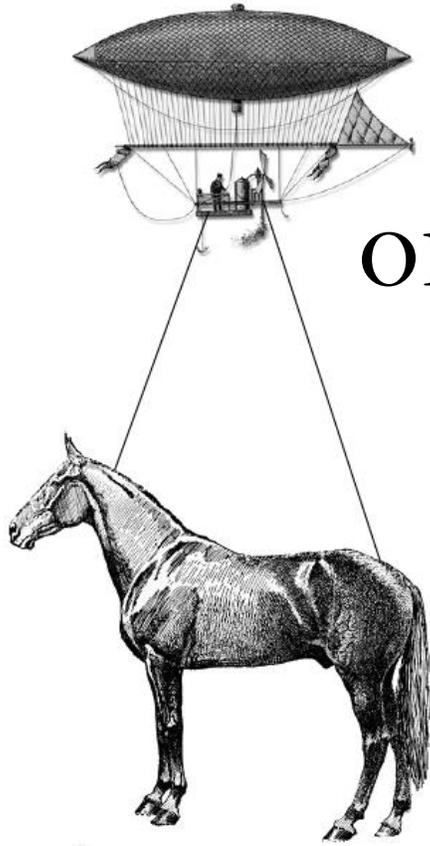


# ordinary planet

text & art  
by Kristy Bowen





ordinary planet



1.

Three knocks under the table  
and my voice flutters like the top  
of a cathedral. My husband binds

my wrists in twigs and wire, but the fire  
won't burn. The landscape still blank  
and unreadable. The house, unbreachable.

I made a circle with my stare. My hair  
tangled in marsh grass, my body  
covered in leaves. I tried to free the

painted horses from their pen atop the river  
but the men stopped me with their voices.  
I kneel behind the cupboard and only

speak through the mouths  
of drowned women, my heart  
slipping through the floor and up

into your black lap.

2.

After I have hidden my hands in the lake, I make  
the perfect birdfeeder, the perfect fever pitch.  
Oh, how his fingers shake when he undoes

my shoelaces, his face blank with want.  
There are bruises along my body,  
you haven't even seen, where I removed

my dress like a tablecloth, careful not  
to disturb my teacup, my saucer,  
the birds nesting in my hair.

Careful not to stir the beast sleeping in the shed.  
Where I broke my arm in the trap he  
so lovingly set. My thoughts balloon animals

drifting up and over the horizon, the fortune  
fish he planted in my belly flipping *yes no*



3.

Seven days later, the wind that  
blew the roof from the house quiets  
and we grow quieter still, tilling

the ground for what was lost--  
left shoe, right shoe, the handle  
of my brush. What rush I felt

when the storm took everything.  
hook and eye and eyelet bedspread.  
Sent it floating over trees and into

the neighbor's pond. Breathless,  
I waited to be picked up by gods  
and hoisted into heaven. Waited

to be struck dumb by lightning  
until my nerves fizzled and cracked.  
But weather works its magic

in increments. Each drop in barometer  
fraying the edges of women  
already bone worn with weary.

Already moth-eaten and bleeding.



3.

When speaking to the dead,  
we learn to throw our voice.  
To cough and cry on command.

To pull the ribbon from our throats  
and bleed as needed. No sooner  
have we mastered moving the salt

shaker across the table, we're expected  
to crack the bones in our ankles  
loud enough to hit the mark.

Loud enough to echo through  
a darkened room full of held breath.  
Windows flung open and candles

sputtering into black. I have a knack  
for producing a toad from my throat  
at the drop of a hat. For speaking

in strange tongues and the accents of strangers.  
The danger is believing in it all too much.  
The ecstasy of lying our way into truth,

eyes rolling in our heads.



4.

On Sundays, we wait in the field  
while the travelers alight one by one,  
clutching train cases and overcoats.

Smoking cigarettes put out,  
one by one, in the dirt. They stamp  
their passports and disappear

into the tall grass, toting birdcages  
and lamps. Carrying their hunger  
in front of them like a box full

of rabbits sacrificed to the sea.  
No one can console them, least  
of all me. I keep a canary

in the cabinet and let it out  
when it rains. It lingers at the top  
of the curtains and dies promptly

every day at 3. What strange  
monsters we harbor in our houses  
and beds. The larger animals

that move inside us stumbling,  
always, toward unknown shores.

5.

By winter, the iron in our blood  
points north, disturbs compasses  
and watch parts. Sets the

barometer-spinning wildly.  
But really what is *north* without gravity?  
Our heavy shoes keeping us tethered.

