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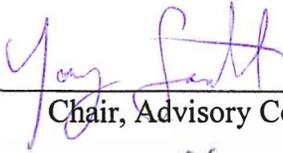
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KITTY HAWK WAY

BY

MARY ELIZABETH C. POPE

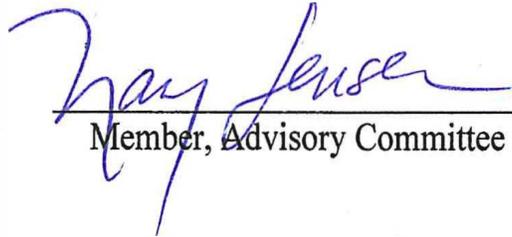
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Date: 7/2/2020

KITTY HAWK WAY

BY

MARY ELIZABETH C. POPE

Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

Eastern Kentucky University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

2020

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Poems from this manuscript first appeared, sometimes in different forms, in the following journals.

“Engines.” *So to Speak: a feminist journal of literature and the arts* (2015) Print.

“The Accident.” *Still: The Journal* (2015) Online.

“Root and Spindle” and “Wake House.” *The Fourth River* (2015) Print.

“Sleeping Arrangements” and “Thank You Note to the Free Public Library.” *One Trick Pony Review* (2014) Online.

“Hard, Awry, and Roving like Wood.” *New Madrid* (2014) Print

ABSTRACT

Kitty Hawk Way is a collection of image driven poems that arrive at form. The poems explore relationships of Art and poetry through space, line, place, time, color, and language as a form of invention that breaks meaning. Solitude breeds within this work, as well as melancholy and ache juxtaposed with slight mute humor. Concepts of Abstract Expressionism, Surrealism, and Impressionism are explored. Gender roles, trauma, despair, the absence and renewal of faith, surrender, resign, denial, and death are immediate themes thread through each room. Walls, doors, ceilings, windows, hallways, staircases, thresholds of entrance, and rooms are enclosures of the conscious and the subconscious. The speaker lives within one house that explores many dimensions of time and space, her past and the now.

In many ways these poems are a conversion of Hagar, a modern testament—not limited to one biblical or religious lens—lent toward the justice of restoration and removal. In other ways these poems are a reincarnation of many biblical women, spiritually removed beliefs, and un-documented daughters. There is not one linear limit to interpretations.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A-C: Notes I-III

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Appendix A: Notes I

“I’m ‘Wife’—I’ve Finished That—” is a title inspired by Emily Dickenson’s *Final Harvest* (Little, Brown and Company, 1961.) “Entering the Sanctuary of Bereavement” is a title inspired by a line from William Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying* (W. W. & Norton Co., 2010.) The epitaphs in this collection are from Jane Kenyon’s *Otherwise* (Graywolf Press, 1996) and *Collected Sonnets of Edna St. Vincent Millay* (Harper and Row, 1941.) The title “Rain Fell, Rivers Rose, Winds Blew and Pounded that House” is a title inspired by “Mathew 7: 27” in *The Bible* (Oxford UP, 2001.) “*The Colossus*” reference in “Rain Fell, Rivers Rose, Winds Blew and Pounded that House” is to Sylvia Plath’s first and only collection of poetry *The Colossus and Other Poems* (Random House, 1998) published before her death. Other references within this particular poem are in the line “*As I Lay Dying*” to reference Faulkner as a source of American Realism; and the line “*The Secret of the Old Clock*” is from Carolyn Keene’s *The Secret of the Old Clock* (Random House, 1987) as a nod to mystery. The title “How Can I Tell Her I Love Her...She Looks Straight Ahead” was borrowed from Vinicius de Moraes’s song “The Girl from Ipanema” (Creed Taylor, 1964.) The reference to “Oliver” in “Often to Ask If You’re in Precise Space” is a nod to Mary Oliver.

Appendix B: Notes II

“Head-back to the Grave of Orchard Hill” is an adaptation of “Genesis 3” from *The Bible* (Oxford UP, 2001) as is the title “Earth’s Without Form” an adaptation of “Genesis 1.” “*Fire in the Hole*” and “*Mayan Mocha*” are actual drinks from Lamp House Coffee, written of in “Light and Mineral.” The author’s great-grandfather, on her maternal side, was the engineer working with U.S. Steel to lay-out the designed for the coal-camp where the coffee house sits in Lynch, KY. The name “Jerusia” was pronounced Je-ru-sha. Jerusia, Solomon, and Moses were great-grandparents on the author’s paternal side and were not miners. The names were kept as a nod toward Old Testament. “*Fontana di Trevi*” is a fountain—visited by the author in 2001—originally designed by Nicola Salvi and Guiseppa Pannini; and made famous in Federico Fellini’s *La Dolce Vita*. The poem “There is a Wife Who Watches Tarkovsky’s: *The Mirror*, 1975” is commentary on consciousness within Andrei Tarkovsky’s film *The Mirror* (1975.) All reference within the poem are from the movie and woven into the poet-speaker’s narrative displacement. The title “Forgiveness Garden” is reflective of the Garden of Forgiveness in Beirut, where the author’s Aunt was from and where she met her husband before she died. The interpretations of the poem are not limited to relatives but derived from a place of inventive memory.

Appendix C: Notes III

The mention of Hagar in “Born to Bare It” is also from “Genesis” in *The Bible* (Oxford UP, 2001.) Hagar was an Egyptian slave and handmaid to Sarah who gave birth to Ishmael. Ishmael is Abraham’s first son before Sarah bore Isaac. Abraham is the father of Judaism, Islam, and the bedrock of Christianity. However, in the *Qur’an* (Oxford UP, 2010) Hagar is not mentioned by name, but is alluded to as Abraham’s wife. There is also a discrepancy of term referring to the water Hagar finds as a spring. In “Born to Bare It” the water is a blend of translation. Hagar is the first woman in the Old Testament to name God. She refers to God in “Genesis” in *The Bible* (Oxford UP, 2001) as *e-lroi*, meaning in loose terms: God who sees me. Hagar also mentions that she sees God seeing her—this is reflective in the Tarkovsky poem and “Donor” where God is re-named. This naming also occurs in “Again & Again” and “Light & Mineral” in reference to Hagar as the first female within the Old Testament to give God a name. This is essential in making the speaker a poet, as naming repurposes in “Beneath Bluest Thunders of Babyblue...” and “This is Pure Paradise”—in the way of Hagar. All words in italics—besides those documented in these notes—are original questions, naming, words, and lines created by the author: Mary Elizabeth C. Pope who prefers Maryelizabeth C. Pope—but this is not on record at Eastern Kentucky University.

*I slept in a bed
in a room with paintings
on the walls, and
planned another day
just like this day.*

—Jane Kenyon

*Why was her body sluggish with desire?
Stark on the open field the moonlight fell,
But the oak tree's shadow was deep and black
and
secret as a well.*

—Edna St. Vincent Millay

Threshold

Murder Mystery

Thunder strikes into the neighborhood. Bark dismembers branches of birch too close to downed powerline. Convulse, electromagnetic shocks to the wood-artery, the way a husband's boot-camp morning drill grounds the house like lightening. Some are quiet as the sapling building bridge across drainage pipes. Gut-throbbled wings collapse the balding house among the ecological scheme of things. Flashlights fuse and splinter. Screwed tight the lights lazarus.

Waiting to Walk to Palm Sunday

It's a three-day sort of story.
A husband finds God on the water
at a trout hatchery. Daughters find God
in the mountain well of baptismal slips
aged yellow. I'm alone in this
house, and none of this is permanent.
My God forsook and forsook.
My God as the shadow on this
tree I'm in love with
in our backyard, I buried before arriving
to all this blue-milk-green.
My God as the moment before
that leaving of house for church, before return.
If I ever had the pleasure of an ending, I'll leave it here
on the way home, under blue noon-tides
of trees that sound of ocean, this wind out-of-nowhere
willowing my lily black dress. Sanctuaries
of crow over roofs. Palms no different than a ribcage
housing hearts and lungs. Out of a weary hallway
into another hallway. The chapel is empty as I enter,
empty as a Saturday. I live within the hallway
of that Saturday. Every room was left for this.
If only for today, I am not a mother or wife.
And God grieved the way I have grieved.
How can this be if he was never a girl?
Within every room is a darkness until the door opens.
All that I see is that God left that room.
I wait. I wait. I tire of waiting.
How long am I to linger here in this terminal?

Eating Blue Pears Against the Dusk Refrigerator

The canvas mounting the hallway is alive. It never dries.

There's a pencil-drawn nest, wobbly eggs. There's a mermaid covered in Prussian blue and Indian sun. Her black lines arch like a killer whale with yellow blood-spill, like the sun shot through her.

She holds the pink nest, her body an aura of disruption. Her body cubed and culled in shades of rusting.

There, in the heart of it, was once a cockatoo mohawked in the whale's blood. That's the chest of a woman now layered in parchment and linseed and metal.

Her head is missing. No, her head is in the corner rearranged the way hurricanes stripmine a mother's island.

To think this all lives: the underneath, the bright muddy. I'm piecing back the stilts and Crow's nests mothers lost along the way, their shocks fed through and breathing like mercury. The way mercury dirties the blood and never dies.

The way cracked windows live inside, and how to feed them

light.

Here It Is

Paint in the morning before children
rise. Kind-waking.

Daughters who move like faucet water. On & off
of the oven, in reverse. The *amen* of the oven as it opens.

To reside inside you—this hieroglyph opposing mine.
This naming, as the sun opens.

To write love open, to undo dying
so much, to form sleep and ocean, my body

a brush on the linen and the rubbing
silhouette blued beneath caring.

Lemon of the canary
blued to laughter, this reaching

of a land to know another.
Rolling over the canvas, without clothes—the imprint

before blinds wake, the walk-out of sheets
of laundry in the basement, windows of dead

hydrangea disrobing light to let it dry.
As though I am a singular lover, this taking away

of sin as a walk into the woodbare, and there
the copperheads parting a red—a sea—as if I am

a lifeboat in the rustbed of pine & needle un-palming
the red teeth, red-teeth of anti-venom

as the lemony-blue, as my blood
is the harp of your word.

That's it, the puncture.

Earth to God

Alone late at night when the house is full and alive with quiet
these deep, mahogany, oceans move with and without me.

Like that time, we met on a wintered sidewalk
in the middle of an everyday afternoon
and you said my name, and I remembered
that time I was your creation.

We walked the flat skylight lost somewhere over Antarctica
as we talked of making something
of ourselves after all the dark and loss.

You brushed my face, the lock slipping to web my throat.
I coughed, and you chuckled. It was good, good to smile.

You must have known that when you captured me, I unfastened
and it felt like being made.

Roof & Gable

I met you under an orchard of streetlamps—lemony crosshatch miring the shadings.
There was the absence of knowing each other. There were our bodies as a locket.

A house shroud in fractures of limb, broken lavender, grasses that refused
to brown. An oak hung hacksawed, tumor-ed with artery,

perched between the powerlines. A house-mote: of hollyhock, wreath, thorn,
bath of bat, and petal. Maze of mice and mole within overgrown violet-bone,

onion, strawberry, rot pumpkin oozing blackgut into beds of lavender crocus.
Out of every window summer beat a darker forest—house-wilt within willow.

Out of every window winter slit her throat of light.

It was like that living here: does birthing cardiacs beneath the budding poison

oak, wed in a thicket of wet-red for protection. Weathered coyote cubs nesting
a den within beaver-brush, within tomb caved behind rows of fallen elm, birch.

To wake in the middle of night and walk outside, the North meridian
to our valley collapsing under heavy wilt. As if the house was a mast, a compass.

