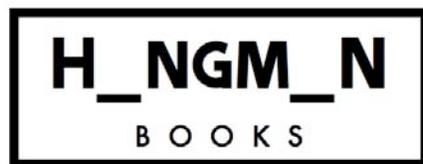


NO GOOD

alexis pope

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A H_NGM_N portable document format chapbook
Cover / Justin Crutchley
Layout / NP

for bug

& frank o'hara

A No Good Seasonal Depression

Though the wind hits my face cold
& my jacket zipper is stuck, I am not
a sad little chipmunk. My fur is warmer
than you think. Heading toward winter
feelings. What I mean is food with more
fat & avoiding meat seems like hard
work. My skin cries for a past it never
knew. A way to kill things with
my hands not voice. The chess pieces
are black and the cream tastes
thick. Here in my room I am healthy
& covered in skin. I put this lid
on my head to feel like maybe
there is a god, someone to share things,
a way to feel less guilty. Heaven
is a made up thing I think. These beads
are Christmas colored. Red & green
I am inside with him. So when the record
scratches, I try harder to believe
in something. I try harder to be
less hateful. I try harder to eat
more vegetables, but the eggs
run and I lie down in the snow.
What is more romantic than
a down comforter? I put my hands
in the air, my shirt is off, I am
myself. I am a warm biscuit
in need of topping. Lift
this shovel & the sky
answers the question you
did not ask. Everywhere
I turn there are more swords
than I remember. Remember
the sky bled down & we
were running, smiling wide
with our arms raised. Not afraid
of anything ever. The way
days pass & we end up
under covers, socks pulled
to our knees. The way I bruise
without touching anything. The way
you forgot my birthday & brought
flowers for no reason. Everything
is so convenient. We grow
teeth without trying.

A No Good Morning

When we shift toward the center
pine of new day. Full-

ness of morning belly. January
spinning air. Feeling clover

hungry & snowed in
with the surgeon. Pleased

in our success. I wake each hour &
fondle the button of your

jaw. A minute passes & splintered
song yawning from your cavernous

tongue. A bed sheet on the secret
floor of our naked possibility. Yesterday

we walked with a different moon. Tomorrow
the day will not come. I know

these things like a cherry
with no pit. It is winter

so nothing is red. The cranberries
disagree in my gloved

palms. A sock in boot
feeling. Holes

on the toes, missiles
of starlight. My throat

only filled with you. I left
my belly outside

with the rats. Tonight we dive
backwards, chase the owls

to their braches. A forest
is not a forest unless we name it so.

The Eve of A No Good Something

I say feather some of your sweetness
to my lap. A hard day in which two
feet work like eight. Hear the things
I say better, like firefly. Gelatin.
Yuletide. December picnic without
the snow. Weather rains down
my headache. A gingham cloth
& silver light on my sleeve. Figure
the sun for a man. Which leaves me
with the moon. Something my body
has always known. A jumping jack
is a snow angel standing. It only takes
lying down to make us holy. Branches
against the sky. Little cold lake. Swim
in my body for some time. And after
the celebration we will be the same
again. Leaving the park like a party
no one wanted to attend. Glitter
the brick of the road with laughter.
It's too early in the season. You
are too late to make a difference.
Nutmeg & cinnamon. Chamomile
& parking lot. A place to rest
our seeping thoughts. Answer
to my morning. Thoughts
don't solve anything. I am still.
You question my symmetry. Tell
me another story.

The No Good Eight Hundred Nights

How like molasses. How felt up
my organs. Strength not from bones.

There inside the cold hut. We walk
together in the morning, with the French

press, with the small dog. Small light
through the cloud. Baby, this day

is not close to over. We watched eight
hundred sunsets, drank eight hundred

shots of tequila. It was a rough morning.
Mugs thick filled with the steam we crave.

My mouth to your claw. My face to your
humble heart. Eight hundred words to file

tomorrow. A milk shaded bath to clean
my guilty thoughts. How you & I light

the page on fire, we hide between walls
& carry our mouths behind us. Muscle

spasm & I'm blown back. I'm attacked
heart, my chest burns. We smoke

dreams out our chimney face. When you
ask me what I can give you, I am without

answer. I hold a grapefruit out to feed you.
The flavor is too bitter & we rupture.