Our hearts, their kite strings tugging madly  
toward sky. When he came for me  
I was wrapped in blankets, crushing

petals between my fingers. All ice picks  
and arithmetic. How we emptied our  
bodies into one another until we tired

of the game. I wasn't waiting to be saved.  
My horses had other names. I sold them  
for beautiful bottles with beautiful labels

*Strychnine. Arsenic. Deadly Nightshade.*  
He loved his meats more than he loved me.  
Such appetite, until his eyes grew

dull and blank as a cow's.

6.

There are other kinds of madnesses  
than that of lilacs--violins, hatpins.  
A house full of cats. I pin my crazy

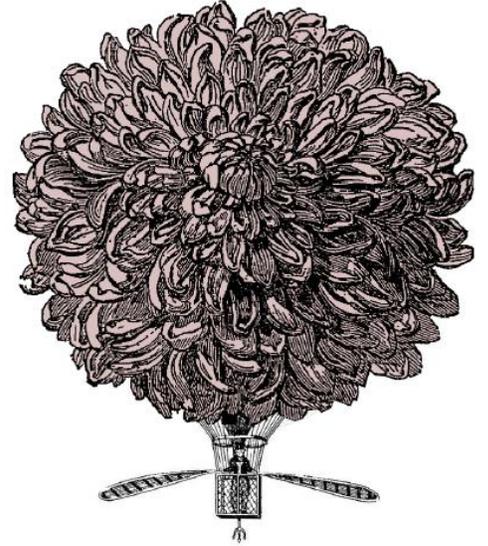
like a brooch to my sweater. In this  
weather, the radiators weep until  
the furniture floats. No hope

for the birches, white as ghosts in the field.  
Still, I arrive, soaking wet and wounded.  
Fall slack against the door. There is something

I must tell you, but fall short in the telling.  
The silver zeppelin that sinks over  
the hill, just out of sight. Where at night,

my words are all mechanics and birding,  
all murder and flirtation. Remember,  
in the zoo, the animals were small and sad

in their cages, but still close enough to touch.



7.

In the spring, everything we've buried  
comes to the top of the garden, Baby shoes,  
tiny teeth. Bits of rope and wire.

I was tired of dusk, and the way every  
gesture pointed toward buckshot  
and the blown out husk of wasps nests.

How every gasp hollowed us until  
nothing could hold water without leaking.  
Even when speaking, my voice rotted

through floorboards. The infant undone  
by fever, by ordinary demons skirting  
the bassinet. How after, I doused the drapes

in kerosene and watched them burn.  
Curled myself around grief like a cat.  
Waited for April and all of its reveal.

8.

There are endless rooms in the body,  
fraught with riptides and roses.  
My bones expand like wood

in an unfinished house. Wind  
bourn and curving. In winter,  
I was cloaked in furs and shivering,

my fingers so cold I couldn't undo  
the latch. This catch in the chest  
that gives way to cold water and

wickedness. On my knees,  
I perfected the skulls of mice  
until they dwindled to dust,

lusted after velvet and satin.  
Lived for days in the attic,  
a lunatic in tattered lace.

Mouthing the words to a song  
caught like a sparrow  
in the tomb of my lungs.



9.

The world as we knew it was  
and then was not. Men fiddled  
the machines into a frenzy

and still the city blackened  
and blitzed like a roman candle.  
I could handle the end of it all,

