

[BLACK FAMILY HOME]

The Ammons family haunting, Gary, Indiana.

Black family home. Black family
and roof patched black. Black family shutters
and Black neighborhood Black. Better sit your ass back
in that pew Black. Better get better Black. Better not act up
for the CPS lady Black. Better show her those A's Black.
Sweetheart, show her those braids I gave you, that Black
castor oil. Sit back. Tell her I'm not crazy, Black.
Better make her believe us, Black. Show her our Bibles
and the red-stained linoleum. Show her the pages
ripped out from the binding. Show her the fissure of scar
on your brow, Black. That claw streak on your brow Black.
But that's not from me Black. You know that. Sweetheart, tell her
what you saw last night in your closet, Black. How it stared through
your school jackets. Believe us Black. Please.
Please give them back. Show her your crucifix, Black.
How it twists down in the night. Tell her who did it Black.
Tell her what you saw.

LATOYA CONSIDERS THE DEMON'S HUMANITY

The Ammons family haunting, Gary, Indiana.

Tonight I sing the sliver-moon, the unkindness
of winter light that blasts through
the sunroom. Sing my children, who have left

and left again. Cooking dinner for four when only my own plate
is eaten from. But I sing the pristine stove top afterwards,
the grocery bouquet that sits on the table

like unanswered prayer. Sing their bedrooms, preserved like museum
exhibits, beds still undone with the tousled print
of their bodies. Sing the apparition of them

floating through hallways in the pink evenings, half-vision
running toward the house from bus stops. Sing until sound tinges
discordant, cusp of a screech. Sing because it's the only thing

I can do. To keep living. Sing because it drowns you out, cursed-
thing. The light of the bedroom is so black, I can only see
your shoulders, oily pool of residue your shadow leaves on carpet. So since

it's just us now. I'll sing if you're listening. Throw the doors open. Believe
that you want to leave but can't, red strings of Hell stitching you
to basement floor. Sing until sound gets muffled by cicada cry, horsefly

buzz, wings machine-whirring against windows. Muffled by cold-snap winter
or the sound of snow thumping against porch. I believe the best in people,
you know. Really. If I pray hard enough,

this house may fall around us both — broken rafters
splintering through my heirlooms. Memory is a chore, a trick
of the light. If we become close — become each other — will you bring

them back? The children, I mean. The memories. Will you do that
for me? Come in. I'll sing broken record. Sing Stockholm syndrome. Have me,
please — just not my children. If you will not leave, scream into the windows of hell

and have me. Until snow hits skin and starts to sizzle. Until you look in the mirror
to see my face.

STILL LIFE WITH EMPTY PLOT OF LAND

The Ammons family haunting, Gary, Indiana.

"Now that it's an open lot people go there to do seances, and the police get called out to chase them away. Those people are in great danger, and there's no way to really protect them. And all you need is curiosity. Curiosity is an invitation."

—Father Michael Maginot

Where house once stood, dead
evening grass the color of rust. Square wound
where a basement sunk. The house was a replica

of every other house on the block, cursed twins lining Carolina,
paint-chipped shutters copy-pasted. Sky its usual milk-grey from smog
pollution, dogs chained outside in November cold snap. Lone steps, vacant porch

that leads nowhere. Five years ago, the last buyer paid a dozen men
to rip every nail from drywall, wrecking-ball roof, wood splintering
from pressure. Now wind whistles through the abandoned gaze the structure left. Whatever was in

that house — arachnid, too-long limbs that swallowed the ceiling, faceless head-tilt,
cacophonous growl — is out. The chance to stow away the thing has passed. Teenagers, three
of them, climb down to settle in the open pit. Ouija board in hand, snickering summoning rituals

they uncovered online. It waits, twists claws into dirt, tunnels up from the red face of Hell.
No time for Catholic hymns, exorcisms in Latin. Now the thing is out — with the rest of us.

THE POET CONSIDERS THE GOD-HONEST TRUTH

Downtown Gary, Indiana. 2021.

*You taking a picture
of the Genesis Center?*

I nod at the structure
in front of us, retro-futuristic, spheres
of windows like pinholes in the walls.
Bleached brick against bleached sky.
The stranger's voice looms behind, unwilling
to step into my camera's shutter. I need
pictures for a book I'm writing. *It's all about
Gary, you know. How it can be revived.*
The building wilts – rounded architecture
strangled with ivy. She snaps her head
in my direction, gestures a gloved hand at an
alley nearby, trash tumbleweeding
near our feet.