A No Good Life Jacket

I think I eat bananas wrong. I think my shirt
is meant to be tucked in. Front or back,
I'm not sure of anything anymore.
Your waist pretends to be a beach
& my fist gets lost inside. A sailboat
with antlers mounted to the front.
Say something like July, or the August
of your backside. Failure to confront
the heat of it all. Helpful you are
in the way my ass is bruised. A shape
of crystal water somewhere like
my eyes. Feathers, feathers, feathers,
feathers. I have gone away. Right
back to the boat. I dive through
months to end up on the beach
again. Sand acts like something
else. Pretending to be desirable. I try
so many poses. Hide my midsection.
Fall into the black water, the puddle
of rhythm, cry of a seahorse. Red
shell near your foot. Feathers, feathers,
feathers, feathers. I look up
and find the sky has left me here as well.

Blessed Are The Weak (For They Are No Good)

This apple I hold with both hands
& step toward the sun
rising my temper out
of the earth. I hope to go
back inside for a few hours, light
my way into your center
parts. Each time I reach for
the apple, my fingers crush
& bend into each other like
a centipede trying to make
my dreams feel moist. The way
you answer every phone call with
another word for hello. What
are we doing here? This empty
mattress turned inside out & my
coils are exposed as well. For each
day I am naked & putting this
mirror to the window for you
to see exactly what I mean
when I say these
are not days exactly. Not minutes
but instead a pruning of less
than fruit. Which is what we are
to each other, I mean. I cut
myself open. I have not
one seed. You have exactly
three. My jealousy erupts
into something green & peeling
from my lap like the anchor
I never dropped into you, but
you see me there. Don't you?
Under this desk I have hidden
for two months. I have tried
at shadowy. Have failed
at being wonderful. My hair
gets darker each morning
I look outside & see him. The field
goes on for what seems forever
but it's not forever enough. Enough
I've had of rainstorms & no flowers
on the desk I am under. Under
you I died five times
last night. Don't wake up
without me. Dream these
days up a little for me. I have
no window to find you.

A No Good Red Sky

After the fire,
the trees fixed in their final positions, facing

to dirt mixed with ash. The front yard is always
a good place to start. A red tricycle with patriotic

streamers, sooty handles and lonely seat. Boy,
you are running in the wrong direction. Orange

lighted windows backlit with smoky darkness. Boy,
it's only a little longer. A few more steps and maybe

this hollowed ground can be a muddy pillow. Black
sky and blanket of ashen grass. Walk slowly,

midnight doesn't know the time. A mother
in her nightgown carefully lies down. Dear

lungs, you are steady companions. Dear legs,
the staircase is steeper than yesterday. Holy

household where a father waits up in the living
room. The walls breathe heavy black. A floorboard

where aching energy gasps, a faltered foot and steam
slick tile. Earthquaking back door opened

to red. Red walls to the kitchen and feel it all decay.
Dancing balloon tied to the mailbox, please wait your turn.

A No Good Thunderstorm

Dear Hurricane, my name is gentle
release. My name is no, I will not drive
across the country to escape you.
I've named you after my mother-in-law
is how I feel this morning. Tea, because
the coffee tastes like salt. I won't find
you tomorrow under the bed, or out
my window on this cold April where you
hail onto my hair. I'm worried about the wind
blown, how to survive you. I wear this
hopeful, light jacket. Dear hurricane,
I'm afraid to leave you. Brush off my lap
with your heavy fingers. Offer myself
to the fish. Where I find you is out back
on a depressed swing set. We lie
to ourselves about summer. A barefoot
expectation while we wait it out. I ordered
this pizza for you, crafted this birthday
hat, bought the streamers & this banner
& expected something like death
in return. At least something that means
you care enough to hurt me. Float
through me like you mean it, that's what
this is about. Eat this cake like you're
starving, that's what I want. Wash over me
like a hurricane. I need something
more than clean.

A No Good Decanter

We had our mouths open
for the grapes we found on the side
of the road. A penny you tossed
in each puddle I left behind. The mattress
was hard, but we had no trouble
sleeping. Feeling like I do not have to go
to sleep, but I must. The seatbelt
is stuck. I trust you. You heated
alphabet soup and wrote my name
in the sky with your finger. A month
that couldn't end with anything
but a storm. The cloud is shaped
like November. What does it mean
when you part your lips? A terrible
example of living. The sins we write
after the bar closes and we're emptied
onto the sidewalk. Closing our arms
around each other. Buying a rose
from the woman with frizzy hair.
It was only a dollar, but you didn't
have that much. When you say
my name I can't hear your voice
or see the velvet of your tongue.
We never drove to Massachusetts.
We never stood outside in the rain.
I don't like to wear a man's coat
around my shoulders. I am
not so easy to love.

