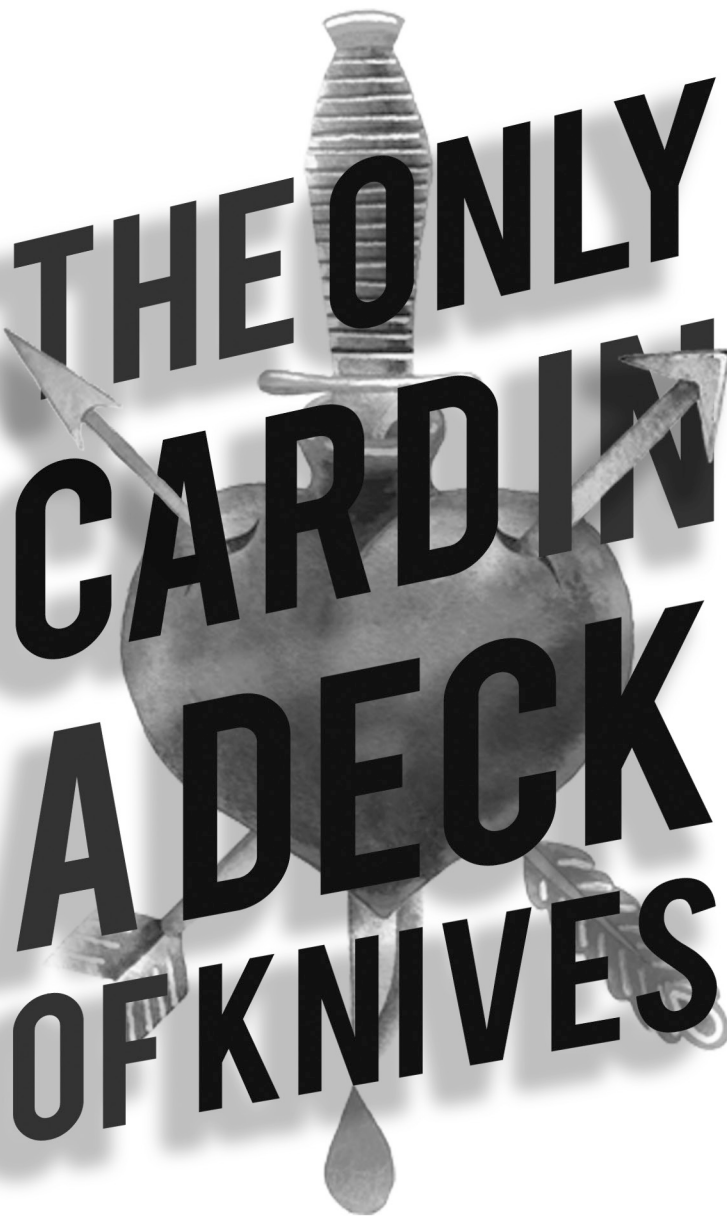


**THE ONLY
CARD IN
A DECK
OF KNIVES**

poems

LAUREN TURNER

**THE ONLY
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A DECK
OF KNIVES**



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A Buckrider Book

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For anyone who hoped for different cards

*The thing is when you're sick or when they call you sick
you start acting like that. I guess everyone knows that.
But I didn't know it, not until later. Not until I'd wasted
a good part of my life in that place.*

– Suzanne Scanlon, *Promising Young Women*

*Didn't I decide in these times
I am not allowed to die artistic deaths. Even though all my loves come here to die.*

– Ariana Reines, “Something Inside Me”

You have to beware of mimicking your own face.

– Nelly Arcan, *Burqa of Skin*

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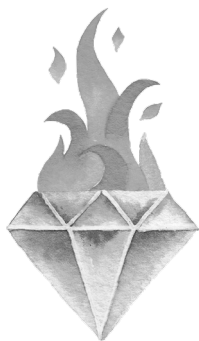
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I
Botched Mythology



Engaging the Core

Respond to the only name you know.

Do not question whether it suits you or lie curled under the duvet at two o'clock, debating whether its vibrancy and litheness magnify your slothful disposition, the unfinished quality of your movements. Those meandering limbs.

Sickle feet are unsuitable for dancing, so stand on your toe knuckles to stretch the curved instep, the *plantar fascia*. Give fancy titles to common parts, even lemurs have arches to grip stone fruit plundered from Malagasy orchards, golden sap dribbling down triangular snouts.

What does this body symbolize? An artist carved a lotus into your skin, above tender kidneys. Did the blue ink reach the organs or flood the bloodstream? Wonder now if your interiority reads differently. Hieroglyphics of porous marrow pocketed with secrets, your fervent indiscretions.

