

MORE PRAISE FOR
Bianca Stone

“Bianca Stone’s poems are powerful, moving, and original. . . . In her poems, we’re in the presence of a naked human voice, not concealing itself—or over-reaching to expose itself—which dives as deep as voices go.”

—**SHARON OLDS**

“Bianca Stone’s poetry has the glow of 21st-century enlightenment and lyric possession. Hilarious and powerful.”

—**MAJOR JACKSON**

“I read the work of our most brilliant young poets to be reminded that it is still possible, despite everything, for our abused and decimated language to ring out the difficult truths of full-on awareness. The best of them, like Bianca Stone, do not settle for mere cleverness. They know it is not enough to be brilliant, that it is essential in poetry not only to report the miseries and blessings, but to transform them. . . . [I] believe she is going to the difficult places and writing these poems in service not just to herself, but to us all, so that we can go to them and together find a little hope.”

—**MATTHEW ZAPRUDER**

“Stone’s poems astutely and honestly address the longing and cost of human connections.”

—**PUBLISHERS WEEKLY**

**THE MÖBIUS
STRIP CLUB
OF GRIEF**

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STRIP CLUB
OF GRIEF**

BIANCA STONE



TIN HOUSE BOOKS / Portland, Oregon & Brooklyn, New York

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Published by Tin House Books, Portland, Oregon, and Brooklyn, New York

Distributed by W. W. Norton & Company

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Stone, Bianca, author.

Title: The Möbius strip club of grief / by Bianca Stone.

Description: First U.S. edition. | Portland, OR : Tin House Books, 2018.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017034949 | ISBN 9781941040850 (pbk.)

Classification: LCC PS3619.T65643 A6 2018 | DDC 811/.6—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2017034949>

First U.S. Edition 2018

Printed in the USA

Interior design by Jakob Vala

www.tinhouse.com

for
Grandma

Contents

[Odin plucked out his eye in exchange for a drink] · 1

I

Introduction · 5

Medieval · 6

Last Words · 7

Lap Dance · 9

A Brief Topography of the MSCOG · 10

The Murder · 14

Client · 16

Mama-san · 17

Hunter · 18

All the Single Mothers · 20

Honeybee · 21

Emily Dickinson · 23

Math · 24

I Am Unfaithful to You with My Genius · 26

II

Making Applesauce with My Dead Grandmother · 35

How Not · 36

Interior Design · 37

Flight · 40

The Reading · 42

Self-Destruction Sequence · 43

Stenographer · 45

Elegy with a Swear Word · 46

Cliff Elegy · 47

The Fates · 48

Dear Sister · 50

The Gang Elegy · 53

Blue Jays · 54

Ones Who Got Away with It · 73

Letter to a Letter to the Editors · 75

The Green Word · 80

Migration · 83

Retreating Knights and Riderless Horses, *or*
Poem with Another Poem Halfway Through It · 85

The Fall · 87

The Woman Downstairs · 88

The Walking Dead · 89

The Lit Club Slaughter · 90

In the Champagne Room with Grandma · 92

Elegy with Clothes · 94

I'll Be Happy · 95

Historic Flaws · 96

The Dark Ages, Revisited · 97

Bibliography · 103

Odin plucked out his eye in exchange for a drink from Mimir's well of wisdom. He wanted to know everything there is to know of the past and future. And so it was. But the weight of wisdom made his face sour. Seeing everything blown to shit. The gods with it. After that, he never ate again and lived on a strict diet of alcoholic beverages at the Möbius Strip Club of Grief.

I

Introduction

At the Möbius Strip Club of Grief, come on in, the ladies are XXX! If you want the skinny ones we got skeletons cracking round those poles. And over at the bar—there's Grandma, with her breasts hanging at her stomach—gorgeous with a shook manhattan, and murderous with a maxi pad. At the Möbius Strip Club of Grief all the drinks are free. Grocery store rosé in gallon bottles on every table. And the dead don't want your tips. They just want you to listen to their poems. Don't do anything dangerous. And call every once in a while. In fact, they tip *you* at the MSCOG. With checks. With a sigh they'll throw one down at your feet—
We make it rain with checks.

Then the dead are sitting at the back of the club, dying further. Sniffing. Shuffling into the bathrooms, holding their skin in their hands, farting methane and sobbing across the stage with their last meal—it's the raciest show in town. And ladies, there's *men* too, hanging themselves on the bathroom doors and from the rafters, totally naked, with their cocks in their hands, tears coming down their faces. Ladies, you'll love how their feet smell. How their bones protrude. How they leave no note.

Medieval

At the funeral they carried boom boxes on their shoulders,
blaring Chopin, swaggering over the snow in sync,
in all black, the cloth of penitents and matriarchs.

A hole is free to dig,
if you know how to ask men with the right tools.
Funerals need not break the bank.

