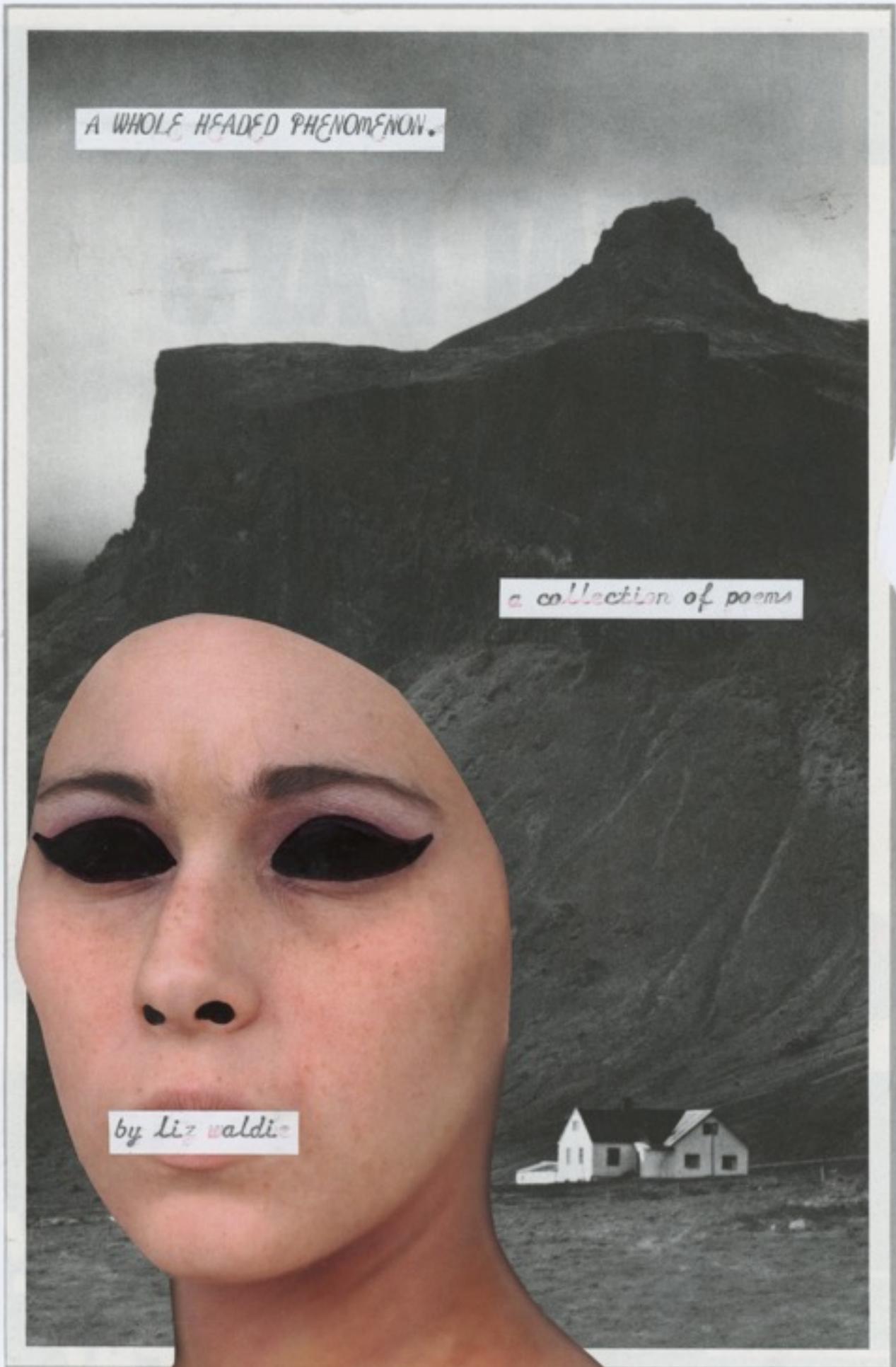


A WHOLE HEADED PHENOMENON.

