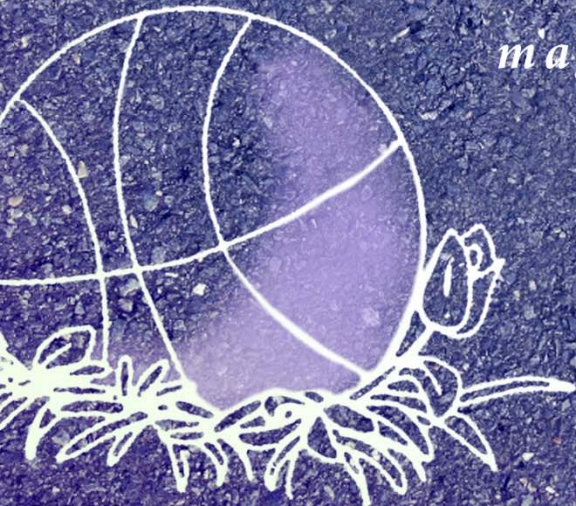




**the bug  
orchestra**

*maggie farren*



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## palms

*i.*

Driving at night is like soaring,  
a pair of ice skates and the whole town  
frozen over. I'm always finding excuses  
to run errands in the moon's embrace, to slip

down the driveway into brake lights and exhaust pipes.

I know neon Jewel-Osco like my own knuckles.

The checkout lady, a cool breeze as she makes up  
a family for me and wonders why they let me go out every night

for dish soap, tampons, a thank you card, wonders  
why shopping has become my goodnight kiss.

Sometimes I will take Harlem so far  
that the cross streets become strangers

and I wonder if I say hello enough times

the world won't feel so much like a vengeful tongue.

*ii.*

I miss the rev of the minivan.

The time I turned too sharp off Harlem and dug  
its battered side into a white van.

The tobacco glued to the man's teeth as he yelled

and then realized that a minivan could do no harm.

I miss pleading my mother for the keys or slipping them  
into my pocket, depending on the furrow of her brow.

And how I would drive the car until the red arrow just graced E

and then vacate for a week, until the tank magically filled itself.

I do not drive in Boston,

I take the train, the slow chug of the city's arteries.

I step onto Comm Ave after a car passes,

jacket blown open wide,

I remember the thrill of a steering wheel  
and a half an hour in which no one will call your name.  
I daydream about Thanksgiving break

when I can shiver in the front seat,  
puff clouds of smoke with the car as it awakes,  
used to slumbering in its old age.

I will take the car down Harlem,  
past Roosevelt where all the cross streets  
turn to numbers and I will count on my fingers  
the hours until I leave.

**milwaukee**

*There are good reasons to tweezer each  
word that you give a body. - Raymond Antrobus, "The Artist"*

The important thing is that we are there,  
frozen and melting we stumble through city blocks. We are  
reminding ourselves that there is little good  
in solitary shivering. I don't know all the reasons  
why a teenager needs a place to run to  
but we have this one. Later we end up looking for a tweezer  
and laugh as we bump hip bones against the bathroom sink, each  
eyebrow a few hairs sparser. We each have a different word  
or how this feels, growing up, and that  
isn't comforting. We'll find the grape juice where you  
left it and have a picnic on the living room floor, give  
each other two palms worth of popcorn and a  
way to believe that we aren't just parts of a lonely body.

## the bug orchestra

Declan shoots baskets. His pants swish as he moves,  
let me know where he is as I lay  
on the warm concrete, hands clasped  
behind my head so my knuckles hurt a bit.

I do not hear him the first time he says it,  
over the swish of his pants.  
But his sneakers squeak,  
and he says it again, and this time I pretend  
not to hear him because the bug orchestra  
started playing my favorite song.  
The one that comes on, clockwork,  
when the backyard fence slices into the sun  
like a wheel of cheese.

In the next ten minutes he will abandon the ball,  
let it roll into the flowers he planted and lay next to me.  
His white t-shirt

looks like the afternoon sun.

We listen to the bug orchestra play the sun to bed,  
the screech of the violin and cello as  
the cicadas warm their lonely legs.

There is a way that the evening sun makes every poem  
about a friend seem like I am wrapping up  
a bit of our world and giving it to them.  
In case I become an empty body, a cicada skeleton,  
you will have this sour song  
and the scratch of warm concrete on your shoulders.



## flaming and hot

At the party I clench everyone's hand, not softly at all,  
as I pass by to go to the bathroom, then the backyard,  
then to find a way home.

I can see the trail I have left because  
I've been eating hot cheetos all night  
and my fingerprints are on the inside of every wrist.

I wonder if we will come back to this:  
cool night air and hot basement and bodies  
that have known another frequently.

## twin-sized

Your feet hang off the edge as we watch TV,  
and when you fall asleep, spread to all four corners,  
I wedge myself between you and the wall.  
We wake and wonder why we ache.

You have your own mattress four floors up,  
but when you leave my side, it hurts,  
like pulling a splinter from between my ribs.  
I have always slept alone, or with a friend or my mom.

Now I fall asleep beside a shoulder and a ribcage  
and wake to their rise and fall. The smoothest earthquake  
is falling into someone so hard that you cannot imagine  
not sleeping with your every limb matching theirs.



## about the author

**Maggie Farren** is studying English at Boston University, where she edits *Burn* literary magazine and received the 2020 Core Journal Prize for Creative Writing. This chapbook is her first solo publication. She comes to Boston from the Chicago area. Find her on Twitter [@maggie-farren](https://twitter.com/maggie-farren).



Note: A version of “The Bug Orchestra” first appeared in the multi-author chapbook collection *Cicada Sex-Songs*, published by Hawk & Whippoorwill earlier this year.

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Edited by Cat Dossett for Pen & Anvil; find her on social [@aboutadaughter](https://twitter.com/aboutadaughter). Cover illustrations by Isabel Farren. The fonts in this layout are Minion designed by Robert Slimbach at Adobe Fonts, and Pretext from Macromedia’s Fontographer.

published in 2020 // [penandanvil.com/chapbooks](http://penandanvil.com/chapbooks)