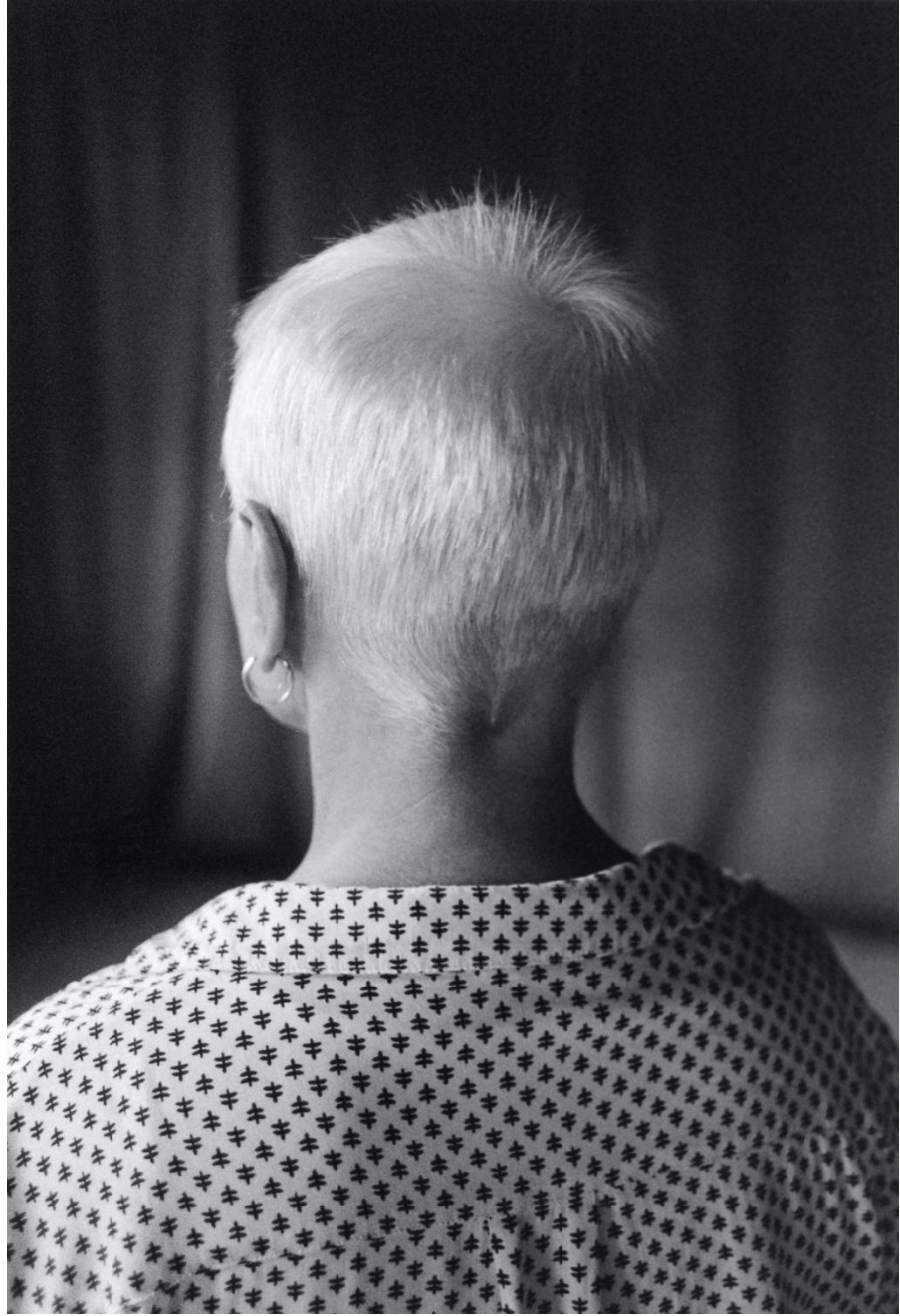


All the Women I Know

Text by Christine Hume

Photographs by Laura Larson



Shelly

No woman I know wants to help you today.

No woman I know wants to make eye contact and ask you questions.

No woman I know can unlisten to your troubles that are like no one else's.