What I mean to tell you is that for years, I burrowed beneath the burning
palms jacketing this deserted island seven miles off the mainland shore.

When our daughters planted their crown of laurel and bloomed—
sprouting organ, lid, gill, thumb, and long long jarred locks.

When they appeared, I gave way to the birth of myself.

The way the neighborhood darkens with winter's smoke before lilies come back.

Afternoons of Terrarium

Most of the time, I don't know why
or from where it grows.
Maybe the black welling of the woods, her winterfoot—
though I spy her in August and feel the snow
of an aging rose move through the livingroom.
Maybe the black barked oak
where our loves live before they form deep winter
as she evolves. I guard the sink
washed in lilac suds wiping human stains
from porcelain cups, far enough from extinction.
Out of the kitchen, hawks guard
hummingbirds in hollyhock nests, a mailman
huffs and stumbles from our wolves.
Other days (that I am home around the clock)
light is a rip into my lilac
tea, awash in the blue octopus cup.

Thursdays at the Living Museum

Glass walls and stairwells that may slip through. It feels as though I am walking the water. Unresponsive and blue.
This seeing-through is like sailing—real, enough.

I'm here for the rehousing,

decorating the walls of trauma—
survivalist fitted in ink and linen, shelved beside the myriad
tropic self-portraits; accumulated and rebirthed Kahlos of organ
browned, sunned in jungle and jaguar. All these books of painting
form a floor of perception that stills the water or flies
through the wing of modernism.

Here I am: Woman as the bull's eye—

a typhoon of sunsets and howling. Or, the jungle who forgets
her canopies, jungle who backs-off. Or, jungle who is coming
and jaguar as the night, as a woman
of amazon threads—infinite slashes of spectrum and fury.
Enter her realm of expressionism: the way a girl dies many times
of venom of grief of car wrecks of handcuffs of lemony lighting
against white walls and war.

Touch the metal tents of oils and lip

that blew the glass bowl to the edge of combustion.
This floor does not ache as it does in the old house, as it does.
Here. See, the Mother opens the light of theory (of recoveries)
to say: This is my testament
in the event that I go missing.

Locks & Bolts

20

After throwing my suitcase out the window and grabbing my stash of keys tucked in the cavemouth of the downspout, I drove away from him like lightning. Lightning from the planeseat crooked as a branch, angry arteries, that great fury searching-out ground. Safe there, safer than I had ever felt—over the ocean in the storm, towns & houses quaking.

21

Have you ever felt wrapped in wasps? There is this memory of a man. In this memory (the man says) his dream includes me in a wooden house, a fire in the woods with no one around. And I've known that most of life: fingernails coked in the seam of lead, looking out the window.

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In another memory there is this man, and the man is an artist. And he asks to paint my landscape, instructs me to pose—my body fixed for strangers (as it is, un-clothed.) My lap molded as clay, hands as figurine studied and stiffened, dimmed in the fluorescence. My body as lamp and line uncorded—cut to pieces, arranged, plastered in excerpts on the wall. Somewhere the leaves making the hole of me.

Often, I say: He was close enough to see my line—the hue of ice (blue-glass) and the rising bear (black-lipped with violet.) The rising and all that is hidden, opening, sketched in a way that looks of lowland, a winter after the leaves die and silhouettes brown to skin-color. My line dismembered, settled into passage. It mattered that he wanted to see me that way—sketched in lead, lead a poisonous matter to the blood and mouth.

0

When I said no, there was this man of memory who hated me for the rest of his summer. Then he forgot me. And that's that.

19

I leave my brush in the studio turpentine to dry, as it leaks black-water, black-water all my life and the drain's guzzle. I think of that. These autumns without. The brush lifting as the body from the floor.

27

Throwing away scissors and blades to babyproof the falling-down house, the brush, tea-kettle forgetting to whistle, air filmed black. I tell my husband—who is a presence—that I'm going back to painting and he looks at me as though he's lost. And, I want to tell him that I'll never leave. That I'd burn the whole dam house down before I'd let that happen.

28

29

I think of the paintings before him—yellow pears and the lampshade bleeding canary, leaden in that corner. How longing softens into the illusion. And, that one painting in the kitchen. Others under bed (height of a manikin) faceclosed as if muted. Others making the memory of matters stare square unable to turn, her lids split-open—within each pupil the clouds intersecting, crashing-awake. I want to tell him that's what he's got: This sketch hiding under the mattress.

25

That time before babies, I hung it on the wall when he was stoned. He considered it. I took it down to compost in the guest closet—charcoal bleeding winter's frame. And I can't get away from it.

28

All he knows is that bowl of sunset in the middle of the raven trying to unhinge the lamp that creeps over the kitchen—stroke, stroke & jagged line softened in cloth and oil. Each dip and bruise of the skin was important. It's teaching me to draw again, to stare at it.

0

That sketchbook made of cow-hide—the hand-bound one that claps a skeleton key, that key that loops around a belt, that belt that closes and opens the pages unable to lock (that one he bought that Christmas—because somewhere in me he sees a hollowing.) My paintings—given, given, to the elements letting them take them. And they took them and thought nothing of it. The way a mother gives away her body to the door of orphanage, to carry that powdery gold smell of hair and remember skin in her throat. Like that. A woman gives what she adores. And how it feels to reclaim it, to own what was lost, to capture it. The way she wants to feel at the center of something, the way bareness is a scene hanging the walls.

Wednesday

The heart is a brass pocket-
watch on the bottom of a lake-
bed, a puzzle of sediment.
It swims with frog eggs and baby
alligators. It's left alone too
much. It loses joy like a mis-
carriage. It asks if suicide is
an immediate entrance back
into the rough and wet.

Third Shift

She took a night class, 3D design with the intent to get out of the house
to meet people and make something, to get her mind off the ceiling
watermarks baring the maps of her escape, fissures leaking
the silhouette of Alaska.

Left her husband
and daughter, bottled breastmilk in the deep freeze.

Her hair was longer then and she always worried it might catch fire
as she solder-ironed a book out of steel strips
the size of toothpicks, slipped and missed the spine, grew
a blister the professor said to dunk in water
that swelled into a soft pebble.

She walked away from the books latched
in cannons of libraries and felt missing.

She read of the Expressionists, their lover still-lives: *Woman I, Woman II, Woman V*
when she'd come home covered in charcoal, in soot, her body becoming a miner
as she nursed; her body becoming lost
in earth. She studied the violent splashes
of de Kooning on canvas, conception of Woman, Woman of negative
space seeing herself stitched by light
in reflection of bottle, in dark matter of leaf punched together
as bouquet, no as memorial. Woman of contradictions standing as storm
pictured in funhouse mirrors. Woman of obsession, Woman of home—
landscape dismembered,
sunk in sun and cirrus. Woman of sentiment spoken in light, her ribcage thought to death.
Woman of broken locks and dye, splintered
stroked light scraping her ceilings.

And she could see the giant
Vignettes of the awakened as they were told
floating lighting and raincloud
within the glint of wall and glass.

She felt alone and veteran in that class. On her way home strolling the pond-edge
mallards drowned the female in heat, sisters on the bankside
watching, waddling away, running.

She threw rocks at them, knocked a couple under, until they sprouted
and spewed paint like water.

She thought to tell someone about it, how it bothered her to see something hurt, to hurt for something.

She tried to when she walked through the door, but a husband was leaving as he'd always leave, for miles. So, she rocked and sketched the edges—bindings and page in her sleep.

The book would open with metal hinges
and everyone would see through the iron
gate of lilies,
no
of waterfall and teeth.

How the Morning Rebuilds Herself

Mondays are swollen, afterhours of pummeling rains—which is the fear of losing someone. How terrifying to trust the one you’ve married. Mondays are creek shed. Coyotes coat caves within the limbless execution of electrical wire—that a housewife might spy a land beyond her picture-window. I’ve married a picture-window. I launder and tidy the beds; wash blood-stained sheets, want to paint without feeling waste; want rooms to pick-up themselves, rearrange the way wind renovates. The way rooms move when the house-wife is home. Mondays are roof-stain, leftover, lonesome clutter. Every dish is dirt. Walls quiver the way rocks roar for Odysseus. But walls are a body of water. In the fallaway is the Odyssey, a gray minivan. I am a land of wedding, swamped in sanctuaries of undrinkable water.

Study Pane

The tree in our backyard is taller than ten elephants.
The playhouse behind the tall tree is pure trunk and a burst of hunter
green. The playhouse is
a cedar of white shutters stained in algae.
Half-dead elms shower the cedar shanks.
The playhouse is a lime-lit cavern.
Limelight hydrangeas bow whitened hived heads
in penance around the property.
Leaves chomp a graveyard of insects over the playhouse.
The tall tree makes a cave over our holey shingles.
Within the dark of the leaves the grave eats our houses.
Within the dark of the loosening bark
are arachnids and wolf-fangs
the children study and shish kabob
with binoculars or roof nails
for science projects. Their shins and cheeks reddened
with lichen and slaps of mosquito.
The bats are hungry
for the miniature vampires devouring the children.
Out of the black willows, the bats try to save them.

Sanctuary of Bird

My offspring gather winter
laced suns from the fresh slit grasses.

Into my arms
the cold murdered bouquets weep yellow-pilled-feathers.

We sit on the cold wet lawn
under the warm, weaving crowns of flower.

My youngest says our crowns
are the color of sun, the shape of the sun inside her
and that I am her teacher.

The bees crown her.

I am her teacher
reaching bare armed into the swarm
numb to the rumble fire-touch—
sun and blood weeping
the painted mess of our crowns.

This morning, I am grateful to know her and to live.

Badland

This morning the gut-throated owl howls from the abdomen of the wolf.

This morning she carves her hawk body from the basin, her wing
from the damned flooded floor.

She lumbers through waters and journeys out the door
into the frosted morning

onto the decapitated dandelions
breaking under the icy dew-slick

rise, rise, rise
and melt of the sun.

Compass of Lost Creations

When the baby flies back to the woodsman who carved it,
animals and oracles fall from shelves.
The etymology within me closes.
Heirloom mint julep cup polished for engraving goes
into the plum sack backed behind serving trays in the highboy.
The Magic 8 ball rattles to settle suspicion.

When I first gave him back, peony leaves milked the sunporch.
Cardamom silt the teacup puzzle-stuck in glue, dog hair, wet-salt
thumbprints murdered all over.
The doe was a stump in the clearing.

Today the Buck Moon pulls antlers into branches, and I wonder if that is him
wandering the leaf-sash, encircling at all times
shallow flickers born of undefinable rhythms.
Today I am veteran.
Coffee milk steams dew wreathed dandelion weaving
yellow halos outside the wire screen sunporch, poison
ivy winds the metal frame.

Here my son's future lies
crumpled in summer-sog, spindled rocker orphaned, empty under the hanging.
Bubbling lacquer pools drip flutes over the dollhouse roof.
I hear mockingbirds guzzle the lemon rain.
Hunter-green tendrils shiver skyward.
The sun is an antique
keyhole rusting its skeleton.
White storm-cloaks twirl the distance knocking.
I've tired of opening.

It's the end of June and the veil of thunder cuts the cord.
Blueberries break under the relief.
I am the persimmon tree calving my pink
earths, brushing locks and seed
into the crux of doorframe to bury in porch, paint-shaved wicker moist.
My twig nests in feather piles.
Bats and moth carve the evening armpit, orange-jackaled in afterglow.
His ash over the rosemary swords brocades the iron garden gates.
Summer squash eats brittle brickways.