a collection of poems

by liz waldi



a train of thought about him

---

his breath is  
cherry blossoms  
falling damp from trees  
in morning time  
before the sun  
awakens  
contrary to popular belief  
and every time  
i yawn with the dawn  
dewdrops beaded  
on his tongue  
fresh because it is all  
woods after rainfall  
dirt on the floor  
clean grass  
new  
and I glance  
towards his sleeping fawn face  
peaceful  
he can hear through his dreams  
surprising  
everything is  
content  
each leaf silently sticking to  
loose mud  
wet and sleepy  
no longer gasping for air  
so why shouldn't anything  
feel this comfortable  
days of struggling through a thought  
so thick  
don't move  
barely breathe  
but with him it is  
again  
a pond of lilies  
and his sleeping touch is  
the breeze  
and it feels like a warm shawl

a cool web  
smells of honey  
and crushed blackberries  
tastes of good tears after  
a settled argument  
and sounds like  
the soft hum of a record  
that has yet to be played  
a branch cracking and  
meeting soil  
and his skin  
a smooth beech tree  
witch hazel in portions  
and his eyes  
dilated  
from morning light  
gleaming futures  
portals of internalized thoughts  
of a silently intelligent vessel  
and he smiles  
whispering secrets through  
closed lips  
thorns tickling  
so I allow my eyelids to grow heavy  
and draw closer  
so he needn't know I'm awake  
tiptoeing through forests  
in my mind  
for it gives me time  
to relish in the  
rise  
and fall  
of his chest  
the sun  
before the day begins  
for real this time  
and he helps me up  
laughing  
and I allow my body to become heavy with him  
entwined and uprooted plants

c o l d s t r e a m

by liz waldie

the place whose bricks are a memoir of  
mudcracks  
a tower of children's building blocks  
whose roof is a patched up wound  
and a dying jungle canopy  
whose gutters are lips, sealed  
with shutters, the eyes of a broken porcelain doll  
with windows that are an assortment of  
submarine periscopes  
whose floors are thousands of rope bridges across  
the summer camp creek  
whose chimney is a box of pine incense  
the place where the wind is more than a wolf's  
howl  
and the woods are gentle giants dancing in slow  
motion  
with thunder, a rolling heartbeat  
where leaves are stick-and-seal envelopes  
and washcloths and double-sided tape  
where every pit is a bottomless home to monsters  
and tree limbs are cracking whips  
and rain tastes like freedom  
where hills and grasses are a breathing  
grandmother  
and the moon an hourglass of light  
the place whose deer are goblins of their own kind  
whose fireflies could only be faeries  
and the worms are gatekeepers to the soil  
and the foxes are criminals of the night  
whose bugs are the taste on your tongue  
whose spiders are the shadow of Norman Bates

whose inchworms are a heads-up penny  
where the moss-dwelling mice are orphans  
where hawks are the screams of the lost souls  
and rabbits are reflections of Alice's subconscious  
the place where spirits are secretaries  
where bumps in the night are helping hands  
where that thing in the closet is only a goodnight  
kiss  
and the whispers are slight tickles  
where the objects that move on their own are  
proud toddlers  
and missing belongings are a Carolyn Keene  
novel  
where sprinting through the darkness is dodging  
trains  
where the ghost is the relative only seen at  
reunions  
with fear, a gust of cold wind  
and gooseflesh, a nightly shower  
the place where shower curtains are saran wrap  
where the hummingbird feeder is a decaying box  
of candy  
with garage doors that are a baseball through a  
window  
and wasp nests, the most lavish chandeliers  
where every thorn on every bush is a Salem witch  
where raspberries are blood-stained hands  
where insomnia becomes swinging at the park  
where water droplets on the window becomes a  
thousand tongues licking away  
where flickering lights are lightning flashes  
and lightning flashes are secret signals  
the place where childhood is a dense, rolling fog

the exploration

---

one time  
i was afraid to walk across a bridge  
sandpaper in my throat

it happened when i was young  
it recurred  
a real life nightmare  
sweaty palms

one time  
when i was nearly twenty years old  
i was afraid to walk across a bridge  
he got a little upset  
because why was i so scared?