No woman I know says she's sorry that happened to you.

No woman I know says "sorry" when you point out the stain on her shirt while dodging your hand trying to wipe it away.

No woman I know listens to your stories before anyone else arrives.

No woman I know says "sorry" when you ask to see her after work.

No woman I know learns a thousand ways of refusing without ever saying "no."

No woman I know teaches her daughter to say "no" and "yes" and "fuck you" and "I'm sorry."

No woman I know learned it from her mother, who said she was sorry more than she said any other thing, all day long.

No woman I know used to scream "stop apologizing" at her mother.

No woman I know with *sorrys* rising up and bursting inside of her.

No woman I know is sorry you don't recognize her outside of the office.

No woman I know said "sorry" when confronted with the bad checks she had written.

No woman I know is sorry you are groping her under the table while speaking to someone else.

No woman I know is sorry, but you can't cat call your grandchild when she walks into the room.

No woman I know is sorry you are yelling at her and beating the steering wheel with your fists then punching the rearview mirror.

No woman I know wants to be the kind of woman who says "sorry," or the kind of woman who accommodates and complains about it later to her friends.

No woman I know deletes the first sentence of her email that begins "I'm sorry," but the ghost of it remains, a shadow word haunting all the other words.

No woman I know believes in ghosts or angels unless they are all named “sorry.”

No woman I know says “sorry” to her daughter after snapping at her.

No woman I know understands “sorry” as soft currency, a way to keep holding what’s not there until it is there.

No woman I know thinks it is the nuanced social language of women.

No woman I know means what you think she means when she says she’s sorry.

No woman I know means to plant the word inside you where it might ignite a feeling.

No woman I know feels the smoldering of all her *sorrys*.

No woman I know slows the “s,” where all the empathy accumulates.

No woman I know sounds like a fire when she says it.

No woman I know doesn’t fantasize about arson.

No woman I know turned and ran from a burning living landscape.

No woman I know thinks burning is a way of saying sorry.



Lucille

No woman I know with all her doors and windows open and her back to the world.

No woman I know trying to live as if it were morning.

No woman I know skywalks into the picture and paints herself out of it.

No woman I know on acrylics and MasterCard fraud.

No woman I know on hash and alone her dreams.

No woman I know on Paxil and Polyxo, a Naiad of the Nile, a daughter of the river-god, and the mother of twelve daughters, all of whom murdered their husbands on their wedding night.

No woman I know to feel herself floating.

No woman I know to feel herself dripping like a popsicle down her own hand.

No woman I know takes a heavy dose of yoga and gouache.

No woman I know on pandemic-time and premature death.

No woman I know even if in time-lines.

No woman I know even if in epigenetic memory.

No woman I know even if in encaustics and involuntary memory.

No woman I know in the reddit thread turns on us perversely or vanishes when we look away.

No woman I know quits mail and deletes Twitter.

No woman I know swallows Tylenol and Alcyone, a star in Taurus.

No woman I know on donkey dust feels she is made of stardust.

No woman I know sees the starlight that has eaten her.

No woman I know falls asleep as soon as her head hits the pillow.

No woman I know goes viral as she sleeps.

No woman I know rates her sleep on the five-star rating system.

No woman I know titles her days or calls them “untitled.”

No woman I know with zygote and eyes like dying embers.

No woman I know prescribes herself to try harder.

No woman I know pulls a reason from her head and leaves a note in large printed letters on her pillow.

No woman I know on radio dramas and Adderall.

No woman I know on tungsten and Robetusin.

No woman I know, her two stories overlapping, lapping at each other like waves: the morning the mourning; the pain the painting.

No woman I know gulps Ayahuasca and Calypso, which means “she that conceals”

No woman I know washes it down in the shower.

No woman I know emptying her feed.

No woman I know like that scene in movies when she opens the fridge to find only a few cans of Bud Light.

No woman I know on Sexton and Plath, drawing herself back to life.

No woman I know on strychnine and cartoon heroines.

No woman I know on hormone replacement and burner accounts can ever get what she wants and what she has and what she wants.

No woman I know on peyote and paranoia.