The spiny hedgehog that nests in my braids bursts, and part of me always goes with him
to wither inside the coal.
I mask my mouth to strip the dollhouse, shaving lead

paint, dropping birds, turpentine burns the shingles.
Rooms and doors are emptied, wallpaper defaced.
I've grown accustomed to shedding these alone, a bundle or so
a month.

Still, I am curious.

The magnifying glass rubs the black letters raw.
Ouija glides by its own metronome, in sphere.

My palms crack open the air to rearrange his name.

Answer Me This

Was I ever more than a cup you threw on the potter's wheel? I'm dying
all around, and you let this happen. This is what it is
to be a mother and a wife. They are not meant to exist beyond me.
Dogs rip and rip the gardens
to decapitate the rug of root who sheds and sheds
her children who exist within the form
of a falling *Y*, and this is always what the tree asks.
So often I've removed my eyes.
What if I told you something that you always wanted.
And this brought us back from what was lost to us.
What if I told you that I have known
a notion of you too risky to mention.
Have you ever known a secret that falls from the shelf, and left it?
I met you in a hallway of sorts. I was walking-away, and you were hiking
up & up it. This is a fact, and this was the way we knew.
The way I see the earth wake inside you
is the way it does in a line like: Then there was you.
And that's too much. And that's enough, now.
So, here is a truth: I'd read to you from inside the tub.
I'd leave you alone.
I'd work so you wouldn't have to.
If you wanted to sell every word and shoe
ever housed in the dust frame of a disheveled bed.
I'd dishevel your bed. I'd go without you
if it was a right and need. I'd sell the walls to walk with you out of the hallway
into the web of invisible wood. I'd bury you and be done with it.
And that'd never be enough.
I like you well, wading the water without me—sketching
below the damn break of cloud that billows the way you look
like you're already a haven.
I don't know how to stop worrying that I'm going to leave you.
I sit in the basement thinking: I'm an earth who is dying.
I say that I'm sick, but I don't know what I'm sick about.
I have loved and never really spoken
but to a hawk on the powerline who stares at the house.
And what is that word, love? It is a dove.
And there are men who hunt doves, and I wonder how this is—
to shoot the message. Dove who arrives to say:
You might walk out now, and all is
better than expected.

Somedays I Wonder If I Was, Ever

How do I say: I've held a dove for you?

*Will I lose everyone the dove knows
in the way only the dove knows them?*

Often, I live within a circle that floats
whether I believe in the circle or not.

What if I believed—even for a day—
in sitting alone in the next room
and not talking with...

Even on the days I didn't want to
believe you, I sat in rooms with you more often than I'll ever admit.

I'm "Wife"—I've Finished That—

—Emily Dickenson, *Final Harvest*, "39 (199)"

What's that sound? Thirst?

To hold a terrible longing
for you, though you are visible.
To sweep in your work-
shirt, your flashlight as a lighthouse, an alter
beneath our pillows when the lights go.

Is this us, this broken jar?

I broke the kitchen. It seems
the sink is filled with fracture,
stars. I've mopped it with a moist rag.
I don't think I missed a sharp edge.
I'm sorry for such loss.

Are we that fly on its deathbed in the fluorescent?

I tire. I tire of talk. I want. I want.
Try to carry this empty
jar of wedding petals.

Of Silence & Industry

Each woman just pickups her mind and moves forward the way the train
pickups coal cars and moves on with deliveries, or the way nature wipes all
evidence of storm to bring back her calm, with or without
remorse.

Livingrooms

The Accident

My mother names the black
bird's resurrection, throws my father's hooked
worms and minnows into the sward to gather crowns,
dim plume
wreaths against blue, her prayer for charred waters
to part, to clear. Her prayer for the black bone
and our backs against hard wet stone connecting
the puzzle
of sun through pregnant pine, cool spit lifting,
dampening.
Flood churning, pressing our slight bodies
from thick slurry like we've been caught, coal sludge
twirling
rivulets of our hair, palms turned to surrender
as if we're at Pentecostal church, as if we've been bit,
seen a ghost.
Dark clouds gather at our knees. We hear the call,
father is home from work.

Last Time, The Cathedral was a Bonfire

God lights the chimney with stray hay and kindling
from persimmon trees,
vine-fall from the windstorm.

He's building a vineyard. He sleeps with *Grapes of Wrath*
open on his stomach. There is solitaire and a chair
where he pinks with wine.

Grandkids gather around his feet, hungry for his mystery—
how his broods were born in a strawberry patch
behind the shadow of the slaughter barn.
How he plucked them.

It's older than he is—the story, the barn.
He wears a black felt cowboy hat and deerskin gloves.

Every now and then he comes to the city to visit
his daughter, to collect mulled spices, to make deer
sausage, moldy cheeses.

He stores dusty bottles in the potato cellar.
When the neighbor dairy farmer died, grapevine curled
around his ankles.

It smells of manure when wind rises from the swell of north pasture.
Other times it smells of woodsmoke and yeast, even in summer.

His daughter didn't grow here. She grew in a cathedral
of pine and soot. There were electrical towers and a substation
outside her bedroom window. Floors ached. A train hurt the air.
It doesn't hurt the air anymore.

Mines shut, and her parents call this farm their home.
Everything that happened in that house is a ghost.
They are happy now, happier than ever.

Now, vines curl arthritis around wood and rust.
God harvests clusters, fills the horse trough
with blue globes for the broods to stomp.

This year, the foothills paint fleck, nest.
They look like a mother.
He misses her. Grapevines gray and reach.

At his funeral he wants bagpipes.

Once when he was riding palominos with his daughter
in the pasture, he said that he was an orphan.

His daughter wanted to tell him that she didn't see
how that was ever possible.

There's a strangle of smoke over the valley. She sees God
at the bonfire tacking up figs, blackberry ached over buckets
of broke vine, wind-mashed persimmon.

The smoke is a prayer.
A candle.

Rain Fell, Rivers Rose, Winds Blew and Pounded that House

—Matthew 7: 27

In her house was a sunroom where I drew and sat.
Her metal, turquoise, bracelet etched
with hawks and arrows on my wrist.
The spectacle of a man
on the hardcover of *The New Yorker*
dusted the coffee table. There was this way
Hemmingway felt familiar. *Camelot*
from the couch on days I held a fever. The rolltop desk
held secret compartments, a rummage
of God's past. Rough open of drawers.
This way the kitchen door rattled any entrance. Hard blank metal
iron crosses, blade of a German soldier's helmet
at home beside the canary corded phone. The grenade
beside that. All that fathers brought back.
The way a man hung in front of the fire or television
and never spoke but coughed.
The library outside the sunroom window.
Walking there after the day ended. A table
of grapefruit bladed with pepper, burnt as the popcorn
I wasted in the trashcan. A liver
burning with pepper. Crawling
through isles of books in the basement. The comfort
and smell of dust. A woman
with a coalminer's lamp rising from the crawlspace.
Seeing how far back the foundation of the house existed.
Never knowing why or how far. *As I Lay Dying* in a leather
brown moldy spine. *The Secret of the Old Clock*
on the basement floor in the isle of shelves. Waiting for the signal
of his entrance as my exit. An old man, as old as God's body,
at the head of the plank-long dinner table. My warm lips
on his fish-cold head. Leaving that house
for the backroom of my dad's insurance office.
Flute lifting through walls
from mom's studio. A picture of Matisse
on her wall— island woman in the eggplant dress
against a canary backdrop. The way the keys
of piano wept when played well. Walking out
the backdoor of their shared space. Crossing
the alley to the flower shop
where a man let me into the freezer to pick a rose.
Grocery windows, library windows

as they darkened. The librarian locking the door
to keep everyone out and me inside
on the dark carpet picking up *The Colossus*
and putting her back—not understanding. The last page.
Sneaking back to my grandmother’s house
when the light of the screen *blanked*. His door closed.
Her kitchen table with the yellow tablecloth—
blue bowl of grapefruit speckled as trout. Blank windows
with snowy pulled shades. The way the shades
made night look awake. Her evening talk of recklessness
on the orchard, those summers before anyone
swept her away.

In Soot

Wet floor rippled like staffs of adders. Animals ark-ed under crawlspaces. Weeping pawpaw rooted basement. Opossums bred and slept in coalshoots. You carried a box of gunglass—grandfather’s removable glass-eyes. Cliffs held grayhouses in gunned leaf, within a gilded cage of yellow sunsets—scarecrowed and pillaged by the blasts of bat and crow. Pine splay like hay-spill. Buttery, tar, canaries waited-out the boom. All trails led to the woodsman who carved wolves from dead pawpaw and pine. A Firetower was that bristlecone to climb—ancient as a god. And God was alive. *Alive.* You’d cry when houses burned and became another seam of coal. You wore scarabs as a broach. Owls howled-out the umbrella dark. Eyeless moles gnawed strips of bark. Birds braided hemlock crowns to wreathe the bangs. In your heart bottled like a key, you kept animals, skeletal twigs, and the question you once loved. The way hawks kept a close watch, appearing now and then like dirty doves.

Trailblazer of the North Hill

I was walking home, as I always walked home from school behind the car lot, like any other regular day—the sky alive and shapeless. I smiled. I was just trying kindness. Yet, the stranger's eyes were unkind, emptied as a vulture caged and beaten, starved to the point of attack. I smiled and he didn't. As he turned the corner of the broke-down train-depot I caught him through the chain link sprinting back to me, and I knew this as a moment. The sky broke and sobbed. I listened. All the businesses locked, coal-company docks broke & bankrupt. I flew-up the sidewalk, passed our house, passed mange dogs herding feral cats, passed our neighbor's smacked-black windows. Rose (up and up) into the woods over sinkholes, over rattlesnakes through the den of bobcats who wanted nothing to do with a girl on her last leg, who were just biding time waiting for sundown to eat. Vultures in the laurel fanning death capes over graves. Running and running until I was lost. And all that was left was that dead trunk I climbed into and hid in until morning.

The Return

The world unfastened in ways
my body was unable to support. Ceilings

hazed a storm that didn't know how
to break. Humidity,

atmospheric pressure, made
my ears and chest throb. Treebark

sweat drowning carpenter
ants in pools of tarry

pine wax, crimson speckled soldiers
sprinkled below the dark skirt. I pushed

the grapefruit and peppered bread back. An inhale
of steam coughed. Little more,

little more each fall.
Eyes glazed over. Everything pined.

I'd lost the taste of forever.
She saw it and brewed evening

primrose to bring my heart
back—a heart

I didn't even know I had. Though, she knew—
only by the loss of hers—

crumbs escaping dust from her teeth.
I lived on her that summer. *Of grief?*

The night felt everything,
its answer striking

still the grandfather clock in the vestibule. Mourning
was this cage that opened in strange ways. I could feel it flowering

as a wisteria, seeding, sprouting gruff winding
arms, groping bone, spine. I considered if

I was the only one who felt this absence as a presence.

Harlan

(1)

In the crook of the coalroad climbing-up Slaughter Holler leans a blue house
on the branch where God grew a wife. She'd sit on that bankside watching
water gloom, coaled fishgut stalled stagnant on the embankment. Home
was never a place she thought to leave.

(2)

She met her husband, blackened and splintered—broke-down on *Fireside*
skunk drunk with sun—wet parched neck half coal, raw, crude as an oil
spilling radiance like a cut. She had witnessed this before—tarmac motes,
oil rings rain-bowed at the coaltemple slurry. So much night without stars.
Her waterface was a stomach chewing, churning her lust—an arm deep pot
rising to boil. His was the blackwater, tarnished light catching and raining
the bottom scorch.