i don't know

he held my hand  
i was shaking while we walked

the bridge was high  
i felt small  
the cracks were too small  
for me to fall through  
but what if i did anyway?  
sandpaper in my throat

he squeezed my hand  
sweaty palms  
looked at me  
i had nothing to be afraid of  
he assured me

but i shook  
trembled like the coils in the oven  
my face burned  
charcoal bits at the bottom of the toaster

baby steps  
that's the key  
i didn't realize until just then  
and i told him

and we walked across  
another bridge  
shortly after

i tried not to look down  
knuckles white  
i didn't mean to squeeze  
his hand all cramped

he was patient  
the height made my stomach churn  
but i ignored the butterflies  
trying to knock me off my path

let's talk about something else  
something to distract me from the fear

it worked

we walked back across  
made it to the other side

on solid ground  
it was the day  
he made me realize  
that there was no reason  
for it not to be okay

economic disaster

the economy is crumbling and i'm obsessively checking the time

the economy is crumbling and i'm wearing a pair of glasses that i sat on a week ago

the economy is crumbling and i'm forgetting what i ate for breakfast

the economy is crumbling and i'm losing my mind over taking a shower

the economy is crumbling and i'm confused

the economy is crumbling and i'm kneeling in front of my bed

the economy is crumbling and i'm hanging a note above the sink

the economy is crumbling and i'm vomiting profusely

the economy is crumbling and i'm acting in a film that flops at the box office

the economy is crumbling and i'm picking at the carcass of a rabid animal

the economy is crumbling and i'm flossing until my gums bleed

the economy is crumbling and i'm dragging my feet across the carpet so i can shock you

the economy is crumbling and i'm sneezing at the sun

the economy is crumbling and i'm having nightmares

the economy is crumbling and i'm filing my fingernails

the economy is crumbling and i'm writing a letter to someone in another state

the economy is crumbling and i'm thinking about life

the economy is crumbling and i'm laying in a field

the economy is crumbling and i'm levitating in my sleep

the economy is crumbling and i'm dreaming about something mundane

sound

---

she spent numbers of hours  
meticulously swiping  
countless streams of consciousness  
into carelessly swept piles of debris

desperately debilitating in their  
dank and predetermined pods  
of aged ladies dancing abroad  
in delicately patterned or dull lace

luscious in light of a lost soul  
already laughing full of ill yet luxurious  
language angels fumbling all pale  
and tumbling lovely tang

temptingly topped with tartness  
concentrated into an aftermath  
articulate in better kept secrets  
turmoil to artful treats curious

curiouser and curiouser the cats  
collectively cackle actually at  
crackers in packages acting  
like crisp alcoves

and apples hung at acute angles  
a race to appreciate actors  
almost artful in a mass of a  
apricot lacking flavor

for far too many famous fools  
fumble with the aftermath of  
frequented fields of flowers  
and they laugh and jeer

jabbing their jibs at jars of gooeey  
grotesque jam, those gargoyles of sorts  
jarring, expressing great gratitude for  
jeans and genes and every unimaginable

unbelievable those undesirable uses  
you used to use the underside of the umbrella  
as a buffer for unwanted sums of ubiquitous us  
uh huh, an understatement of harmony

hideous harmony, oh how shallow  
hiding away in a heated hollow  
harsh hash harrowing howls  
and hiccups in the road

rolling along like a rock made of resin  
he rests around the corner, racking his red  
rounds for regular remarks  
far too tortured to be beloved

basking in blankets of blood  
before boys will be boys or  
breastmilk will be betrayed by  
blindly barked orders

oh order and order  
and over and over  
and beloved you sleep  
so sound

r i t t e n h o u s e

liz waldie

screeching squeals like slopes of ice  
sarcastically stroking the sides  
of grinding gears