*You honestly think
it's being revived?*

She cranes a wise eye at me, studies my gaze
through the scarf obstructing my mouth. I begin
an explanation, speech petering out – halved
like an orange. She interrupts

*I'm twice your age at least,
honey. No one's reviving shit.*

We stare at the abandoned convention
center, rust blooming from the rafters,
entrance door kicked in. Where thousands
once gathered, foundation slides inwards –
structure teetering as if suspended
on fingertips.

*It's not revived yet. But I grew up
around here, I blurt out, almost to myself.
I want it to get better. Wind whistles through
glass, punched-through. The stranger shakes
her head gently, begins to walk the opposite
way down the street.*

*Just keep writing that book, baby, she calls out,
muffled winter light hitting her back. So long
as it keeps you out of trouble.*

THE GIRL-BODY GOES BACK TO THE BEGINNING

the nightmare that nature has made —
my mother statuesque and white, high
cheekbones with polite teeth.
in photos our differences are stark —
rounded face, afro puffed against
pin-straight hair. when i was young she combed curls out
of my head, conquered with relaxer, alchemy
of assimilation. she said that i shined
like a new penny — dirty copper of skin, identity divided
into partisan issues. in elementary school, a white boy
captured my hair in his small hands, called me
[redacted]. how tenderly my mother
soothed me, suggested
he had a crush.

IN RESPONSE TO THE 2021 VIRAL VIDEO CLAIMING GARY, INDIANA IS COMPLETELY ABANDONED

Ghosts in the dove-coo of early morning, ghosts soaking in lukewarm bathwater. Ghosts in the singing of fried potatoes, ghosts in the dark kitchen grout. Ghosts that never let you leave their homes hungry, how they clutch an elbow and float toward the stove. Ghosts in the busses that putz along Broadway, in the beige classrooms that line the community college. Ghosts in the garage Yahtzee tournaments, ghost family reunions, ghost photo albums with levitating matching shirts. Ghosts planning get-togethers at the library, ghosts comparing oranges at Miller Mart. Ghosts in the weathered cathedrals on Sunday afternoons, ghost choir of disappearing mouths. Ghosts eating vegan food at Vibrations, in the low light of pink-neon bodega signs. Ghosts who flutter toward breakdowns on the highway, who stop what they're doing to give you a jump. Ghosts with clutched Bibles and karaoke machines, ghosts who rush home to translucent flower gardens. Ghosts who help older ghosts fold their laundry, ghosts who call you sweetheart as you pack their groceries. Ghosts in the mills who bang coal into metal, father-ghosts in coveralls and worn-out work boots. Ghosts in the strip clubs off Route 20, in the empty shopping plaza on Lake. Ghosts with lush balcony gardens, sending down tomatoes in wicker picnic baskets. Ghosts who spot starlings with hovering binoculars, studying dawn like gauze over a flashlight. Ghosts who shake bells to call children inside, who yell to their kin in spirit-box fashion. Ghosts who pray diligently to the small god of fairness,
people with no reflection in the fogged bathroom mirror.

SO WHAT

It's my miracle now – this life contracting like a nervous fist. Negroni with an orange peel teetering off the edge. A year ago I was so hopeless that I had no use for seat belts or cardinal swooping. But now it's all how-to videos for escaping flooding cars. For example, doomsday prepping. Buying a pear orchard in Athens, Georgia. Vegan eating to offset familial stroke risk. Fearing highways and questionable insects. You get it. Maybe the longleaf pines are petering out of existence just to prove that they can. Iced coffee on a balcony while the sky self-immolates. Except now I'm obsessed with living. I can't get enough of this stupid world.

LILY SOMESON

Lily Someson is a poet from Gary, Indiana. She is the author of *Mistaken for Loud Comets*, winner of the Host Publications Spring 2021 chapbook prize. She has also been published in the Academy of American Poets, *Underblong*, *Court Green*, and *Columbia Poetry Review*, among others. She is currently a third-year Poetry MFA candidate at Vanderbilt University.