No woman I know though we like to think of her swimming in the wind, dancing in the room, flowering out in the morning.

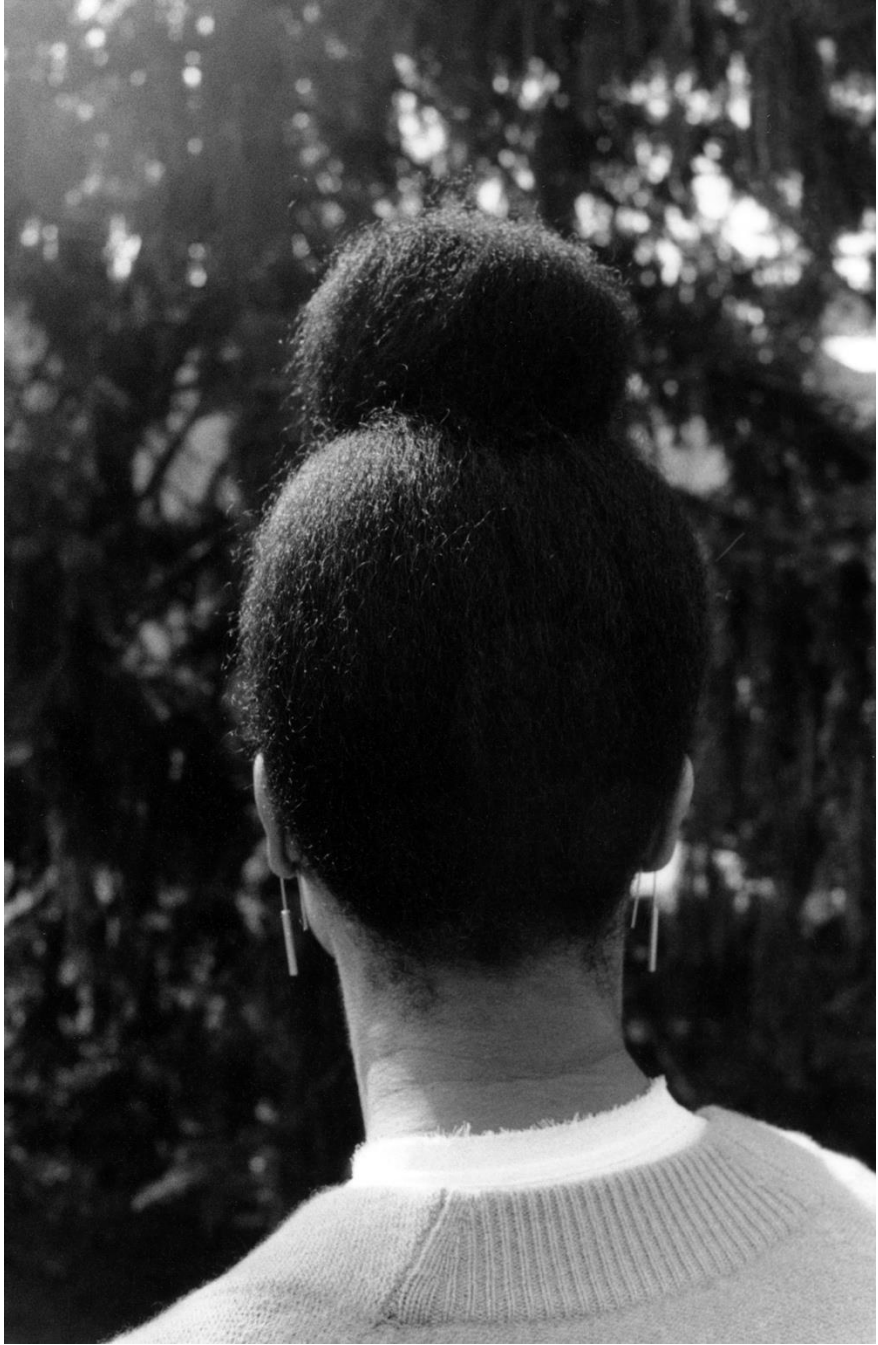
No woman I know shimmering like a photograph in its bath.