Liver enzymes pickled slightly. Little asthmatic lungs mid-spasm where another set of hands gripped your taut abdomen, the head of a drum organizes static. Veins pulsating hemoglobins in perfect three-four time. This is your waltz. Sway to it.

Self-trolling

This is as ordinary as it is harmful. It says a lot about me that I'd mishear a lyric *you bring your heart, I'll bring my sword*. Often I tell people I'm 24. Not because I want to be still but I keep slipping out of seasons. I've found a way to not feel my feelings and it involves a surprising amount of bile. Your mother's expectations rode atop us like a flea market mink coat. I meant that as an insult but fuck it sounds grand. *You left* is my felling blow to ambiguity. I won't pool this fish-bowl for gold nuggets. I feel zilch. I like words that come spit out. Orchids are offers for grave plots, airplanes pockmark skylines and transatlanticism fails somewhere beyond a Death Cab ballad. I'm not apologetic. An empathetic heart dangles by its own blood threads. No seducer mewls the rib cage to tie you up. My last dearest, take dignity. Envelope this malice in manila. In Châteauguay, junior letter-sorters are all atwitter over postcards from our sordid sabbatical. I'm tired of scorn by feral girls whose morning breaths perfume the pillowcases between your thighs. This could've been the *Gotcha* moment in our game of Sorry. But it's a one-sided duel if your fencing shoes are thrown over a wire and our swords are just sticky fists of children in a sugar crash.

We've Taxidermied the Wrong Choices

Remapping the route back to Brattleboro, our footfalls shudder
like a shot of neat whisky.
We can't be real

when memory gets blackout drunk. Let's step off-sync, windup
toy soldiers set loose,
split seconds apart.

Bearskin is filling my eyes with sweat and you're the salt lick
where every buck wants
to take a good slobber.

These woods blister silence. It began when oral history caught
venereal from truths
rubbed into lies.

New feelings can't lichen over what we remember. But it's easier
if you swirl past in a double-
hooped skirt and hood

to execute your own murder. Stay for a slow waltz. I'll bite the sea
pearl off your earlobe.
Swallow it down

because *unbalanced corpses can't unzip god's clouds*. This jewel settles
my guts forever,
as my weepy heart rides

your ribs' bell jar. Our lives tether in gory symmetry, still you barrel
careless down the path
as I follow.



Lauren Turner is a disabled poet and essayist, who wrote the chapbook *We're Not Going to Do Better Next Time* (knife | fork | book, 2018). Her work has appeared in *Grain*, *Arc Magazine*, *Poetry is Dead*, *Cosmonauts Avenue*, *The Puritan*, *canthius* and elsewhere. She won the 2018 Short Grain Contest and was a finalist for the 2017 3Macs carte blanche Prize. She lives in Tiohtiá:ke/Montréal on the unceded land of the Kanien'kehá:ka Nation.



PRAISE FOR *THE ONLY CARD IN A DECK OF KNIVES*

“An exquisitely feral ballet, *The Only Card in a Deck of Knives* burrows into the belly of poetry, its guts and blood. Lauren Turner expertly orchestrates swift melodies out of fables, cocktail hours and illness to counter the magical beast that is the literary life, its toxic lore, power dynamics and embodied sacrifices. Never have I witnessed anyone wield our shared illusions and realities with such earned purpose and defiant precision. Here is a new mythology that may topple the towers that loom darkly over our lives and art.”

– **ADÈLE BARCLAY, AUTHOR OF *RENAISSANCE NORMCORE* AND *IF I WERE IN A CAGE I'D REACH OUT FOR YOU***

“A disease can't be equated to an abuser,' acknowledges Turner, and yet: 'on my worst days, I recollect my early twenties and hypothesize that I poisoned my body with bad men.' Written with the fearlessness, ferocity and dark humour of a survivor, *The Only Card in a Deck of Knives* is a powerful hybrid collection about blooms and rot, youth and death, and the marks that abuse and illness leave on a life.”

– **AMY BERKOWITZ, AUTHOR OF *TENDER POINTS***

“This sensational, defiant debut holds the complexity of trauma, sickness and care with caution and intelligence, velveteen and latticework. ‘There’s no origin myth, only women / split like pulpy peach,’ and ‘Blame is so reductionist,’ Turner writes. With insight and wit, she looks you in the eye to say, ‘If that analogy angers you, it was intended to.’ Each page is equal parts song and dance, written in skillful language that reminds us ‘curtains don’t open, they expose.’”

– **TESS LIEM, AUTHOR OF *OBITS***



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