(3)

The house was built upon what her husband brought back from War—a sound dark—quiet as the mine. A silence that ruined him as it sometimes does. She supposed a shade tree flowered inside him, and it flowered until it was gnarled, and the roots bore claws into his sun—and he became the dark.

(4)

Her haunted husband was put to surveying the vein run-down the gorge. She thought it fitting that he harvested buckets of remedy, as though coal was the lamp to quench his silence. Though he didn't pick at it like the rest of men mining for blackstar, soul shucking away fingering gunpowder searching for the seedling dumped down there to grow. He didn't pick at it like a scab. He ran it, stuck dynamite in its side, and burst July the way kids poured applecider vinegar and baking soda in a sealed jar and shook it, the way it shattered. And, he shook them when it shot-up dusty clouds on the ceiling that never rained down.

(5)

She rounded-up the chicks born every April, the homeless hens pecking boot-mashed yolks, sizzling Saturns. She put her ear to train track so close to clapboard it made her drum the closeline rattle. The house blackened, the creek, the stone, all the linen sheets turned ash. When her husband built this house, never did she fathom the sounds of shatter, train trestle, forest folded, twisted arthritic into muddy scarecrow, into kites, into root stools. Into anything his hangover folded over. A ponytail scrunched with bangs swept her lashes.

(6)

She recalls running downstream from that haunted sink. The bright blue morning floating down to baptize, steady as a stilt-walker.

(7)

Abandoned old house where everything once mattered. The dog-tired, sunk porch spoke the ancient omen: *abandon all hope*. Words she wore as a cotton dress unraveling thread. He wore the distant sun when evening swept over his water-eyes, and his spirit was drunk enough to rise a shaky boat across his stormface.

(8)

When her heirloom lilies bloom, she thinks of death and summer
wild and bright like tigers, the names she labored, thirst—this ache
to travel.

Kitchen

How Can I Tell Her I Love Her...She Looks Straight Ahead

—Vinicius de Moraes, *The Girl from Ipanema*

(Characters: Lovers 1 & 2

Time: In and out of present

Scene: In the car on the way home from La Casa Cantina.)

I. Lover 1: What sort of happened...

So, our story ended (or it began) on the ride home from the Cantina where you drank Dos Equis, and I didn't because we moved over the lawn over robin eggs and blue jay shavings—feathers of my splatters lodged like kerosene covered ducklings into the summer grass. I thought I was pregnant. Out of the rearview, road spattered spotted fawns and afternoon light set the absence. We were broke, gluing back the break. I came home in love with more than us and told you that I was pregnant with the idea of something—as if the forks of a river converged into a great rushing *and opened a sacred forest of locked-mouthed clams parting this glimpse of a sand-pearled planet before it was formed.* You came home nauseous of language. So, I drank three cups of Persian tea and left you there, in significance.

II. Lover 2: What it felt like to watch land die from the drive...

So, our story ended (or it began) on the ride home from the Cantina where I drank Dos Equis, and you didn't because the nights before we made love. How were we to know what it meant to be expectant? When I suggested a sip of something to end the land you were forming (as I wasn't certain how to envision the earth) in the rearview afternoon light glorified your unsolvable absence.

III. Lover 1: A version of the day I met you...

If you found me in the gut of a rot tree and held out your hand, your hand as a lifeboat. If you were a mine foreman, an axeman, or deer hunter holding the bloodheart of a fawn in a leather satchel crossing, cradling, our only drinkable water. If you were beneath sea-light or pawpaw canopies of pear-leaf bruised enough to rest in and devour. If you held out your hand (your hand as a hue of port and yeast) and, I kissed you on the crux wrist, my chin a kneel into the pond of you. If you lifted me from the brook of slug and mold and barb. And I asked (as I've never asked) of my body before.

IV. Lover 2: If we met at a museum...

There was this distance between us, that's how it goes. A distance to channel across to find someone, the way light travels from house to house through electrical lines. If I wrote you not to come. If you came anyway. If you drove the hours to change us forever—even though

I told you not to. If I wanted to know you beyond letters. I was sitting on the couch reading and waiting for something to happen. Then it happened.

V. Lover 1: That day you understood...

It was on the ride home from our last feast at the Queen of Sheba eatery, where we ate with hands and mouthed fingers, the way one licks the bone after the goat. You looked at me. Whitelight from the passenger window hailing your figure, your figure a pond etched in near-death. You called me: Cleopatra. *Cleopatra* (you said) *I want to say something, but I'm not sure how you'll take it—so I'm just going to say it.* And, you wrote this couplet sideways on a napkin.

VI. Lover 2: What it was like the first day you held our daughter and we named her...

If we lived within the pages of Bible, if we lived in a rose garden, if we lived in Bible-belt. You held out your hand the way Ruth held her hand out to Mara, and she took you as if you were a mother who found her hiding inside pinewilt writing the door of dark open. There was a cut on your hand from slicing an avocado. Your hand wading our walkway up to your neck lifting like a sinking. Down, down you moved to deliver our daughter to our door—swaddled in your garnet the way a sow heals her calf with a tongue or waits for her to walk. Out of the rot tree to the porchswing fit as an arrow in the bow of your arm. That's how she came to us—as a cup poured, smelling of primrose of stagblood.

VII. Lover 1: To feel as clean as Jesus...

You washed yourself on the bank of the creek beneath the waterfall where stones nest. Where minnows pool motes, where roots of moccasins den within mangrove or the grip of a black tupelo's spiders of artery. You dove into the moss of pineblack clothed. The water was a hearse that stoned and wrenched beneath the stagnant mold and flybombs. Doused in dark. You came (she came) for all of me.

VIII. Lover 1, in retrospect: What it felt like to grow her with you...

On our shred of land sat a bayou colored house with ivy plaits over yellow shutters. On our shred of land was a parade of arrowheads, burial of oyster beds, a slaughter of endangered birds. When I came back from the sea after a long night of painting—my wrists and the backs of my knees bloodied in milk vetch, carmen leads, whitespirits—I came home bright as a bouquet carrying the dew of every little thing, and this and this residue of love's trespass.

This is Pure Paradise

Standing at the sink, I decide to build out of the fallaway
to come back cleansed of every form of harm.

So, it was (it is)...

Hair as water, dark as magpie. Lips as rosepetal on the edge
of extinction. An annex of bees as rings & earrings—only

in spring for that moment that never seemed to exist.
Then? I was in a truck beside a train of roadkill, with a boy

who saw himself in the lyrics of Chris Knight, those nights
it was never easy, to leave. When he left, I painted

our bowl of injured pears in a studio above a garage—
as that's what I did to erase the ones I loved, who left me to death

or the notion of death in a jet somewhere over Jerusalem—always
in a woman's version of armed dark, safe in studio, safe in library, safe

at her table. Then, I was somewhere in San Antonio leaving someone
to his gun, base. Leaving someone to Utah where time deployed.

There was once a time of-between with a goliath who was never
a soldier or man of thought or honor (who remains unnamable, as to name

is to bless.) A son of a son who grew into a goliath, who was
the water I padlocked—the conception of war. I should have skipped

and skipped the way back to my mother's hills where everything was
a cough & exit, anyway. Anyway, there was 20 and time forgot

to exist until it later formed a wick.

Now, of our house? Rosebushes kneel
in snow—pink
as a rub. Iron gates continue

to gnarl, then cultivate. The walkway
collapses into the arms of two guardian

spruce. A light-post feathers
into the dark of those

pinecones. Home is nothing
like a fishbowl. It sighs light.

Chairs dim, mostly
empty. In the centerpiece

sits a silvery candlestick,
a vacant teapot of decembers.

Boudoir

Lacquered in Bayou

breakfast or so ago

When I was lost in the marsh of our backyard. There was this cottage overgrown in bloodish lichen. The compass quit working. I meandered over thousand-year mangrove bridges. And wadded tributaries. Where capsized canoes might as well have been petrified alligator-backs.

dusk or so ago

Every memory led me to my husband. The view of electric through my childhood windowpane.

day or so ago

When they were tiny as mice. Daughters called me *Snow White*, and I'd answer. A hum landed beside me. One day on the sunporch. When I was crying. I cried everyday as I lipped my coffee. When the daughters were seeds and pumpkins. A husband left for work. When I was alone in the house and the walls talked. Doors opened-shut. And I worried the coy pond might gobble us up.

dusk or so ago

Now, around our house Japanese maple gobble eggplant. Chamomile sweeps. Rows upon rows of tomato. Melon. I water. I am pregnant with an electric. Again. Turtles and toads nest. Below hornet combs. In the starring shade. Where hostas grow without tears.

mid-day or so ago

It's 60 degrees this September. I sit in the sunporch with an African fertility statue. Carved from a baobab tree, a life. The statue is naked. I mean the carved woman kneels. Naked above a bowl. Everything is a dismemberment of tree. There are terrariums of air plants. Cactus. African violets. There's a Virgin of Guadalupe. Candle wreathed in pond pebbles. Books on Moroccan floor cushions. Stitches in gold patchwork. A dog-chewed stuffed beluga whale. Someone forgot to hide in her hideaway. Loosening ceiling boards. A lumberjack's chainsaw. The falling of a forest that sounds like the crash of eternity.

supper or so ago

Of our yard? Through the bedroom window. That chainsaw too close to the weeping. There's a cave I can't see. A dog paces. Hammocks grow over a blueness that belongs to me.

Summer House

Scaled in the limbs of alligator hatch. Swigged in magpies and switchgrass.
All that's left is the mouthy refrigerator snaked in threads of nest, skulls

of hibernating animals, an empty patent leather suitcase, a record
of Elvis on the sunset linoleum kitchen table, an ironbed tucked in

the fray of babyblue. There's an end of the day shade.
The failure of the day is the color of the kitchen table

caught in a swarm of black ash and bald cypress, posies
of mantis, aphids—all green insect. Ground ferns that look

like Night-of-the-Living-Dead appendages, fungi rising
from flesh of the swamp ground. An emerald velvet throne

overgrown in suitcase, fridge, gator-cased bark. A trickle stream
through the property that looks shale-silvered, skinned in shark.

In the center of it, a mirage over the cartilage of water, her floor-length satin
gown pearled and swamped in red clay, in red day.

The bottom of a bloody dress. The Glass of the house is
a punch of seawinds. See there, there it is in gray-space—

buckets of potatoes, mange chickens pecking bits of glass
within strewn worm feed. A memory now, like a mirror.

Stuck in the left-hour when the waterspout ate the chickens, so close to the end.
There are moments that don't belong anywhere but here.

Atlas of the Motherland

I. Leaving the Mainland

You stood in the wooden boat gliding through seaglass birthing
waters of hatchlings from the sun.

Blonde stalks of yellowed light cut and sway through murky tributaries
bleeding into the great mouth of bay.

Saltmarsh emerged. A darkness gilled.
Your boat edged down Fowl River. The sky was an absent black.

Vultures erased from you the way mountains shrunk
so similar to indigenous heads, so similar to the heads of relatives in the rearview.

Clouds hung in ropes of feathered webbing. Light was a dreamcatcher exploding
into flights of blue—yolked, hammered, arrows.

You edged through sludge skirting half-sunken oyster boats.
To your back the mainland browned and dipped from wind and heat.

Moss hung in tangles from muscled cypress,
as if the tree ate all the shade.

The southern Cumberland was a smothering
heading into the Gulf. Pines killed themselves for that cypress to flourish.

Night of the mainland bloomed alive against the evidence.

II. Pier

You traveled until land broke into mangrove.
A man's mouth was the blue shadow over solid land.

You wanted to believe that your soul wasn't lost in purgatory.
You were pregnant and the bay wove

nests of loose silt, riptides, pelicans.
Through binoculars the white azaleas.