Through the yard
like a procession of Danes and Duchesses from *Hamlet*,
all hired mourners from birth,
punters of rough gods,
women of the salons—

our funerals are like poker games
in the back room
at the Möbius Strip Club of Grief.
The stakes are high.
You have to have pneumonia to get in.
You have to cough and gurgle.
You have to have a cat on your lap.
And refuse to eat.

Last Words

After the funeral was out
the hors d'oeuvres came out.
Olives, pâté, sardines with soft bones and violent,
flushed organs—too much wine, slouched on a flowery chair—
aperitifs on the porch with the early moon—

I looked at the sky overhead where it said
in the white jet-stream cursive:
dying is awful.

And I lit my head on fire.
Danced a dance for the gods.
Mom peeled out, off down the mountain
like Mad Max
to sit alone in her house,
to play solitaire in the dark
because they'd turned off the lights again;
the pipes were frozen, the wood almost gone—
so solitaire on the floor beside the woodstove,

thinking
about abandonment
about love
about luck
about money—

like a winter songbird
it sang in her head all day:

Who will pay?

Who will pay?

Who will pay?

Lap Dance

I think everyone's glad I'm dead, said the stripper with the caved-in face. Her fingers were bone and no sinew. She flapped her arms at the two wrens caught up in the rafters, staring down on the empty dance hall. Chirps rained like sparks from the electric saws in their hearts. No one here is glad anyone is dead. But there is a certain comfort in knowing the dead can entertain us, if we wish. We line up outside looking drowned, telling whoever comes our way that we are falling very fast. And that we are fine. The dead as wrinkled as jet streams cutting across the room with glasses lost on their heads, vitamins dissolving like milk under tongues, hair still growing, crackling out of their skulls in time-lapse loops—and we file in, in ones and twos, clinging to our tragedies, finding our favorite face, and it looks back at us with indifference, contempt, chill disappointment. *You never came much when I was alive*, says one with red hair, lying on her side, a Botticelli on the stage; *and now you want a piece? \$20 for five minutes; I'll hold your hand in my own. I'll tell you you were good to me.*

A Brief Topography of the MSCOG

I

Over the door there's the iconic ice-pick in a human heart. You have to show a scar to the bouncer to get in: the old suture holes, a common kneecap, the shy smile of a cesarean, spattering of long-gone acne—any scar will do. And you have to tell a story about your mother. Something she suffered through. But once you're in, you're in forever.

Then there's only the horizon, lush carpeting through cigarillo smoke, coats on hooks, worried aunts, croquet—grand as a yard sale, a ghost, her eyes like thumbs pointed down, her laugh like an almost perfect test score—

leave your inhibitions at the door. There is no room for modesty. Your magnum opus will start

in the dim alcoves of grief.

II

Main dance room: frivolity, managed by a House Mom, who sits in a high swiveling chair, making sure no one breaks the rules of solitaire.

*Lay me out on the floor and win me. I have nothing to give but
my songs no one knows, on my album no one bought.*

The DJ is the world, spinning and spinning.
On the loudspeakers it's Rubinstein at the piano, remixed
with sick beats.

—and there's Grandma, half-blind, naked but for an open
XL flannel and Birkenstocks. She peers out from behind
the bar, squinting into the faces, trying to figure out who
is ordering and what, her hand up behind her ear like a
sail. *Don't let the cats out!* she screams, whenever someone
comes in.

III

You want privacy with your dead?
Follow the nameless great-great-grandmothers through the
screen doors.
Cross your hands over your chest like a coat of arms.
I will ravish you with songbirds.
You'll see angels bathing in dust.
Let there be something for you in one room or another.

And there are so many glow-in-the-dark galaxies to look upon.
Like you're all alone in your childhood bedroom,
but totally restored
in the adult entertainment industry's moral center.

IV

For the masochist, nothing quite hurts like the truth.

Farther in the cavernous club
where the bend in the strip fakes an edge,
I engrave my lunatic memorial:

I WAS HERE!

The dungeons of the mind, the most defeated cells,
wherein cruelty cums.

V

Let go and there is nothing
tethering you to the stake
that is always driven
into the soft center
of your vampiric world.

VI

The great cosmic cow gyrates her stomachs on stage. The tall grasses sway at her knees. The people moan. The sun sinks. The band wraps up with “Gloomy Sunday”—

Oh, Billie. Billie, do not leave us again—it never ends, it just lies down and weeps, because it can’t get ahold of anyone. *HELLO?? Is anyone there?! Why aren’t you answering your phone??*— lost in a magazine from 1998 about the sky & telescopes. Let the moths land where they will. Feel their powdery legs against your own. *Gloomy Sunday. Gloo-my Sun-day.* Would the angels be mad if I thought of joining you? Bright midnight moon, gloomy Sunday through the glass ceiling—better yet, Mars: that raving nipple, that red goddess who demands from the eaves to be worshipped.