“ow” and feet hitting pavement  
thud, crack, another

a thousand voices i don't understand  
not hushed  
like whispers  
but muted  
like the moans  
of children rolling in their graves

squish, squash, slurp slosh  
scratching at the muddy grass  
i think

a gruff wolfing, barking, a yap  
grating on my nerves  
drilling through ears

“it's too cold for this”  
her voice is thick  
thick mustard on a cheese sandwich  
that's maybe been left out in the sun for too long

booming low thunder  
“there's that peet's on sixteenth”  
it's a question not a statement

and bubbling gurgling baby barks  
escape a child's lips  
she coos  
she's a dove

there's a click  
of a sunscreen bottle  
the snap that is almost too quiet to be satisfying  
like that horrible bzzzzzzzzzz

coming from that crappy boombox  
it rings  
screams  
it's a horror star of its own

rolling wheel sounds  
staggered  
a heartbeat  
the heartbeat of that guy smoking a cigarette

hacking, gagging, choking  
she's talking to herself

the crack of a—

jingle, jingle  
pitter patter

giggles that feel like third degree burns  
smacks of the lips then halt

“just one dollar”

horns  
how did i not notice  
those oversized ducks  
quacking out of the place  
where they—

and the wind vibrating  
across my ears  
a momentary deafness  
a momentary peace

raspberries

---

i was gliding silently  
through moonlight and thorn bushes  
covered in raspberries  
could you believe it? raspberries  
when i came across  
an old woman  
there was coffee on the table  
served with sugar  
glazing my teeth  
and puddles as dark as her soul  
and i licked at each crumb from  
boxes upon boxes of newspaper  
the ink bleeding onto my sweat-drenched palms  
and the old woman's skin sagged  
it was grey skin  
and everyone i passed was faceless  
a chirping in the distance  
birds mocking and humming and such  
unsure of what else to do  
for my predicament was lost in the woods  
and that was when the crows began flying  
i flew, too, but in a different way  
she laughed with razor cheeks  
smiled with sandals on her hands  
and i turned away and ran through the brush  
there were an assortment of sounds  
the ground was moving and i realized  
thousands of maggots filled every crevice  
and it smelled like raspberries  
could you believe it?  
raspberries

so i pulled my hood over my head  
breathed in a familiar scent of him  
and crunched through the dead leaves  
the moon was smiling  
at the bottom of the hole  
and soon there came a cave  
darker than any place i'd ever been  
it sloped downward  
i felt pillows around my head  
there were buzzing sounds  
oddly entertaining  
flickering lights on porches and  
harmless little gnats landing on them  
i brushed it away  
as if it were a snake  
but it was rough and splintered  
and i discovered that it was rope  
i grasped onto it  
there was an ocean, too  
a new predicament  
and my mouth filled with raspberries  
could you believe it?  
raspberries

fragments

---

liz waldie

witch hazel  
reflected in eyes

liars lick at you  
sleepily drumming

relish your urges  
ingesting iron nails

swift, now, repent  
sunset coppers fade

plastic bags and moonlight slants  
and engaging in what?

articulate in better  
turmoil

by blindness  
euphoria knew

water and chemical washes  
little crimes here and there

in slow motion  
believe it or not

what a fucking mess  
heavily soaked

arguments hardly sleep  
simple and victimless

who do you think you are  
“a most fantastic voyage”

out of touch with earth  
may I proceed?

we slipped ever downstream  
clothed in bleach

a master of masterful masterpieces  
and shitty tongue twisters

starve out the mountain  
drape yourself over the porcelain

you are a worry  
I am worried

can you wait up  
wring out the towel

tiptoes on splinters  
and I've still got that goofy smile

it's a lonely, lost, beautiful world at the bottom of  
somewhere in my memory