No woman I know on Nyquil and Ryū, a dragon that eats dreams underwater in a red coral palace.

No woman I know on the other side of the ocean, waving.

No woman I know reversed inside our unmeasured eye.

No woman I know all the way in the other hemisphere, standing upside-down in a human shape.



Dionne

No woman I know grew up in a folktale in Florida.

No woman I know worked as a maid, waitress, manicurist, secretary, and nanny.

No woman I know lied about her age in order to enter high school at 26.

No woman I know wrote her own story through that of another woman.

No woman I know entered the party flamboyantly sailing a scarf over her shoulder and crying out the title of her play.

No woman I know, when it turned out she couldn't type, passed herself off as a princess from a tiny country on the other side of the ocean.

No woman I know studied her way into confidence.

No woman I know went back to talk to the people of her hometown though by then she had forgotten the language.

No woman I know gathered their stories to prove she had not forgotten.

No woman I know listened to her family pass salt-and-pepper worlds through their mouths.

No woman I know with sentences swaying like generations of women sobbing and laughing, hell-bent on houseboats.

No woman I know with sentences staring loud through the band's tangled music.

No woman I know with sentences for manifesting herself out of the haint-blue skies and porch ceilings painted that way where the weather was always under discussion.

No woman I know shaped shards of talk and memory into stories that left out the sour smell of terror.

No woman I know refused to write about accusations, exploitations, or condescension; she conjured the future she wanted.

No woman I know after being arrested, contemplated suicide, but slowly came back to herself on a long sailing trip.

No woman I know made a point of not needing what she could not have.

No woman I know tended to marry or not marry men, enjoying them while never relying on them or missing a beat in her work.

No woman I know finds herself in characters who keep finding their way on the muck.

No woman I know pieced together something that may once have existed.

No woman I know with all her sentences burning like black candles in glass jars.

No woman I know wrote about the longleaf woods so that nothing would not root her in one place. She wrote about a fox there so that it would not eat its way out of her.

No woman I know wrote about the horizon so that she could pinch off the biggest thing ever made and wrap it around her neck like a sapphire necklace, like saffron scarf, not like a noose.

No woman I know, no matter how far her sentences go, with the horizon always ahead of her.



Nancy

No woman I know in a cage of labile geometries.

No woman I know believes in patterns like constellations, the Fibonacci sequence, and a proof she made as a girl showing the inverse relation between being told you can be anything, do anything, and the likelihood that you cannot.

No woman I know needs to be told to let her zodiacal light shine.

No woman I know feels like she is blazing brightly or even flickering.

No woman I know arranges her ideas carefully into a theory about relative gravity.

No woman I know feels comfort in imagining her own endless mental sky.

No woman I know maps data points on the gradient until her vision blurs and opens.

No woman I know savors herself as myriad, as galaxy, as an infinity of asterisms busy with creatures and churning seas where tiny bubbles flash up on the surface like blue fires.

No woman I know in a cage of all the things she may never be ready to say.

No woman I know in a cage of remembering.

No woman I know contains the girl she was like a ghosted mark on a coordinate plane.

No woman I know maps the distances between.

No woman I know was a girl squinting to transform the can-lights in her ceiling into cartoon stars circling her head like a wobbly halo.

No woman I know collected moons like pets and arranged them around her.

No woman I know prayed that aliens would abduct her.

No woman I know as if she could both be captured and disappear.

No woman I know pretended god was watching over her.

No woman I know with a hundred Andromeda nebulas stuck in her head.

No woman I know closed her eyes in a cage made mostly of air.

No woman I know mentally rotated her view so that she was under the bed looking up at the box springs.

No woman I know says her mother was not surprised.

No woman I know says her mother could cage a secret like an unremembered dream.

No woman I know already just a little *spacey* sometimes.

No woman I know remembers the first time it happened and kept happening and has always happened.

No woman I know buries black holes in her body like secret organs.

No woman I know sheds darkness in broad daylight.

No woman I know leaking and hissing and radiating light years ahead.

No woman I know looks into the picture's future and re-plots the data.

No woman I know in a cage of reversals so that nothing will be answered.

No woman I know in a cage of beginnings where everything is cornered.