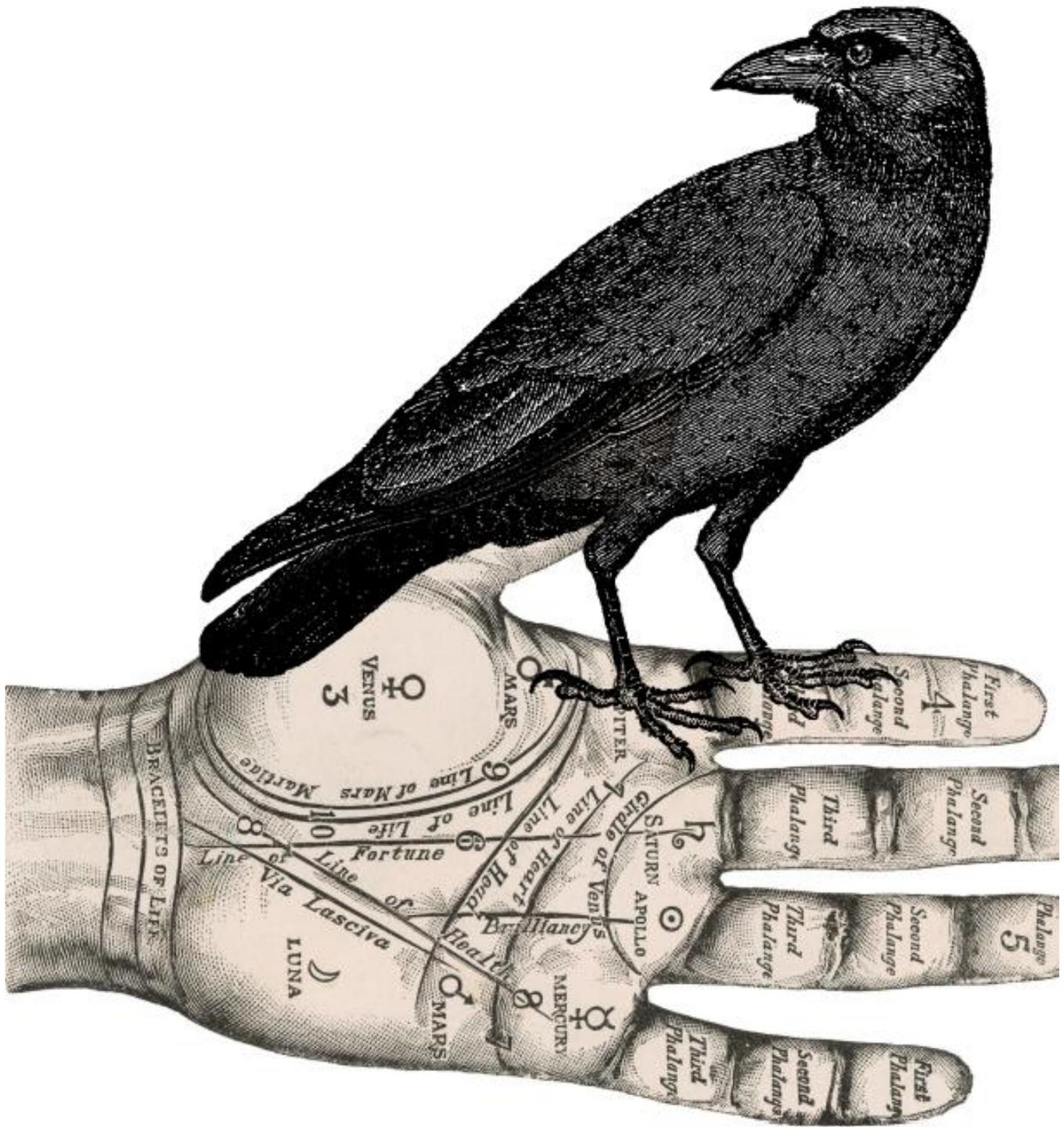
could float and lull while the streets  
filled with water, if not for the daughter  
I kept hidden in my pantry. The fear

that stopped up my throat  
like feathers. Whatever the weather,  
we watched and waited, braided

each other's hair until the lake  
took the land back into its body.  
Til the sea swallowed everything

that wasn't tethered to our wrists  
like an enormous blue balloon.





10.

Spring comes in like a crooked tooth,  
a broken neck. We are gutted by  
soothsayers, writing letters to the dead.

On the airship, I was manic,  
distracted by butterflies beating  
their wings in my wrist. A fist

closed in my chest full of poppies  
and peppermint balm. The moment  
when the rain turned coal black, greased

the back of my hand with soot. A man  
with a harpoon and a pair of antlers  
welcomed me into his home, showed

me a pile of bones arranged into  
a sofa, another into a chair. He tethered  
my hair to his bedpost and swallowed

the key to the door. We lived like  
this for years until discontent arrived  
knocking, all the hinges blown open by wind.

11.