A No Good Red of The Barn Last Wednesday

We are not new to these tasks, we are not insufficient. Somewhere the sun is rising, but right now the only sparrow is dead & outside my window. It doesn't belong here anyway. Like when I was sixteen & bleeding on his couch. The world is all clouds. The whistle in the midnight breath plays hangman with my throat. A bellow reaching silo high & ringing lungs knock indoors. This place where valleys never flood. This night that never turns to dark. I find him there, hiding behind the corn and breathing some soft garlic. Refreshing how the morning falls to rust my belly up toward that mouth of his. There is no pill or glass of water to steady my shaking. Turning back the clock eight hours just to fall back down. And when these dreams stay their cycle, I am just a little boy. The mouth of that solemn river where I drowned four times to hear his voice search that last note. One more sinking shoe to the bottom to be fished another Wednesday. When we are not in the backseat of his car. Searching for a way to be less Midwestern.

A No Good Way To Wake Up

The light of the floor lamp, the sun breaking
my vision. I try to be more understanding

but the clouds. Jesus was a little boy. I was
three years old. There was a day

I could not ask you to bring me
a glass of water. I am thirsty. I am always

thirsty. It doesn't mean anything. I have heard
if you drink too much water you need

more. Like sleep, everything we need & are told
we get too much of. How can this be? Your face

in the crack of my door. It's midnight. I was
sleeping. The vitamins next to the bed, so I can

remember. I forget: Darkness so late
in the morning. The grapes in the freezer. Bathing

in the moon. My bathroom overheats & steam falls
like tomorrow when I will get out of bed. Again

& again we drive the street. I eat a pear. I smell
my shirt to make sure it is clean & wear it

anyway. These dreams in which your name is a bakery
with no exit. No bread & no employees.

A No Good Something About This Deer Beside Me

Fawn speaks to me from her corner
of the mattress. I push back under the quilt.
Removing nail polish & body odor
leaking from off the bed. My fur needs
licked. Fawn eats popcorn with too much
butter & salt. Bedroom haze of mid-dawn,
translucent thong ripped down
the center & half eaten
apple on the floor. The carpet
is ruined. Finally I can sleep.
Fawn muddies the pillowcase.
Nuzzles crazy into my hip.
I push her away. I cry small
freckles into her coat. We spoon eight
days without any water. The sunlight
slinks through the blinds. We binge
on some new atmosphere. Without fur
we could do it better. Maybe more
alone or something. Failure fists
without relenting. I sob on Fawn's
restless shoulder. She kicks me
in the mouth. Three days later
we are puddles of our legged bodies,
reaching into the other to make
one. From now on we promise
to deserve less. Eat out once
a month. Make it to work
on time. Shower
every other day. Fawn tongues
my forehead, smiles her furry chin.
I kiss her belly & tell her one day
our fur will be clean. She dampens
my tawny ass. For us love is something
we have to eat.
I try to make myself a sunset,
but she demands that I reach deeper.
There is nowhere else to go.

A No Good Statement of Something Tender

How your silence spreads
over my thighs in that warm way.

The very least a blanket can do, but you
are no blanket. I have these lungs and no one
to breath for. I have these mittens and only an ounce
of sugar. The recipe calls for more, much more.

I bake with whatever you put in the pantry. Gift
baskets filled with cheese and a puff shaped

pastry with only a little blackberry jam. A heart
is not the shape I would like it to be. Generic

in the way we say I love, but wait no, not at all
actually. No movie ever showed this part. The living

is so raw. The space behind the fridge. The fracture
in the new coat of paint. I am this small girl.

I promise. I promise. I ask only for more sugar.
I ask only for more rooftop, more quiet. I know

that you can give me this silence. This space
without thought. I need these things the most.

An apple and no conversation. The feeling
of our warmed arms. No blanket

like this one on the floor in front of me.
No elbow quite the same.

A No Good Sunset Cruise

You say I am not very soft
but I am the softest. The most
cotton, the most like my baby
skin morning. You help me
onto the boat, but all I wanted
was a sail of my own. Something
bites my ankle & I sink
it deeper. Let it hum on the life
vibration I am not sure exists.
Our babies & more babies, they
all wanted the same thing. Pine
nuts & bloat dogs. Healthy knee
joints that don't snap with each
kneel. I want you to trap my
want, to melt my brain into a nice
puddle that desires not much.
Hold my hand in your small paw,
your crust mouth filled with words
I cannot hear. Take this cup
of laughter & throw my thoughts
away with the rinds. Compost
afternoon in my sawdust esophagus.
You say my throat cannot hold
all this feeling. You have never
really seen me float. I guess
a boat doesn't mean more than
the water underneath. It's like
my name, or how you say it
when you hand me your glasses
and fall back to sleep.

