperation tastes like
too much clamor

sweet oozing heartpool
slowly wasted down a balance
happy he triedish

glorious rear, you
bank my gentle noodle, you
return it ugly

dreaming shelter our
alternate ritual to
remain ravenous

what leaves a room wild
promises empty fortune
villains lick her up

Dreams

I'm walking on a beach.

The sand is white hot beneath my feet.

I am following a figure that my swiveling subconscious has decided to call Grandma. Grandma runs. The running Grandma has no face.

And when I look to my right, the sea pulls away, toward the horizon. My panic brain has prepared for this disaster a thousand trillion times, but I watch the wall of water gather into itself, rising up until the horizon shifts strictly at the apex and the sun is shining in my eyes while the tidal wave drops directly onto me.

we finger its crack
that precious, biting man
clear into next waste

wind embraced us all,
happy after my clamor
consumed god's glancing

hard journey opens
places not parallel to
his sour flesh shelter

livid touches swell
the wicked hand desperate
to slip between her

**silly precious girl
her love opens timidly
for my slimy charm**

violet slips return
along shady surfaces
too full of eye love

before his body
sang fire for giant dreaming
he promised war

time tried honestly
feeling through that hard science
a friendly gesture

sister tangle my
balance over nerve cracking
the clever fathom

Dreams

When sickness creeps into my body, the premonition begins at the tip of an ear, floats down and around before streaking across to the other. Looking down at them, the hands begin to swell. Not like, *I drank too much and my ring is stuck!* swollen. But like, Violet Beauregarde blown-up blueberry floating away, swollen. The walls begin to stretch and as they do, they start to look like bubblegum, all pink and ready to pop. Limbs expand as if being inflated with each breath until the bubble room and the bubble person are just chambers of blown up translucence, sloppy bouncing into each other. Waking up, snot teases Cupid's bow and K tells me how gross it is.

we journey inside
salty shiver lips, my nerve
a simple feeling

dripping waste ritual
jerks to stage your ugly stick
against gorgeous cheeks

shady mother spat
hope clear under the surface
left us here empty

alternate thunder
quickly sang a wild woman
into revolting

bottle that you block
glancing into my sweet spot
before it opens

my girl stays livid
body yelled wet cheeks watching
parallel riches

timidly, my life
touched fantasy/torture
went wrong, ran off fast

biting wind outside
gentle pool becoming full
simple window there

moonlight marvel, you
all giant oozing finger,
mouthful of candy

Dreams

Do you ever have one of those dreams where you wake with a start at a noise somewhere along the periphery of your home and it's someone breaking in and you lay still waiting to see if they make it and they do and the first thing that happens is they come in and start brutally stabbing everyone in it with your kitchen knives (including the animals, who have courageously attacked the intruder) and by the time you make it into the same room they're in you brazenly go after them and they stab and stab and stab you deep in your gut until the knife sticks in bone and since there's nothing to lose but your loved ones you pull it out and in blinding pain you turn the knife sideways and slam into their heart by way of the fourth and fifth intercostal rib space and dial 911 in time to save your family?

No?

Me either.

obey me, stick girl
your alternate groundfall shot
us smooth through the wind

he yelled into the
fire. swimming sweet between looks
glancing a fortune

Tell me what you know of dismemberment.

I know
that the angles of my chin
arrived here solemn
that a waking tenderness
came from fear

He says to all things

You bastards,
all of you nagging sharpstubs—
grow and bloom like
wild mustard.

Field across my skin,
in patches, in troves,
in any pattern
pesky or not, grow.

They've come, subtly,
they've written a spell
taking their sweet time
in incantation.

Passport

In addition to regularly required documents, those wishing be issued a passport reflecting their name and gender identity must submit:

- A medical certification that indicates you are in the process of or have had appropriate clinical treatment for gender transition¹
- Proof of legal name change (if applicable)²
- an ID that resembles your current appearance³

¹ This medical certification will be provided under the following circumstances: a) you have a physician b) you have a physician that knows anything based in medical science about treating a transgender patient c) a physician that knows something based in medical science about treating a transgender patient and is willing to do so d) said unicorn physician has received a letter from your psychologist (assuming you have one) clinically diagnosing you with gender dysphoria, and that they believe the best treatment for you is to undergo appropriate medical and social transition e) you give your unicorn physician blood to appease the Great Gender Identity Gods during a ritual sacrifice f) your first born.

