

# Poems by Ösel Jessica Plante

Wednesday Oct. 27, 7pm UP Bookstore sponsored by the Garaventa Center + English Dept.



Ösel Jessica Plante's fiction and poetry have appeared in *Best New Poets 2017 & 2019*, *Best Small Fictions 2016*, *Narrative Magazine*, and *Passages North*, among others. She is winner of the 2018 Meridian Editors Prize in poetry, Honorable Mention in the 2018 Gulf Coast Prize, and Finalist in the 2019 Nimrod International Literary Awards. Plante is a former fellow of the Vermont Studio Center. She holds an MA in English from U. North Texas, an MFA from U. North Carolina at Greensboro, and a PhD in poetry from Florida State U. She's originally from Massachusetts but now writes and works at University of Portland in Portland, Oregon.

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## Poems from *Waveland* (2021):

### Pistol of Bones

I live in a green house on First Street  
like a figment passing through rooms,  
almost less than plaster and lathe, horse  
-hair smoothed into walls, pine trees felled  
a hundred years before I drank the sun  
and rain, rooted deep in silence and sleep  
married to a man who flooded our  
bedroom each night, never sat at the table  
to eat, nor took his pleasure in me. Listen  
to the way *ob* is the surprise we know  
with our mouths—my moon, my cottage,  
my storms that blew acorns onto the tin  
roof. I measure and sew my days  
together—floral and nothing I would  
buy again or hang myself in a new life,  
the one without a man, the one where I  
understand the marrow of words tastes  
nothing like the marrow of bones.

### She & Wolf

Outside my house there are men heating up  
the newly paved road with a blow torch. Their fire  
sounds like an airplane engine. In orange  
and yellow vests they make me think of what needs  
protection, not the fruit of the fig tree from  
wasps which will burrow deep inside, not the tadpoles  
birthed into the brackish shallows that will  
nibble an outstretched palm, but the piece of me still

circling into my husband's ear, his mouth,  
measuring herself against his bones as I sit aching

at my desk, bent and white as a swan, hollow  
as honeysuckle wrists. The wind blowing outside ruffles

the men's hair. They parade back and forth  
to their truck like peacocks, their words dissolve before

I can hear. My husband's words have found  
the shady edges like snow in early spring, they glint

from the sunless rims like amber holds a frozen  
sun. Look and there's the curve of a beetle's wing, a tiny

continent of stillness, dust. Any warmth now  
and my scars flare. The life below the one that shows,

wriggling to come, to know itself black as tar  
and indistinguishable after the men are done. I get up,

head for the kitchen to dive into lunch. The coral  
mouth of a torch goes out, there are small fires sutured

to me tight as a blush. I wish for a dozen birds,  
for sunlight to strike my throat ruby, bare—a woman,

a bell, a magnolia bloom, the same uninvited  
wolf sitting in my dining room chair.

### The Navy Husband Digs a Pool

For days he drove a bright yellow Bobcat  
to move earth from the center of our yard,

he piled dirt along the back fence, exhausted  
and measured our plot beneath the hot sun,

wresting all that had lain undisturbed, patchy  
grass where oleander had stood, a place

to put the dog, a yard smaller than a postage  
stamp on a zoning map folded into a drawer.

Day or night, what I couldn't abide he dragged  
around for all to see until what began as

a depression one day had corners and walls  
of dirt after a crew of men shaped the pit

he'd dug. They secured steel rods into the earth,  
a concrete truck split our driveway in two.

The slurry would set in three days he said, & as it  
cures will emit a chemical heat. At night I'd step

outside to water it with the hose. Though it had no  
drain, nor lights, for years he'd fill & swim until

one evening I stripped and waded in. The air was  
warm, the house had sold, he lived in another

town; I took my turn swimming laps & floating  
on my back, in the center of what he'd exhumed.

## Disassembling the Navy Wife

After he was not there it seemed terrible  
to have ever loved him. It was June,

the dead pine needles still on the ground. Piece by piece  
I left myself. In this room my hair and my right

eye, in this a femur bone. In his old office  
I kept my father's hands. In the attic, the daughter

we'd never had. One day I forgot the difference  
between my memory and what was

missing. I started thinking about myself all the time,  
found a man who lived inside my skull,

found him and decided to bury him outside the empty  
house where the trees don't move. After twenty years

I cut the trees down and built a boat, slipped out  
beyond the oars to whisper to the water the story

where God has a son but no daughter. He cannot  
speak. Some men don't know they're unhappy.

I take a folding chair and sit outside, measure  
the length of the day against what I need—sky

like a blue shirt waving in the branches, cardinal

like a red scar veining through the leaves, my body  
which pulls the blade from everything.

## Peaches

The problem with words now is that they don't  
break open the way I broke open,

they can't hold or move or bend unless  
I am standing knee deep in the ocean and I am

almost never standing in the ocean,  
not that way, not anymore. I would buy

two Moscow mules and walk towards the waves,  
pour one into the blue mouth

that used to know me. I'd blink inside its eye  
and now, nothing knows me. No one

knows. Once, I was raped and that is what I thought  
life was, the exhaustion of giving yourself

to every mud-slicked face that can say your name.  
Everyone I meet says my name, so who

can I blame for the woman inside me  
who calls herself an animal, angel, or bruise

of yesterday? Look, life doesn't go away  
just because you feel you're less than an embryo.

I find peaches in my hands all the time  
so I eat them. Just like anyone else.

## Blue Eyed Crow

I pray that the crows will return to my yard

so I can watch them pluck off their plumes  
like soft black knives, alive the way words

are alive inside the earth of our bones. Did you know

that the tongue is never empty? That it has a memory  
all its own? If you were to flay mine you'd find

the letters of your name next to the ones

for God; they make an impression, a shadow that travels  
backwards inside my throat along that pink hollow as if

I am a cave of honey. Come, listen to me speak. Let my mouth

move against your emptiness until you utter back to me  
the sounds I most want to hear. Once spoken, a word

is fragile as music and holds no more. Today the crows

have changed my name so you'll no longer recognize me  
on your tongue. You who were barely inside

me, I'd take your right eye, blue, and place it

next to its mate, arrange them like pebbles  
in this dish on my desk. I know you think about

me. You've sent these crows to my yard to spy,

to arrow their wedged and dark heads down to the earth  
as if they are pointing to where I've been.