A No Good Excuse For A Couch

In the dark we could be lovers,
but that's another word
for nothing. For eight weeks
I wrapped my legs around
your boney hips & thought I knew
what it meant to die. I know
what you mean when you turn off
the lights. For thirteen days,
I've been pacing the hall. Reinventing
ways to say these words. To you
I am spilled wine & ample supply.
Try a piece of this
cake. The apartment smells
so good, but I'm the only one
home. I'm not lonely. That's
not true. You fill this space
real nice is what I'm trying
to say. I broke all the glasses
when I knew you weren't
coming back. The moon
casts this wicked smile
through the window. A sheet
of glass will keep me warm.
When the door creaks, it's not you
but there's wine & gouda. A thick
skin of what is left. Wednesday
our hips were close, almost touching.
This is not a love seat.

A No Good Organ

Tell the children to stop laughing.
The sound of everything happy
is always the sound of a playground
ripe with rose tinted cheeks & the muddy
paws of boys. This pillow feels cheap
but it does what it does for me. Which is
not much, but it's doing fine & cotton
things to my face. I can hear them still
outside & young. Even my bed
is ancient & passed down or it was mine
when I was younger & when did I
start paying for things like
shampoo & dish soap? The smell
of peanut butter through the cracked
window. I am an artifact of garbaged
want. The breakfast table is shiny
& raw. My hands are cracked & unable
to build a cabin. This is not a cabin
I built or a bed made by hands
with which I am familiar.

I want to roll over & ask you
what have you built for me or how
do we make things with our mouths?
It seems we're only good at very
little. Feeding ourselves. No, not
true. Like a toddler I am falling over
bumps in the rug, building a small disaster
without knowing, sticking my delicate
thumbs in the outlets. Fruit cannot
be built. My parents didn't think
of my body before it arrived.

Now the laughter is killing me while
I try to sleep one more hour. One more
time I will try to forgive you, but I'm sure
the coffee is cold & bitter. Still
there is the soft beat & full
pout of morning rising inside.
I will try to make love
with more of you. I can
only promise as much
as you can give.

A No Good Evergreen

I took a ferry
to the statue. I took a ferry
to the island. It wasn't
tropical. I had a bikini on
under my sweater. I had
a lollypop in my mouth. I had
a reason to be excited,
I forgot. Your mouth
in December. The icy step
to your apartment. Brick
& Cement feeling. The Christmas
carol of my growling belly.
I feel less hungry today.

(What I mean is it started
snowing this morning.)

(What I mean is you look
really good in yellow.)

I never meant
to be this green
or heavy. Boots
up to my thigh &
singing to your front
porch. The neighbors
all wondering what
it means to be
not a homeowner.
A cemetery of holiday
wreaths & optimistic
lighting. My glasses
fog & I look
to the windows. All
the children & noses
pressed to glass.
I wave but they
are scared.
They are so scared.
They have never
known less.

A No Good Orchard Feeling

Juicing cycles were delayed
at the mill. The forest whispers

my name. Paint peeling like rubbed
through a grater. My bones are not

fragile like hers. With a name
like red it has to be truth. You

said the apple had a decision
to make. Cider happened

from of my neck. A vine world
where all the insects search

my bare chest. I am always
exposed. Not amazing,

how the light hits heavy
at this hour. So when the party

starts around eleven, you know
to find me at the nearest

stack of hay. The pony
dancing toward the window

trying so hard to reach
my hand. I sugar

some place
near his mouth.

A No Good Holiday For Gift Giving

When we sit at breakfast
with an imaginary noose
around your neck, I am
this cup of coffee
ingested & muddy.

Imagine this house, a thick
gravy. How you can make
milk out of anything.
It's not amazing,

it's average.
It happens yearly and still
we wait for each season
to save us
from something but all
I'm waiting for

is the next cup of coffee
this waitress will bring me
& I will be kind because
there is no other way.

What is sadder than
a vased orchid? Maybe
a clock. A used mattress
against the dumpster.
Your lonely legs.

A No Good Love Song

In the bedroom: your pillow, a locket
& a picture of a grizzly bear. Once
there was a boy, but I forgot
his name. It's all so distant now
and then I dream of poppies.
Already sleeping in a different
bedroom. A different human
with the same face wakes me
in the morning. I am nothing
more than this cup of coffee,
the rice milk, and the subterranean
longing after which you slump
to sleep on my belly. I am a cave
with no bear to sleep inside.
I know there are different names
to call this room. There is always
a softer pillow. A better way to pronounce
hollow. If I could light this candle with
both matches. Magic of not knowing
if this is a dream or a real conversation
we've had before. You fall
a blanket over my lap. Surprising
how the sunset looks different
from this window. I place my
hand on your head and imagine
a better place to fall asleep.

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