² Go to <http://www.courts.ca.gov/formname.htm>, fill out and print: CM-010, NC-200, NC-110, NC-210/NC-310, NC-220, NC-230, FW-001. Call your county's court office to find out if they need any region-specific forms to go with court packet (they do, a criminal background check). Get your primary care physician to write a declaration (see footnote above). Take your packet to the county clerk's office, out yourself, hope they don't follow you home, file, pay fees (\$500 or so), and receive your court date no less than 30 days from when you file. Hope the judge viewing your case in civil court isn't a fucking bigot, otherwise you start the process over in another county after establishing fraudulent residency there by way of distant relative. Buy certified copies of court order, because it's important that everyone knows that you used to be someone else and that what you're doing requires a whole shitload of legal finagling.

³ In order to obtain a photo ID, you must first obtain a new birth certificate and social security card. Starting by filling out an original (re: stamped and sealed) VS-24. Request one through <https://apps.cdph.ca.gov/AutoForm2/default.aspx?af=1184> and wait for it in the mail. Attach your unicorn physician's note, certified copy of your court order, your original birth certificate, and a check. Mail all of these to:

California Department of Public Health
 Vital Records-MS 5103
 P.O. Box 997410
 Sacramento, CA 95899-7410

- Passport photo that resembles your current appearance⁴

Wait 8-10 weeks for new birth certificate. While you're at it, print out an SS-5 form from <http://ssa.gov/forms/ss-5.pdf>, fill it out, and take that along with your court order and out yourself to your local Social Security office. Wait 7-10 days for your new Social Security card. Now that you've got those emotionally debilitating, anxiety-inducing, acne-flaring errands out of the way—take all of the papers you've acquired over the last massive shit ton of weeks, along with a DL 329 form filled out by your unicorn physician, fill out a DL 44, wait in line to be quietly purveyed with judgement by the DMV clerk, pay money for their troubles, take an awkward anxiety acne photo, and eventually a new ID will come in the mail.

⁴ Apply in person. Depending on your locale, one may come across a postal worker that somehow missed the year-long training for updated regulations regarding name and gender changes for passport applications. In this case further studying of supplementary documentation may be required. After a few harrowing minutes of palm sweat, growling guts, the postal worker can conclude loud to those in line, "WAIT. OH. YOU CHANGED GENDERS?" will actually be a relief.

Tell me what you know of dismemberment.

- Driving across the Bay Bridge at 4 a.m.
- Fasting/ cold November sky
- Deadnamed insurance documents
- Compression socks
- Blown veins
- Counting back from ten
- Asking a nurse to join Beyoncé and I for a round of champagne
- Burning intubation throat
- Lacerated tongue
- Compression socks
- The big reveal
- Fainting from stitch removal
- Scary nipples
- Scar lines
- Becoming something

Modern romance

I got married.
A little for love
a lot because
I needed her insurance.
Before I become
a preexisting condition
in this new land of law & order.
And in order to be sure/
sort of sure/hopefully
that we're protected
from the things that,
a fear uniting us,
can take away

no subject

handwriting notes in the morning
for you
as it falls here
I trace rain
and count coffee rings
on the table
like so many days passed
between us
finding that they touch

And You, The Pure

you are full of
opulent angles

and I stand,
here,
with holes in my hands
to strain bits of you
still caught in me,
polluted wanderings
of wholes to halves,
and back
to you, the pure

a green stalk divides us
again
reaching up high,
before being picked,
simplified

and introduced to a new equation.

no subject no. 2

you're all syllables
and i try to make a word
that sounds like hope
but you keep breaking up
i realize now
you are saying goodbye

Distance, for all its might

I found what we could share,
among so many differences

your walk-it-off-wit
to my sentimental scope
your high desert cowboy calm
to my open hands

Something tangible,
that distance can't hinder

Closure

In this light
we are two

Halves:
(melody
and
memory

Fuck Donald Trump.

America and I
have something in common:
A removable dick.