Moths birthed a jungled dark. There was nothing
airy or translucent about the island off the coast of mainland.

There were goats hanging from thicks
of bent branch, strangles of moss like gargoyles.

There were mounds of oyster shell, bones
carriage-ing the entrance. Buckets of squid gut. Docks soured
in lime, liquored pearls of fisheye, cold blood.
This island where the baby inside you grew.

Where you learned to sway, slip.
This is your picture in a lace shift, scissory seagrass, sanded under the dying.

Caught within a mason jar, sunning, igniting the clot salt.
You were barefoot, tanned as an autumn elm

teetering there on the pier half-alone.

III. Exit Signs

A map lodged in you tight as a pocket.
Sun cut through sheets of storm, the way a baby was cut from her mother.

You waited and waited, but there was no one in the dark to see you.
The world seemed haunted. And you carried the visitors—

as though you carried a door into the swampmarsh
in search of something that you needn't carry anymore.

A waterspout grew goliath swallowing the ocean.
Stilts swayed like reeds. It wasn't how you intended

to live—a glassless house, mouthy waters churning
as if you existed within the gut of a great mammal.

Safe as an Oilrig

It was days before
the Tropical Depression. At the end

where it looks deserted
until you get close—

albatross, magpie, vulture
bones nest in gloves of drift.

You swam with mantas
through channels where the bay fed

into ocean. A neighbor drowned. The ocean cared
for no one. An empty boat

was a life-house, a nest.
You found a set

of petrified molars once—maybe
from a barracuda, from anything

lost as locket. The storm
was a slatefall behind

the rigs, lightening blush
and fractured. You took

a hand-me-down boat
across the bay, docked

and drank golden
shots rimmed in alligator

hued lemons. Beer floated
lime so similar to the jars

of shark and pufferfish floating
vinegar on bookshelves—jars and jars

of bulge-eyed scales, a seahorse
from November, a giant sand-

dollar so gorged and starred

in the center you said

it fell from the North.
That night you crossed

the bay until it was dark,
a waterspout formed

in the Sound
the size of a tornado, a house.

Waves Bit into the Rib of the Boat

You lost your lifejacket.
Cobia swarmed against steel.
The ocean was a mineshaft.
That year the Gulf went slick, red
drum declined, oysters disappeared.
You dreamed of dawn as a scuba suit.
In the distance a tsunami brewed.
There was nowhere to go. The island was a pencil.

On the Westend Collecting Feathers with Her Guardian Ghost

There were no palms, no jungle, no birdwatchers.
Those days there were no boats and the sky ached metal.

Waters hurled. You threw the anchor bayside.
The Gulfside shook.

You had no worry of coming storm.
You collected pelican feathers

and jellyfish in jars. There was a shallow canal
with a strong current and a bridge of sand

where the hurricane cut a crossing.
All around sharks slept.

The last time you were on the farthest end, a hurricane took
balconies, but left stilts, crosses.

You made necklaces, buried bones in shrines of drift.
You swam in the warm depression of Gulf, swam on your back,

surfing your body over the waves like a plank.
That last day, the ocean pulled winter from the bottom to heal herself.

You huddled in the hallway with the radio, boats in coves fought
to stay put. You played dominos,

combed through a catch of shells.
Houses on that end were miracles if they made it.

There was one (an A-frame like a pyramid, a trinity) dawned in manatee
carvings and fish netting that made it through everyone.

It always looked barren but wasn't empty at all.

Apothecary and the Pony Express

I'm as south as I can go.

Capture my tears in a blueglass bottle
and mail them to my mother.

Let the northwind hoove us home.

Catastrophe

There are suns in the shredded sheets.
Yellow blades break
into grave.

Dandelions strip; they look
as if they are failing
from the shift
of season—
bald as a birdlet broken
and shelled from the crib
in transition.

Wishflowers come at night to bloody the lawn.
When the house is lightless
they form lightening
shredded feathers under lunar beams.

Full and waxing
as the dew slits the stalk and milks
chlorophyll onto my puzzled thumb.

She's Had Enough

This is an interpretation of the invisible ways bluejays are trapped in a sunporch. In obvious ways of sinkholes, water-winds, wakes, and those times she just stills her seed over roofs. See the dogwoods unroot, elders fall, saplings net the deadening. She springs and molds-alive. There is art to saving a species. But she's tired of trying, ravenous for houses, river's widening to divide forks into reservoir. Hot-air twists the houseplants wicked. She's tired of saying: Spare the soul who touches the weed in a way that he shouldn't. So, she doesn't say it anymore. Atmosphere erases. There is this need of spectacle for belief. Forest is disfigurement of telephone poles.

There's this woman who might any day carry an unlawfulness, busting under the scorch, watery as aloe miscarried from a cactus.

Nest

Somedays our house lives on Bienville, lives across from the jungle, and the mouth of the trail is foliated in green saw whips, vine, bromeliad, and gardenia.

Gardenia blooms line the mapped-path
into the sanctuary where I go to pray
with my body.

Gardenia blossoms burst dove tongues
that willow and crumple when they are touched.

One hungry alligator lives in the sanctuary.
One reptile that haunted
(what seems like) a gazillion years, lurking
like a spiny toad in the marsh
under the pier in the salt-mud.
I can feel her slither-creep follow me.

I bring her a communion of marshmallows and moldy crusts, my blood
as an offering, as a truce.

I'm no longer terrified of her swallow.

I'm no longer scared of the glassy darkness she hides beneath.

The birds trill and trip through canopy, through leafy hammocks.

I'm older than I was; I have children of my own
to wrestle and love. I run
over root raised planks, paths through forests
under this crescendo of pterodactyl batting through mosquito air.

I'm running to save myself.

I'm running from a shadowy version of someone.

The jungle sweats.

My body is thirsty and looks like it is raining.

The jungle is darkening, and in the heart of it
I'm lost and time is eaten.

There is no direction.

There is only the sliver of glistening
on the wax leaves, a starry dust.

And I wonder if I'll still be a mother
and a wife when I get out, if I'll ever get out.
Dammit I'll get out.

I'll run like that raptor is hunting me.
Run from the ghost of myself.
Run like I did when I was nine and that dying dog was murdered—
that one with limp graying eyes, that one a man nursed
into un-beaten paths for the reptiles and birds to gobble.
Vanishing man on his last breath draped in binoculars
leashed to his birddog, who bowed her speckled head
like a swan into the swamp
for a taste of silt-y dark
waters.

Side-by-side into the bird cave,
and in one gulp they were gone.
And for years those deaths hunted me, and I never entered sanctuary.
But I'm not afraid of death anymore.
I've come back
from something.

My body is moving, weeping
in ways that feel hard and wet and good.
I'm running.

I see the waking
drift sky as distance opening.

The osprey fans her sharp cry into ocean.
The osprey opens
her breast and arcs her wings at my coming.

The sun is a fossil rising over the breaks.
I'm moving toward it
through dark artifacts and dismembered maps
over trickling pools and arthritic pine root,

scaling the paths, falling
to scrape my skin
and gathering my limbs, wiping the bloody wetness.

I'm burning
through jungle into the sun's salt mouth.

Evaporation

Rain rattles the lawn and vanishes
into the thicket, from where it was formed.
Waters that live within are
revealing.
Hawks circle like vultures.
They are wedding me.
They are messages from the departed.
We mist through wood and air
alone. The yards grow
notes from the universe.
I long to walk upon the wet
violets—the violets
as the unfathomable core
of the fallen
clouds that form everywhere I look.

And If God Was Lost to Us

I. Gate

If I might capture you like a sepia in an oval locket. *Is it like this? Am I more to you—immaterial, without measure?*

Ask of me: *Where were you?* Think of me as obliged, pilfering the cages and cages of cosmos, hives of going, whys of limbs, ifs of the bees stealing

bags of honey out the bell-jars of begonias.

If you just said: Come find me for I've lost myself. Just said: The light-weaves in and out of a winter that remains the image

of a burial plot until light finds itself again and winter is distant.

Just said: To not make it out of January. Just said: Come here, I am ready to hunt and hunt for your face.

What is a face, but a cloud of name.

II. Windowpane

I have never trusted as intended. I comb and comb the knots out of the leaves of this winter who insists on shedding the dead

like fishscales of manna. Winter is biblical—old, tall, molded, in wait of a daughter. I study winter as I should study a singular word.

Love, I'll call you that. Love, I want winter to live but ask if she wants life if her body is a prison or image of stillness. *Is this too a gift? Is this*

what Love looks of in reflection?

To say: That worn version of judgement worries me. I wish to ask for it to evolve. Love evolve as I evolve

in thought. Love as the one who has always known me. Always

in Love's ribcage cradling the canary—Love's yellow opening.

Every book of Love's ancestry, leading through corridors

of a left-ventricle, loosening as a rose.

III. Staircase

On occasion, that old rage (that moved the mother to salt) seeps into Love like a flu. Sometimes to ask: *If Love and the Son are a single flame*

where is the Daughter?

To ask who was truly lost to Love. And then, I am the garden hose that freezes and leaks about herself, and sometimes I am a vacuum

that pulls the fear out from beneath the beds of thyme to wear in my cells like freckles of dust. On those days, I am thirst and water is a prayer

that begs to move my mind into something holier than it was.
Is this a terrible thing?

I know so little but expect everything.
I hunt and hunt through the shelves of something significant that I must know—
that appears to pursue me.

And if I was never lost to anyone. *Is Love anyone?*
Is this the meaning? I think of the original grief. Sometimes

just to feel it as the 4 o'clock sweep-through in the laundry room—
back to the beginning of everydayness.

If I could capture it like a shadow to dangle as a chandelier
of sparrows parting my daughters' beds like a perfectly dimmed bulb.

Second Story

Again & Again

1.

There is this need to fill absence with the sound that dwells behind darkrooms where a photographer must work to erect lithographs

of what's unspeakable. Truth as irrelevant in a room of relative strangers.
Why do I weep when the animals flyout, truth seeds, and the words

and the words won't stop? I can't stop opening onto everyone onto everything—
the kitchen counter is a shipwreck. Studio-floor is a sea I've dirtied

with an assemblage of paints that look like the slit of a swan's throat.
I can't pretend everything is only the surface of a pond. There is this need

to fall into the pond and get sickish-wet, I mean real-wet, I mean
cry in front of strangers wet. I can't stop this. I can't sit in that room

anymore, that room with the photo behind my artery of strangers
(who I'm on a first name basis with) and say: My biggest lie is—somehow

it all worked-out and leave it at that.

2.

What is the heart but an invisible existence. The heart as a country
and the body as border of earth. The mother re-named her son:

The Lord Will Provide, even as his old heart was collapsing,
even as there was always the possibility of real ending.

How does a mother ask a doctor: *What would you do?* And trust his answer.
What it felt like as she wept, as the doctor wept, as the child wept

and the ocean grew about them and the three of them became a boat.
What reached into the water is what lift them out of salt. This is a story

of three promises that restored a land in the night of a hospital room.

3.

To study an organ is to study where mind meets its rivers of electrical wires, holds hurt
as image—a hand that holds both the native and the foreign, as if they were destined

to meet. Sometimes, I think of the heart as the tree of knowledge. It branches and webs
into arcs of wilderness. *What did we do to the heart all those years ago*

in the blueing to injure the body in a way that was irreversible? I want to believe
that day the doctor said: My path is to open the body and re-wire the irreversible,

to take out the old hurt and hold it in my hand. To give love back, to restore an earth.
The goodness of that. The untouchable grief of a call that is answered

even before the boy is born. There was this deep need
that was pieced back together in a way that is beyond sympathy.

