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### Three Poems by Sheila Black



### The Willow Blossoms from Its Secret

I am thinking about what girls like my girl  
learn in those years of awkward knees and everyone  
talking about B.O. like it's some kind of crime.  
And the thread of blood that must be hidden  
under thick swaddling of white, white gauze,  
and the cruelty in gyms of body hair and shaming  
the slow. And how she, limber-light, learned to walk  
as if there were lead in her bones, a lead you

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Published on Talking Writing (<https://talkingwriting.com>)

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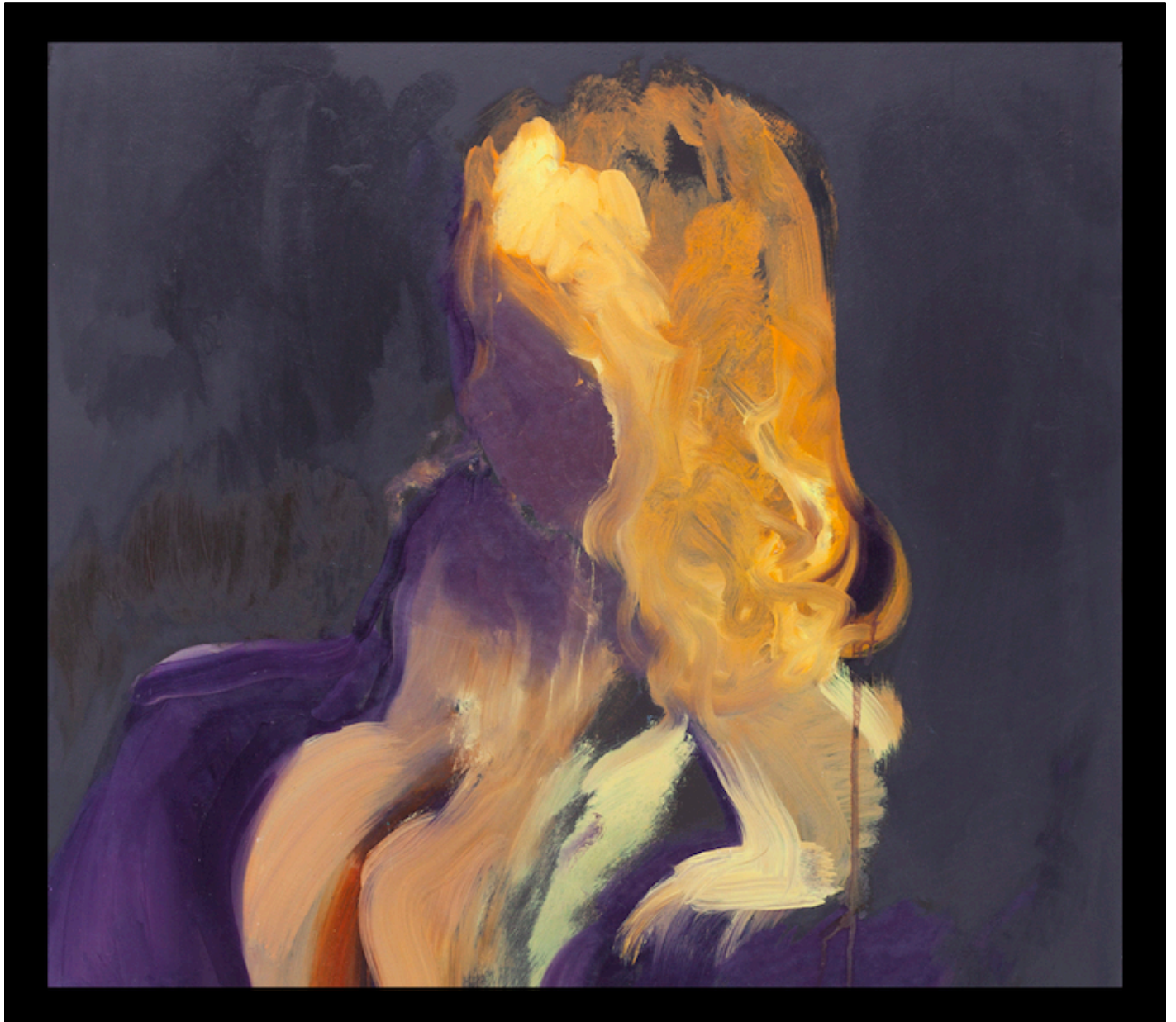
could almost see, irradiated a dangerous blue,  
as though in time it would make her disappear,  
her too-solid flesh (to her) resolve into green-leaf  
and dew. I know why a girl might wish to become  
a tree—to subject herself as if at random  
to any passing storm. You play the music as  
loudly as you can, you floor it, you careen, and what  
is more terrifying or beautiful or bone-alone  
than our desert at night with its lunar gas  
stations and creepy rest stops, and the hiss of  
“pretty” everywhere, and all of us around a seed:  
the willow blooming from its secret house even  
beside the river that rises but once a year. My  
daughter looks gobsmacked, my daughter looks  
struck lightning. All at once, she has made herself  
a god. She shows me the pictures to prove it. This  
is a heart. This is the liver. This is the face, the  
expression of a person who has never been.

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## For the Greenhouse Gases

Grape, madder rose, chrysanthemum, the pale jade bowl  
of tea in which we float the slightly unpleasant chamomile  
flower. Bitter pit, rind of cheese, bone that gleams  
against our teeth. Joy of blue-red rare steak, and french  
fries in hot duck grease. Thicket. Pool of shadow. Snowdrops  
under pines. The souging of sea or corn fields in tornado  
season. Drunken orchards, apples splitting under our  
Jackbooted feet. Burial grounds, unnamed. The sign for John  
Day against the cliff where fossils of bone-light mammals,  
some that could fit into your palm. They do not exist. Draw,  
canyon face, *arroyo*, mesa, *bosque*. Acequias, watercourses,  
almost invisible across a desert so hot the earth is cracking.  
The walled garden. The keyhole. The knowledge you can't  
change for anyone, not even yourself. Madder rose, stamen,  
pollen, termite, ant, maggot, roly-poly. Loam and the spines  
of leaves. A clear liquor distilled from raspberries.



**Rembrandt, 1639**

Tell them of the sheen  
of indigo,

how it spears at the edge of certain summer  
skies, at noon

when shadows disappear, the sky swallows  
its mouthful of black.

I see the irises on her table,  
the sharp lemon of their insides.

I can spare her nothing. They will all die

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before me. I don't know this yet.

Only the men coming to count the canvases,  
over which, greedy, I weep as if they were children,

though they are hardly alive.

What awaits me is the indigo of short nights  
on streets where the rain falls

in a steady stream. My wooden shoes will split.  
I used to think I might float

if I walked quickly enough. I have grown  
much too heavy, I think.

Here, a gesture I have always loved: wet  
two fingers and hold the candle shut.

Tell them of the sheen  
of indigo.

That truth is mute and terrible  
like God.

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### Art Information

- “Ma?a Hania (Little Hannah),” “Lining,” and untitled image © [Piotr Ma?czak](#) [4]; used by permission.



Sheila Black is the author of four poetry collections, most recently *Iron, Ardent* (Educe Press, 2017). She is a co-editor of *Beauty Is a Verb: The New Poetry of Disability* (Cinco Puntos Press, 2011).

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Her poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *The Spectacle*, *Third Point Press*, and the *New York Times*. She currently divides her time between Washington, D.C., and San Antonio, Texas.

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