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Alive and Possibly Dangerous

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

ALIVE AND POSSIBLY DANGEROUS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in

CREATIVE WRITING

by

Lillian Catherine Starr

To: Dean Michael R. Heithaus
College of Arts, Sciences and Education

This thesis, written by Lillian Catherine Starr, and entitled *Alive and Possibly Dangerous*, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

Denise Duhamel

Donna Aza Weir-Soley

Julie Wade, Major Professor

Date of Defense: March 10, 2020

The thesis of Lillian Catherine Starr is approved.

Dean Michael R. Heithaus
College of Arts, Sciences, & Education

Andrès G. Gil
Vice President for Research and Economic Development
And Dean of the University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2020

DEDICATION

For Harriet

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the journals in which some of these poems first appeared.

Thank you to my teachers and mentors Jehanne Dubrow, Leslie Harrison, Julie Wade, Denise Duhamel, Campbell McGrath, and special thanks to James Allen Hall for his patience with and faith in me.

Thank you to my mother and father for their unending support.

And the biggest thank you of all to my sister, Harriet, of whom I am infinitely proud.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

ALIVE AND POSSIBLY DANGEROUS

by

Lillian Catherine Starr

Florida International University, 2020

Miami, Florida

Professor Julie Wade, Major Professor

ALIVE AND POSSIBLY DANGEROUS is a collection of poems interrogating family, sex, and the ever-changing modes of internal living. How do the things we hear when we are young age within us? How do we cope with our biggest fears coming to life? ALIVE AND POSSIBLY DANGEROUS explores, perhaps most importantly, how we come to be the strongest versions of ourselves. Clustered around a sprawling, four-page poem propelled by the phrasing of an internet meme, the poems in this book cover topics from astrology to country line dancing with the same fervent breath.

ALIVE AND POSSIBLY DANGEROUS is interested in syntactical leaps, rich, romantic, ridiculous imagination, and unsteady urgency. The narrative voice of ALIVE AND POSSIBLY DANGEROUS is largely inspired by Richard Siken, Kaveh Akbar, Melissa Broder, Louise Glück, and Ada Limon. The speaker desires love for themselves and with others, toggling between reality and fantasy as though they were two sides of the same TV screen. And they are.

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WHAT MADE US

Everything we could paint brown
with all the dirt in my hometown

boots even when it's hot

black tshirt fatass

nobody where I'm from minds

a slick back puddleshoe angelface

my uncle who pushed his girlfriend
down the stairs on our family vacation

hole in the big toe of your ten pack sock

big enough for a prayer stone to fall out rolled-up towel pillow

dirty tank top under your work shirt

lighter on the stove cold sore

four rings missing from the shower curtain

table with the block of wood under its wobbly leg

spaghetti three meals a day silver minivan like a minnow

ranch dressing stained ceilings

stolen office muffins in a white bag

my mother's simple hands

the groundhog my dog killed

it wanted to live more than I did

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

After Jennifer Bartlett

I love the past for all the typical reasons. I grew up where I couldn't walk anywhere in particular, only *away*. Cornfields, cows, piles of burning leaves and fences over six feet. My parents dancing in the smell of frying onions. My grandmother cheated on her husband; my mother cheated on her husband. After the phone call where she revealed what was then a secret I did nothing all afternoon. My father wrote an email—*you two are the jewels of my life. I didn't want it to turn out this way*. My mother took me for Chinese food and asked what zodiac sign I think she should date next. I had to leave them; I changed my hair, fell in with melancholy. Rage died. I made myself a new body. Vacancies one after another. An evening in Philadelphia. A move closer to the sun. More of the same, giving the bare minimum. A daughter becoming more like her mother. Shame died. Embarrassment died. Then some gratitude. I met you in the center of all I used to know. I did not want to change but was made to.

PORTRAIT OF MY MOTHER AS THE BOOT SCOOTIN' BOOGIE

1-4 Step right to side, cross left behind right, step right to side, touch left heel diagonally forward (clap)

My mother crosses through the pasture every morning at 6a.m. to feed her four horses and to shovel shit into a yellow wheelbarrow. One scoop of flaxseed, one scoop of salt, another of rare earth. Dehydrated grass soaked in water for fifteen minutes. Johnny Cash hits the rafters, *the beer I had for breakfast wasn't bad so I had one more for dessert*, he sings. Indestructible speaker. Her rubber boots kicking up dust as she moves.

9-10 Step right together, touch left heel diagonally forward (clap)

Geminis don't take naturally to rest. Yard work. Trim the roses. Take