Memory of the Matter

Leaving you is the shedding of a rainbow
tree in New Guinea, the peel reddening, the heart
un-weld from the riddle, gut-gnawing the heart's removal
as it is un-wed from itself, as is the splinter of a shadow
in such a way that the shadow returns, disrobing
herself into a version of dark.

Wait, Outside the Heart-Transplant Room

Through the window of my hotel is an earthen-cement
parking garage. The sky is halo. An electric swell.
Lightposts wing into the gray. A building in the vanishing

has blue mirrored windows that reveal
the absence within the halo.
The garage blocks my view.

On my bed is a bowl of papaya. I pretend to hold the cell-
tower of current caught in mist. I'm taking the skywalk in an hour
to visit my sister who sits beside her son in a white room—his new

heart is a covenant, his body an ark.
Someone was born for this, and I want to ask if
a thimble of that love has rebuilt a temple—if we are more than organs.

When he slept through the anesthetic, if he found where we are hiding.
But I don't know how.
His face, her face, is the color of corona beyond the mist.

The parking garage is no different than a Fort.
The sky is a weep of salt

on a grayed winter Gulf
barren of tidlewaves.
It snowed this morning for a short time. Out of the tower it shook

like breakfast salt over a soft-spooned egg.
In this moment, in the rust-bleed of nails that mast the Fort together
in the bulleted wash of a faulted façade of face—

of the garage that holds our vehicles—
I hear the drum of the electric pump
heating the building.

The whole ocean falls as if to listen
for the rock of the body to open.

Donor

How does it close itself to some and open itself to another?

How does the body match? I think of the heart's failure
and her coming into this world—intact—as a savior.

I think of all years of existence. I think of God now
as a potter, the form, the cutting-apart of excess, of un-needed.
And inside the cup, the negative—but there, *empty* as a function
that holds the body of water. How water restores light.

The body holding herself, never knowing who the heart
belonged to first. Often, I think of God as water—this unending
Great Lake that turns into bog that turns into cumulus,
our bodies as cloud & clay, and earth as the holding
of arrivals and exits of light. All this time the creek and rain
that my sister and I swam in was coaled & lightless
mist over the mountain, as The God Who Never Left Us.

The light to remind us that before touch forms, rain is poured
there in the dark beyond the limits of goodbye.

Crow's Nest

The Way Pictures Pass While Driving

Sometimes, I think of God as a grandfather, a monolithic antebellum mansion whose foundation rattled from a quake—a war that no one felt but he felt with his whole being—and the monstrous pillars at the entrance, shutters shaking every time someone rang the doorbell. I think about that quake, what caused it, and how
How unhappy life appeared, hard, cryptic, no one ever said what they really felt, no one ever objected. A grandfather who just drank and blew-up. A child who hid all over the place.

I'll never know.

Sometimes, I think of God as a wife coming over the drawbridge, night edged to drop-off, and for a minute her thinking to edge-on over into the bay. But, she didn't. She hit the break and shot forward into the windshield. And she lived (on a lot in a stilt-house with no screens or glass windows, and that's where she stayed, and it couldn't have been romantic.) It was always July and she was always pregnant with an idea, and the mosquitos were ravenous and stormy. And real storms felt like the ocean was going to eat her and shook and shook the stilts and swooned and swooned the house—until she was sea-sick and fever-shaky.

Then there are nights God is a husband swaying, and the one time his wife stood-up to him—and shook him and told him the world was ending, and they had to get out of there—he picked himself up from the floor to rest his head on the electrical outlet to open his eye to say: *isn't it pretty*.

She Always Talks of Houses and Baptisms

A body as a home, a home as something inheritable, something that feels like a fixer-upper in need of renovation; a home that was once loved, antique of secrets and passage where children once hid out of the joy of hiding, out of the joy of being found. A home in need of cleaning, home that is haunted by a child who needs to talk, who keeps talking by flickering the lightbulbs and opening slammed closet doors, child who needs to be heard, who is lonesome, who speaks to no one now that the rooms empty and the spiders wasp in nests of corners under cabinetry.

Home who hears the creak of the door opening and perks up to close herself in the bedroom to peer-out and see the brave soul who dares enter.

She wonders if that's what is felt.

Winter House

There are many snowy rooms and aching un-level floors
beneath the attics, above the cellars, beneath
dark groundwaters seeping through foundation cracks
where mile-high pine wrangles
through fault-lines, through coal-shoots, through blackdust
opossum nesting sucklings, kerchiefs
around a mother's graying quills.
The way spillage from the rootcracks part cement
molding the falling-down souls together.
The way walls quiver. Windows pulse
when there's a knock at the door.

Outside the house? There the house holds years of dishevelment.
Thickets maze under the snowmoo. Tiny creaturely sockets peer
through, Alaskan-looking. Winter's jowl bangs shutters, rubs
the house raw.

Into the lovedark woods windowlight slips
combing for breathmark.

Attic in Grayscale

(1)

Light opens the iron-twisted stairwell

pulled with soldered twigs of grape and vine

lined in stumps of boxwoods and rotted verbena.

(2)

As the light peaks the threshold there the elk-head doorknocker

of patina and copper roots dust under the gothic

arch charcoaled with fabled fauna

of hives and wolves, of rooks

and jackrabbits, of dodos and toads

and walrus, of bearded lizards

and cockatoos, of jaguars

and orangutans, of koi falling from magpie

birdshells halved and ghosted in forests of yew and cypress.

(3)

It smells of moth and geranium.

(4)

Above the gothic arch is a triptych

of St. Francis kneeling before

a spotted fawn and burying a wooden book.

Purple bellflowers are trapped in the glass doorknob.

(5)

When you open the door—planked in lotus wood—

a mural of a black barn with a rose roundel

is eyed below this octagon thatched roof.

The black barn with the shuttered medallion is haloed in gray sun that seems to whorl

a seam of coal

or trail of smoke

or sable

lock of buffalo fur stuck in the plaster of tar and graphite.

(6)

There's nothing much to write home about.

Winter is over and the souls of the animals hibernate

behind the rare door.

I write postcards from Greenland

where the nor'easters and beluga are safe from the snow melt.

(7)

In the offseason, down the corridor, there's a guestroom with a leaky pane

overlooking sea cliffs and labyrinths.

(8)

Every now and then narwhals migrate through a telescope

and I capture them.

Here is what it looks like

to net a mammoth from the crow's perspective.

Passage to Iceland

It's been winter forever.
The cypress hollows herself and the wolf of winds unleash

to bang their furious brow of hails.
Mouthy white petals form the weeping.
Pomegranate trees avalanche in boulders

of snow—a hex over the queened crops
that surrender any return.
Sunflowers, the monarchs, forget themselves
and sear.

Branchless blossoms burst. Shriveled sheets of tobacco and wheat
tear and swell into ferocious seas
of debris—gobbled plows and unlit streets.

I navigate the boiling atlas, prodigal and daughtered.
The fields call out for anyone
to emerge out of the rock and well

to star our mother and country from this deep spell.
To resuscitate the lavenders—mouth to mouth—her black marbled
throne devoiced and grown more terrible than ever.

Black Swans of Winterdom

1.

Canadian Geese appear in the driveway confused as to why the violets break under the February mud. I want to tell them:

We are as fragile as the unsuspecting crocus
who has forgotten her season.

These creatures care nothing of it. Dark wings, the lovers, they continue to float and tongue and sink shaggy crowns rising and falling under the hot, hot sky.

And they will do this even in war, even as they know that they are going, even as they appear to erase every winter.

Coming back from the dead sometimes feels too green, unable.

2.

These geese remind me of something that I am trying to forget:

The sky is trying to remember her-self.

Winds are angry children who have lost their mothers—the memory of a mother, a mother who has forgotten herself, whose tantrum crashes the house, whose waters sweep for solitude and forgiveness.

3.

I am a weep of climate that shakes & blazes. Sun's memory evaporates, weather-vanes tornado counter-clockwise cawing an aloneness. I am an aloneness, a mother in a foreign country struggling to decipher the cryptic signs of lips (and this all happened because two lost-souls sitting in a garden—in France, or on a bench—decided to kiss.) It feels like:

The absence of dawn dangles above evergreen branches. Tourmaline timbers link below the biting. The glossy planet smiles behind raven clouds. Windows fog. Ice is painful to touch, her print-touch into the snowy hunt. Glass futures form an end like windshield frost, after wipers dismember the flakes. Crows sketch coal across the pale lampshade. Armies of fallout wings flare and split, the way coffee grains scatter across bone floor. Leaves clap hacked hands in fury. Sky lifts, wind snaps—that *swish, crack, collapse* of a glaciated swan melting the foyer of a wedding party somewhere in July.

Tundra

The girls and I haven't left the house/yard since

Saturday, eight days circle. He keeps bringing back supplies
as if we live in Northern Alaska, Upper-Eastern Siberia, nether lands. The girls imagine him

snowshoeing over treacherous distances, frozen
lake, etcetera. *Girl 1* says she hopes he doesn't get eaten by the

abominables. *Girl 2* assures
her they are only fish eaters. I keep to myself

the dreadful inclination that he is safe. Or maybe
already, his gill-fur drowned/eaten

delivered by ocean swell.

Friday

She smiled. She wept over the sink.
She dropped the razor in the shower.
People call her improbable, housey, wife-ish.

She'll not die. She felt that in the shower—
the rubber plant in the terracotta pot is invincible.

On the desk behind a round paperweight is a blue.
It's winter and the inks are booked behind the February
of many mothers. The chair of her desk is dark with starry eddies

or bees dismembered by the eclipse of a yellow mum's opening.
But this is an immaterial moon. She sits with
an empty red purse. The chair is a mural.

A hive follows—wherever she goes. She goes to the market.
She goes to the studio above the ice-rink.
She passes the bank.

She watches the giant limb outside the den window.
She thinks of the word *den* as this faith that is ravenous.
Bullets hide in her husband's shiny shoe, latched in a closet.

She shuts-up the news, makes the beds, puts on rainboots and heads-out
to buy gesso. Some days she feels that her house is a seize within the palm
of Marie Antionette. She is on her palms and knees

scrubbing the grout, her lungs are Clorox.
She bakes, chocolate rises the way toast-smoke rises.
Carpool is 3 o'clock. At 6 is the oven. 9 is prayer and grails of water

placed periodically on the edge
of a side-table to house an indescribable grip
floating her neck, in place.

Conservatory of Ceilings

Blueprints

In my husband's office there is a map marked with thumbtacks—
Indian Ocean, Ellsworth Land, Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh, the Arabian
Sea. How small our country is to Africa. It looks less like a burning
on draft. In my husband's library Alaska is close enough to belong to Russia.
The Bay of Bengal is an inverted chalice the way my body is a chalice
and the body within me grows our wedding. Ellsworth Land looks lonely
as an elephant reaching for the rim of Argentina, though none of this happens.
There's my silhouette hooked in the black of the stone-church against lead-glass
making my gown edged in tunnel, trainlamp—or that it's past the point of fire.
This is how he knows us—birth photographs, instants we enter the world
and the light wanting us back. He's lived here longer than I have. He's the reason
the heart is on a generator, and I read in his dark. The World Series drums on.
All that I can do is think about how he does it—the light and wire unending
us.

Figure Drawing

I want to say that I don't adore him. That he'll scatter seedash over
the tulips, over pondlilies, over warted toads, mermaid statues.
That the mason jar sprouting a mansion of hips and houseflies
will knock from the island by a paw or ponytail. I drop the aspirin
into well to keep it statued longer than expiration.

Slit torn petal like appleskin to wear it in my hair like Khalo—
a lace of weeds and all that wilting bed-red.