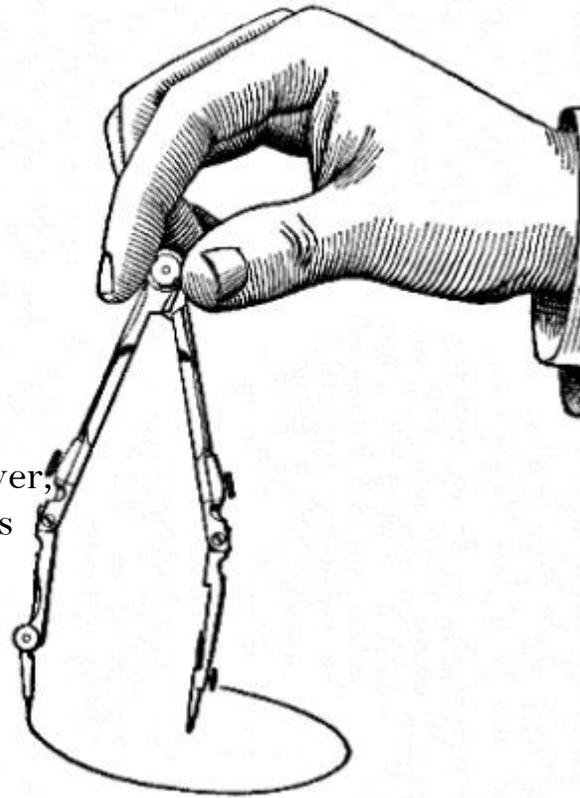
At first, of course, the men were kind.  
Holding open doors and waiting til nightfall  
before the burning started, yearning

for apron strings and sweet, soft breasts.  
Rewarded with women grown lean and angry  
as knives. In the old world, I was a teacher,

a baker, a teller of lies. Now I fashion my knots  
into necromancy, so many corpses floating the river,  
simmering on the pyres. Nightly, I hide my words

in the mattress, my books beneath the boards.  
long to smash my crystal ball into the skulls  
of strangers and tip their bodies into the sea.

Above the fireplaces, the skeleton of an enormous  
whale that swallowed us all. The black between  
its bones made entirely of stars.



12.

At night, we meet in the crawlspace beneath  
the floor. My daughter and I, the hinge  
in my heart tight but soundless, where

she slips in, skims the hem of her dress  
on the dirt floor. In the time before,  
we ate oranges and read well until

the night. But now our lips are tight  
in the kitchen. Our hands pale  
in the dishwater. A million different

sins laid in our laps—wrath, greed,  
worst of all, lust. The men working the dust  
in the fields, working themselves

up over the slightest unbuttoning,  
the barest flash of ankle. As if we could  
take it all back, the world inside

the body, before spitting it out again.  
Bruised and beautiful and ruined.

13.

Fall is a season of witches. Of ditches  
filled with cattails and the ruined  
bodies of women. As a sinner, I am

extraordinarily good at swimming  
the length of lake each morning.  
At hiding my wet clothes in the bushes.

The marshes are thick with hunters,  
while the child inside me flips and floats  
the bloodstream, craves saltwater

and sweet rolls. Foils even the best  
plans for escape with her wanting.  
Yesterday, the startle of blood

in the folds of my nightgown, a warning  
that even the unborn conspire to keep  
us weighted and motionless, our limbs

gone white at the bottom of the river.



14.

On the island, days are long and round.  
Form like an oval from our mouths,  
full of rain and the open window panes

of houses leaning into the wind. The kind  
of lonely that blackens the eyes,  
the heart, and anything not tied to the ground.

I take my tea at 3pm, when the women begin  
to line up on the porch, each waiting their turn  
in the parlor, hands shaking with coins.

Faces the pallor of white flour, sifted through grain  
sacks. The lack of sons and husbands taken  
by fever, by factory, by flood. One woman,

her daughter, floating the mud of the marshes,  
Rope round her slender neck. Another, her sister  
drowned in a well by their father. How his hands

shook when he wrapped them firmly round  
her throat. Her trespass, the cow she refused  
to sell to market. The man she refused to wed.

The dead, their pockets full of broken watches.  
Locketts emptied of their lovers.

15.

The woman from a nearby town is holding  
a sweater to her chest and crying. Her daughter  
left floating the bottom of the cistern, the sister

lost in the woods for weeks. My tea leaves float  
the dark soup at the bottom of the cup, my  
own child in the night cupboard with a doll.

All of us horrified when the men start butchering  
the horses, one by one, for their meat. When the children  
are taken, one by one, in their pajamas, into the streets.

The men drink what's left of the whiskey and start  
in on the wine, but who can dine with wolves  
and not become one? Who can abide such wildness

without sinking her teeth in the nearest wrist? I twist  
my hair into a knot atop my head and swirl the little bowl.  
The lamp sputters, then glows. A tiny cough from behind  
the breakfront, a tiny sigh from inside the ghost.

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A writer and book artist working in both text and image, Kristy Bowen is the author of a number of chapbook, zine, and artist book projects, as well as several full-length collections of poetry/prose/hybrid work, including *SALVAGE* (Black Lawrence Press, 2016) and *MAJOR CHARACTERS IN MINOR FILMS* (Sundress Publications, 2015). Visit: [kristybowen.net](http://kristybowen.net)