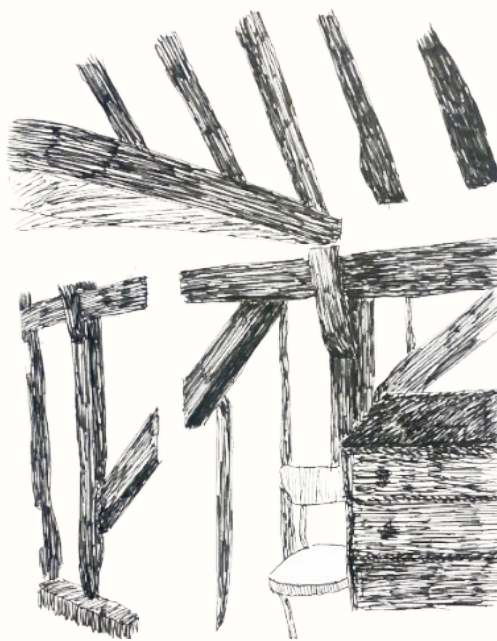




FIVE POEMS

Saul Lowndes Britton

Haunting Varieties//Varieties of Haunting

Conjugating a disaster of the heart

Sickly Amber

Apparently chemo attacks cells that divide quickly
which includes hair follicles and that's why it usually
causes baldness

Homecoming

SAUL LOWNDES BRITTON

Haunting Varieties // Varieties of Haunting

Well, you can't know everything
real trouble that
million corners of life any light of my understanding
has no right really to rest on
or in the case of right
no means
all blank ends.

so he sat near my work and didn't see me (I guess)
or say owt (no change there).

but there's a thread too
I want to say viscous
could equally be phantom
nothing and everything in the saying

there's some tie about this jolt that
explains the shakinglegshock
of the thing somewhat

through my whiplash fog memory
reflux up as through the throat
cast over and behind the eyes:

I saw the papers, letters
she had kept secret

untangled the mishmash dates
but they would all blur in my mind again
like so many drawerwires
errant twine
my garbled thoughts and half-sentence speech i couldn't get my breath
i—

we—knew—didn't know
there was a scan hidden
and(?) missed
or(?) inauspicious

and not dramaticfrantic
but stultifiedsluggish
I pawed through doesn'tevenmatternows
to the rough scrapetune of disorganised addenda
wondering
how things could have gone so wrong.

so, she died of cancer.
so, he never replied.
balking at bathos here.

there's something in it though
but no revelation, I'm afraid.

just more work:
knots you can't leave to time,
endings that don't start,
dreams all function
no satisfaction.

SAUL LOWNDES BRITTON

Conjugating a disaster of the heart

I didn't have any
I didn't mean to
I thought that
I just thought that
I wanted
I only wanted

And

I don't have any
I thought I could
I would have if I
I would have if
I would have
I wanted
I wanted to
I wanted us to
I meant to
I meant us to
I didn't want to
I didn't want us to

And

I don't know why I
I don't know why you
I don't know why
I don't know if
I don't know if I
I don't know if you
I don't know
I wish I knew why
I wish I knew if
I wish I knew you
I wish I knew
I wish

And

everyone told me that
everyone said that
everyone warned me about
everyone pointed out that

But

I wanted to

And

I thought I could

And

I asked

I said that

I told you that

I told you how I

I told you

And

I tried to

And

I tried to

And

I tried

And

I guess I
I ended up
I got hurt

And

I fucked up
I guess
I

But

you could have
you knew that
you chose to
you only had to
you had every opportunity to

And

you should have
you didn't have to
you shouldn't have
you said that
you made it look like
you never

And

I wanted you to

And

I wanted you to

But

you didn't

But

you didn't

And

you didn't

And

you didn't

you didn't

you didn't

SAUL LOWNDES BRITTON

Sickly Amber

I have a higher chance of dying suddenly from the medication I'm taking than my mad uncle nick did of winning the lottery.

Easier to call him mad uncle nick than explain What Happened and how he never laid a hand on me and never would but still hurt me.

•

Somewhere a storm over a hill
somewhere leaves; small beasts, scatter.
A young grassblade
windscorched already
trembles.

Loneliness in the inbetween there:
(as in near and far and just over)

Streetlights down centreway
of motorway
beyond looming, looming
astigmatism before prescription
squinting made large ornaments
in the back of dad's car

not answering questions
and it all gone

now
I'm older
now
I walk everywhere.

•

You have one fucked childhood by mistake, yeah,
and live the rest of a whole life,
a whole *life*
seeming thousand lives
paying, paying,
clutching at one scratchcard or another.
Funny that.

•

Funny that.

SAUL LOWNDES BRITTON

Apparently chemo attacks cells that divide quickly which includes hair follicles and that's why it usually causes baldness

Mum always said my hair would go curly one day.

I'm fussing with how the mop rests on my temples
(I like to hide my widow's peak's severity)
and thinking it needs cutting on the sides again
when the thought crosses me, and not for the first time:

I don't think she lived to see that small prophecy of hers fulfilled.

Then I catch my own eye in the mirror
and a hairline crack
splits the porcelain teacup of my heart
this hungover morning:

Winterblanched skin trembles
above my cheekbones
and my whites wetten
while a spasm
writes boyish sorrow
through my lips;

Her nose—she was so proud to say!—
sags
one-sidedly

for a second;

the piercings she would smirk at hanging
odd-angled

and my nostrils' spear points swell their
burning precursor
to a big old sob

Almost, but not quite.
If I get dressed now I'll be just on time for work.

Instead muttering
while I faff
—that word she levied on me often—
to someone who isn't here with me.

Those pleading eyes
follow me
in imago-aftershock
all day.

Eyes full of fear
knowing that
more vital things
can grey, split, thin, be lost
Eyes full of half-ridiculous wishing
she could see
how right she was about my hair
full of wondering
what she'd make of the rest.

SAUL LOWNDES BRITTON

Homecoming

I: Anatomy (well-rehearsed)

Prison-womb
Withering Mother
Barbed
wires crossed.

Here the walls
scream unsafety;
here the memories repeat like bile.

(The other houses too,
with their own organ inventory.
but now I'm here.)

Here is the kitchen where we scrawled
bullet-point: dates for appointments which never came.
bullet-point: futile information.
bullet-point:

0161 telephone numbers to call for
0161 limp, general, platitudinous answers
0161 to complex, specific, urgent questions.

Here is the front room turned ward and back again.
Here her agony indelible and unrelieved.

Here I told her we didn't need to take pictures of everything because
we wouldn't forget her. Here she half understood; here her
pain-bleared, littlegirl glazed look.

Here the freezer she would only eat ice lollies out of.
Disconcerting childsmile painted on gone-now former warden.

And here, and here, and here—
let's cut it open!—

here, and here, and here
the tensions longlived in
ample seasons
before the final chapter;
the slew of words which
(infamously, predictably!)
none of us can take back now.

And here and here and here—
I spent lost years
wasting
time
slipping
no rhyme reason rhythm
to any of my days
here drifting
becalmed, sedated,

And here and here and here—
why did I come back here?
Oh God, why would I come back here?

II: Action (perennially frustrated)

Demon-facing.

Fire-cleansing.

Slowburn.

Tiring.

Painful.

Forging myself (or trying)

into a steel

sharp enough

to run the walls red

with new blood.

Folding clothes for shelves,

marinating chickpeas,

intending to repot plants (and not getting round to it);

making my humble bed

for less offensive

lying in.

*

The years have not been kind.

but I have, whenever I've been able.

Something in that

worth holding onto.