As if the stamens crawled out of me,
wove through like lattice.

Or the way rose moves in and out of winter.

Or I have a rose jar of all the dry petals.

Or I make pink teas and drink the intention.

The inside of me is blue. Blue as *how can it be?*

I've drunk a labyrinth of expression.

He knows. He knows. My body as a carving.

And that's always been the problem.

Passage Out of the Grotesque

Chapters 1-7:

He made it through prayer labyrinth, pumpkin vine thick as lumber, as calf fed boa constrictors—coils slinking to trip and mummy any form of love. His body a distant country, a question, an intruder to mine. He made it through shiphaze, his wrists a wish outstretched arrows like electrical current. Into my room, open as a wound. Blind as a rose. The sky was a slither hawking the attic.

At one point the walls reached out of boxwoods to devour him. But, he's not the others. If my body was a bell, I never knew that it was humming. He sliced through twig, trip-leaf. Through swans of winterdom, starbugs sharking the mote's scarface. To this un-shackled door carved into an image of The Virgin holding her halo—fountains ponding from her chest, loosening as a spirit. *And behind her?* This medallion of St. Francis holding a bluebird on his thumb—similar to a hallway of tapestries within the wing of museum.

The thing is, I might leave at any time. I was my own prison. I might walk through the tapestry into the stained-light of the day's museum. But, inside the door: monarchs, moths loomed my locks into Queen Anne's Lace.

I journaled daily, named the animals, painted the extinct into watercolor—ghosts of rhino, dodos, a sabertooth into the drop of darkmatter. There were persimmon scenes, animals hunting for muscadine hiccups of fungus. There was no death to speak about. Anyone else might have opened it.

He wanted to touch me and not to. I felt it. That's all that came of it. A touch, and I walked out the attic into the wailing herring, spouts of Baltic, belugas splaying air like bats of birds. Then, there was this memory of the way a newborn nuzzled.

I left the door unlatched. He opened the horizon of humpbacks, gardens of shipwreck that I waded through. He commanded me home, but the words ballooned-off.

I clutched my mother's compass in my pocket—buried in the pit of whalebone—the one that led to the Gulf, the bay, the boat, a daughter I longed to discover. I lipped the boy on the eyelid to quiet him. His love was a star, a half-grin booting the wetting dusk. He tasted the nape of my wrist with a blood-brothers' tongue. And without words we spoke of many hours from now.

And then.

Hunter, Huntress

A bear last

night in the backyard, in the clearing

where antlers eat the violet

my husband wants to cut. I want to grow into a forest.

My Husband Holds A Gun, Hesitant to Declare

Let her loosen her branches on her own accord.

Hold the bullet under the latch.

Let her eat the hives of blueberry and pillage the egg nests

until her fangs and paws are murderous

with the yolk of the good ground

—to whom does he speak?

Husband

Chapter 8:

It was all those spoiled particles in the water, sulfur and brine making her head bob and buoy. If it was obvious to anyone, it was obvious to me.

She left starfish stamps everywhere she walked
as if the marine leaked from her.

Sometimes I'd brush up against her arm
just to be near her again, skin damp and cold as bluegill, her sockets
glimmering something foggy, long braidlets kinked and twisted tangled into waterspouts.

Brushed it, just to be near her again. I'd blink three times
trying to make out the drift tumbleweed and shell bits falling from her locks.

Chapter 9:

After her starling was born we named her for that yellow wispy crown
flowering before the leaves remembered how to weep. She tried to hold her occasionally
but it was too painful, gutted and all, trying to quiet what was left of her humanness.

Sometimes, she sat by the creek dipping her toes in the warm murk, bathing
suit clasping her leaking breasts like loosening mollusk hulls.
Always near water as if she needed it to live, to breathe.

Chapter 10:

At night she'd sneak-out to skinny dip and I'd follow.

She'd walk alone staring straight-out, terrified to look up or
down, or maybe terrified isn't the right expression. She
stared aimless. Even then I knew she was staring at
something.

Always through wood rustle, through briar, I'd chase her into burrs, her slick coat clean.

We always ended-up at the same place hidden in waterfall, one of our only kept secrets
(I liked to think.) Our closet
of water crystalline and still. High enough on the mountain to wash down clean.

Clean like those waterfalls untouched by coal spills, threaded throughout trails. Even as some
turned night on their own—as if humans poured their lungs into them, sobbed their sores.
That body of water inhaling sorrow
until their chests started to throb and flutter.

The water taking in all the carry, turning the shade
of everything—black as God's metallic glove
smacking us down, calling us look up.

Chapter 11:

I loved her for speaking to the water, giving it all of her weep and tangle. I loved her for letting me know her this way, in the dark her body a lantern.

Sometimes it felt as if she'd never surface, as if she'd nest in the forest of catgut, snapping turtles round as hubcaps, water moccasins tonguing waterbugs, her moongills igniting the under.

I counted, counted until almost passing-out.

When she'd surfaced, stars on the waterface unraveled, trailing her glow, flipping as if her legs welded and webbed, turned into palm.

I felt myself drowning in her.

Creators

She's rearranged the room. The ceiling reminds her of marigolds browning
and white mums catching the light, yellowing
like a window. The floor is paw-scratched.
All the beasts are hidden in the backyard under the swings.

The abstract she paints is *The City in October*.
There are blacks and amber.
Lines erase into each other, perched above her vanity mirror, above her tiger's eye
bracelet, and perfumes of star anise.
She names her un-born daughter: The earth's center,
wise child, she who wears purple, empress of autumn rising—
never the fall.

She forgets what she looks like.
Her mind smells of peat and sea, the river and its eagle
mirrored in jade-ish lake, mythic trout thick and reddened as salmon.

To bring all of this, to leave it—
her quilt flowered in cursive and Genesis and oracle cards of angels.
Her bedside: a guardian
of candle and quartz animal carvings, the endangered.

This is where the world was made—under the sketch of a historic octagon barn
that struggles to exist
as the charcoal and inks erase.

Watering the Walls

She wrote letters cradled in dust and crumb under loose floorboards, under her great-grandmother's wardrobe in the sunroom.

She carried something that hung from her in ropes, draping arms and ankles like water chains, beading the rocker. As if her branchy locks looped veiny through spools and spire of antique carpentry, relic scraped forests crowding our home, firewood and souls smoldering around the hearth.

It came on the way birds and bees sense stormdust, scurrying from the gladiolas, packing up nectar pollen sacs, beaks bleeding hollyhocks, clenched worms sagging lures to newborns, loose-leaf crumpled and watery as cloud.

When she could do no more but sink into herself, I watched her slip farther into the woods as if she were that islet of lake where snakes and salamanders swarmed prehistoric, where thick-nit-battered leaves punched and spilled from a monstrous trunk, roots bound shallow ominous gulps that kept swallowing.

The rest of us in the boat reeling her silence, curling smoke fingerlings through air passages, clouding our lungs.

All that I wanted was to call her back before she forgot me.

I was afraid to wake her, as I was afraid to wake my father night-roaming, afraid he'd wake at the sight of me and not know how he got there, or worse fear himself, or me.

Sometimes I wrapped my body around her frozen toenails growing dead cells, sprouting back soil, even before burial. I was sad to lose her this way, even if only for a while.

I tried to quiet the uneasiness creaking my ribs, warning she was lost in that remoteness like a ghostclasp crawling through swamp to snatch her back, because he was alone and waiting. I tried to hush it.

Our boat lapped gray foam crest onto her eroding shore. She was safe awhile longer. I inhaled hard to close the sweep of her inside me, to keep her

from slipping away again.

She felt cold and earthy as spearmint gripping the back of my tonsils, as shade growing moldy veils under shed eaves, patchwork lattice, or light-edged river birch shucking her onion skin. She smelled rusty and sweet as uncured tobacco dewed in blue-dye under the morning sear rolled-up weepy, lit under a father's chin.

I took her sadness without her knowing, carried it in me like a baby growing to stone.
As if the more of myself I vanished, the longer she might live.

Nursery

Parentology and the Dictionary of Extinction

1.

Home from the farmer's market marred in organic, we speak of *divorce* as though it was ever an option—ripe and dented, bruised as the avocado meat, splintered as the wooden-hearted olive, pit chewable, dark and dissolvable.

~

My whiskery corporal suggests weeding and bleeding the marigolds.
Suggests exhaling

a few tokes	every now and then
to steady the	nervous system
	to forget

all of this.

2.

We speak often of meeting and leaving, the effects of bringing another life into this falling—clouds gathering acid, raining away.

What is *extinction*: Empty planets circling the sun.
Frozen ocean sounds as river.
Windshield after the bug, the bird
beaks web into laminated glass, warm wind nudges one piece down
with a *bing*
 one by one
 in formation
 they av-
 a-
 lanche.

~

Buzz Pollination: The way bees vibrate the orchid, loosen pollen. The way my husband's base cello quivers the resin.

Born by bees (*bay-bees* says our daughter are carried in sting-teeth are placed as we sleep beneath pillows.) We adopt this way—

sea-mammals beached, eardrums shattered, beating.

Engines

My, my how the ignitions have changed—you wreck
the playmobile splat as an ant at the top of the hill. I

rode my father's lap over curve road, shot
gun

my mother sat, child in lap. Learning to drive
at nine waving to police, my brother

summersault in the backseat naked-
toed, dirty-teeth giving grin. Now you

in the carseat caught as a cat, your bite
marks fray the gray weave.

XXX

My first wreck pulling-out from a boy, his wreckage
deployed into formation. Northerly geese

made signs, heading down. I missed the
blink turn—Black Moon, eye-shut.

Into my side, the bag-less bangled
airbag, my body thrash into splintered shard,

shrapnel, limp. His Clapton cassettes
unraveled in the tape deck.

And you who may never know him
found my stash of him. Photographs and dance fairy like bullets

from your bubblegum
corvette, bring your father to his knees.

Thank You Note to the Free Public Library

Storytime saved my life those formative years
when munchkins crawled to talon my thighs the moment their rumps met the floor
or wept the abandonment of my arms, my right hip
whelped into a bruise of South Dakota.

Those days of my zombie apocalypse, I saw dark clouds coving
my sockets, I saw the blur of reflection, unfamiliar and vacant.
Asleep on the toilet or bathmat, I catnapped until one shrill chirp
of the cardinal broke the REM cycle and the roster cocked and shattered

my darlings into the panic of waking alone in their cribs.
I slept with babies on my chest, on my damaged side
and fantasized the rubber mats puzzled into alphabet, where my roly-polies learned
to topple onto the laps of smiling mothers.

What Are They?

The weeping cherry unlocks her moth of blossoms—

sun gulps her grow-up shade

and flies into the cave of schoolyard.

Forests of chestnut collapse

dark over our horse, her jaguar-eyed

amethyst, electric against my flash-

light, her gallop crashes over iced kindling.

Everything I've thrown out of me

thaws beneath the pummeling. Everything I am

is a dead recovery. In the field of snow and crocus

she is the daffodil bolts, head-up.

In the field of violet and dandelion the rays name her human. In the coppice

she is animal, spirit. I wonder—as she unbraids, as she unlocks the wind and twirls

like hay winged in the weathervane, and rust—what she was before she came for us.

And I decide that she was, she is

the wildest of the wild

survivor of the mountain scalp.

Sleeping Arrangements

Into our wrestling wring

you come wearing the panic.

You slip amid
as a near death

your father and I, and he roars

lion, groggy and disgruntled, he hungers

for the gulley
we flood,

the odyssey between.

I wrap in your mane and arms

as the

koala upon the eucalyptus tree, as the

meadow
upon the earth,

you spun within me

your skeletal

wings, and I clothe

you, and you

clothe me.

Pet Cemetery

Sky is a fire and our bodies sob out the toxins. Succulents on the sunporch twist and thorn as age-old elk antlers budding out of the worry. There's a dead wren on the shale floor. Mute flute. Her tit-less miniatures rise beaks out of the blue

wren house. Even the cactus might starve. We can't let this happen again. Not even the dog. Even the dog resurrects the lilies, eggplant, cabbage, blazing star rows of animal mashed melon. We can't let this happen again. We gather buckets

of borers, blister beetles, crickets, caterpillars, scuttles, slithers to mother the orphans in the birdhouse on our sunporch sleeping beside the rose antlers. Neighborhoods burn of cedar and smog sun. It's Saturday and we keep crying

for the animals. There's nothing to resurrect a wish; and I wish for Jesus. I wish for that way an electrician man-handles the copperwire, conduit to harness life into breathing machines for burn-victims in ICU. Even he keeps

us afloat, alive long-enough, in and out of hospital rooms. I want to bring the hatchling's mother back. I don't want to nurse them. I want to touch her like Lazarus. I just want her to get-up and do her job, because I don't know how to fill her absence. There is nothing

to sooth the un-namable sobs of cyclone. The dog is a season digging-up the mess to bury this Easter.

How You Were Formed, Even Then

You made it through the fractions, plausibility, percentage that said you wouldn't make it.

I'm not sure if it works this way or not. If you knew what you were getting into, if we are any different than the persimmon seed discarded from the bulb buried in coal hibernating to burst, a blink

in that great unhinging spill, until a feeling comes like a chill or maybe a knowing.

Binoculars

1.

The broom broke so they can't fly anymore.

Spindles hang the brush pile.
Inside we hold hollow flammable paper-rolls
glued siamese—cylinders painted camouflage
for finding them.

In hallucinogenic dark teathy growth
our parents lost their wings.

2.

Leaves scratch our backpacks, things we need: pages, bent
crumbed leaves, quilled pens
hanging our necks by string,
raggedy dolls with dangly
button-eyes, we pop-off.
Our mother will sew back again.

3.

Inside the treehouse
amphibian eyelids blink neon, bat voices scream
from the pit of our hunger
the moment before we are gobbled.

Our parents bear the clear edge
too close to the singe, too close to the broke metal
rings.

Near her, near him, our life-lines end.

Our parent's bodies billow downstream, to meet.

4.

When they speak
char-wet clouds net the stormy roof.

Our fingers poke through the smoke holes, reach to catch them.

Hieroglyphs

Onto the grass and tree-back she wrings what's inside her: cyclone
of sun, of stem, of stray strand

unraveling her pajamas—handprint cast like a hatchling
within her nest. She names *reflection*, she names *electric*, she names *labyrinth*.

And of the concrete she makes clay mosaics, a family
off-kilter from summer. Pansies storm into technicolor, into the umber

path of the unhinged home, welcome mat, cloaked windows.
That's a dad in the ball-cap playing peek with his thinning, dad parading daddy-juice

in the koozie that looks like a bass mouth, hook dangling like an earring
from his gill-lip. That's a mom in the dangly—her skirt

blowing-up like a parachute.

Pantry

And If She Died, She Died Walking the Market

Seasons of fruits and meats temple-ed round and above
walls of hooked carcass, pyramids of pineapple
netted in rickshaws, roads of mangos woven
into bassinets, like mammoth pods birthed from a relic tree,
hidden for centuries within a rainforest
guarded by tigers.

Starfruits ripened, and the fires inside
her body broke into monsoon,
as if the lotus within her spoke
and fevered
through the tented rows
of labored-flesh and soil—

as if the lotus closed the idea of love, to rest it.

Where Mouths Withered and Water Grew Too Dim to Drink

Loam spatter stroked the hem of her hidden
sweat, the soil swelled into river.
Her host mapped the terracotta mosque crowned in minarets
dawning the crest—bamboo shoots stabbed
through etchings of an eroding
history, through the spirit of emptied baked earth.
Through fished waters to the village
where her guide was born, where women swathed in sari
pounded rice and spangled horizon like baroque
lanterns, precious metals buried within the mountains
her father spent his life killing.
She navigated the waters into mangrove—into God’s story.
God cut the jewelry of the palm tree
with his machete, the heart of it stoned and carved and handed to her
like a head. He speared
the coconut
until it severed and opened.
Warm milky spillage
like death and seeds, called her alive.

Blood on the Napkin

Proof 3:

The whole-wide world is an autumnal orchard, a Gothic renovation. I've inherited an empty box, my child asks to fill with mums and anise. To gobble and rip.

Proof 2:

Afterhours the lights turn pumpkin melting the bark sky, clearing milky city houses gone black and non-existent. Streetlamps as the constellations we've studied all these years—making our way without them.

Proof 1:

The dollhouse dismembered on the front cement stoop is the deconstruction before the rebuild. The heart holds an accordion, a garden of iguanas, barbed-wired rosebushes, an eskimo, a cabbage black as licorice.

Apron

She goes before you opening the light, shaking the beetles from the leaves
like rain. If there is a hawk, she has presented the hawk.

This is what moves for you
when you ask of her.

The tree is not sick; but stills to beg for resting. Rest and write of her
until she belongs to you in the formless street, collecting the beetlewilt

of each snow crossing. The asphalt, the sprig bears her worn will & testament
& the unlock

of what is missing
like two jet streams unaware of the other's skyface, who face. This

mulberry silhouette on your frostpane is a left-ventricle souring—an atlas
erasing its own handprint, letterback.

Behind the Library

Head-back to the Grave of Orchard Hill

Canyons and vales were born within the hollows of a slaughter barn.
God staggered onto the porch out of the orange orchard
and drank a cup of iced water. That ice barreled like the avalanche
of a glacier through artery to brew an arctic swelter. That glacier stopped
choking what was left of the sun. Then there was you needing to quench
the fires rising out of candled rows of rotting orange—sky's hemorrhage
of ant-red, ground lit and smashed as a jack-o-lantern. You were hot
and thirsty, your body a weep of salt on the wax wicked porch.
A betrayal etched into the scrolls of your cells and passed down
like a legend. Your sorrows shed into creek bled-out of banks
and winding seams. You were left alone to shriveled lands
(and inside your cells formed latticed landscapes of cactus—
knifed spines.) You assumed God just left you to that thirst
as a penance. Your infants, the peelings, willowed into the spider
of an unquenchable October. Orchard limbs and bulbs cast a widow-
veil over the ending, where you lived in the fall-away of a ravine.
Solder-iron vine twisted gates under gaslight
and exhaust. There was an apple orchard in the cradle of a fertile vale
where a house lived within lasso branches of pinks and galas, where
trees bowed and crippled like crests of tides, and the strawberry moon
had a mind. You were just a child, lying in the hammock naming throbs
of clouds and insects, when you were bit into like an apple (by a garden snake.)
God was lost in rust-holed tractors swallowed in kudzu and thirsty
blue-brute vines. You almost died. You were terrified to bother a man
back from the smoke-black barn to hatchet the snake-fang lodged in your bone.
So, you decapitated that snake to ensure that it wouldn't resurrect itself—
stretched-out in grass under slithers of moon beneath the hammock, north
a gleam emerging, pines of weep turning the orchard into ropes, as God drank
himself to sleep on the bleeding orange hood of a dead engine.
Your baptism into the hallowed curse of tolerance. Though, you didn't really
die. No woman ever died—though they knew no better than to try to.

God of the Daughter

Who said this doesn't erase him? Lines rust from the chemicals
a hand soaked in the darkroom those beginning years of her life
when the burn made photographs. Those hours he tried to re-create
the grape-light to know the sun, the earth he wanted to believe
made every breathing-thing for a specific purpose.

Who was trying to capture the landscape for a reason?

The mountains she's always known are becoming flattened with time—
the cratered face of a living mammal.

She'll be fine. He wants to believe this.

She will be fine, and none of this will matter.

Into the Dovedark

The way those of your blood crossover into the family plot hidden in ropes
of bottle and houndbone and hair and hemlock.

Ivy and hollyhock skeletal as ladybugs wilting the ridge of a windowsill.

A sill of barbed-wire. A cemetery gate

hung behind the flesh of a vacant house.

When I Lived in My Parent's Old, Old Big Gray with A Lily Entry

Chestnut blighted armoires tall and ravine enough to crawl into and get lost in for centuries, where God stored his camera equipment—snaps of calyx and rootbend, apricot fruit bowls basked in shadow, always searching for the source of glint that makes us all reveal. A house of stairs, creak, knobs, skeleton keys that lead to an attic sewing room with a separate phoneline for the myriad of drifters who once rented the third floor. I'd meander through darkrooms—shots of North American wildlife, hawks and tulip blossoms mat against sun and falling. I'd listened to the renter's (above) talk for hours—talk of clocking-out, day-chores, and the sore silence of waiting for the other to end first. Sometimes, I swore they were deceased, the phone was forgotten, and I was the only one who knew about it. Sometimes the departed talked of the day they fished *damn* rainbow trout jittery and slipping through lure, current, netting. How warm water felt. How when they touched someone they *really* loved they were losing themselves. Again, flies skimming jackets, mosquitos over lake. Apologizing over and over for the line lodged into the hem, how close that cast came to nicking a calve, a neck.

In the Land of Sirens and Dry Landfish

Those years of early deaths, a boy who wanted to kiss her died of a fire in his lungs. Her grandfather—bald as the after-mines—gurgled his liver to death. One kind uncle on the orchard smacked a tractor into the rib of his home and went limp. Days and days of Revelation preached from the pulpit. She was told her father drowned when he skipped sermons to fish. Every Sunday, she evaporated into a fight. And he grew gills. That kiss died on a chicken clawed couch upholstered in olive and intertwined thorns of honeybees hiding within the carmen lip of an opening rose. Light was sick from the smoke of a father's lungs and ashy lampshade. Light graffitied her stomach and all that was inside. That kiss drowned the night it sought to know her through the darkening carmen of her hinged lips. To know the opening and closing of her hues like an attic trunk. That kiss died of an asthma attack on the couch in crow arms. Died after doing backflips on the trampoline. That kiss burned a cigarette door in the trampoline; broke into her bedroom and stole her jeans. She slept on the trampoline night after night and thought of an uncle she met once, the kindness of a man who spoiled the earth with his body and ate cold apple pie for breakfast. Thought of the wreckage a father left, a mother in the crimson carpeted house of antiques, dimming without him. She wanted the blackdoor of the trampoline to split in-half like dead sea. She wanted to rip its tarp with the dirty hooks of hangnails. To know the kiss her friend took—what it felt and tasted of. She heard the howl of it leak-out at his funeral and evaporate into quakes that shook rafters and shattered stainglass etchings of peacelilies. She'd never heard the hole of someone resonate like that, like the bang of a primordial organ or cannon let-loose from the blackcave of a hot ocean. The way it sired the body-walls and tremored vein passages. The way that sight of his mother down in grave clawing the coffin open like a barren raven is buried in her islet of whalebone and shipwrecks. She vowed that May to never want or to love. And locked her gills, her head, and chest.

Root and Spindle

Blackberry vines weave barbed wire the way they wore Jesus. It's hard to tell
where the living end and the dead begin, the twisty bramble, the corpse-knifed steel.

The mountains look like they own us,
as if we are copperheads roaming their tangled bristle hair,

nesting blackberries the size of eyes, of spoons.
Inside the prickle crest, the morning scent of snake lines

our roads, distills into mist, into essence, into spirit
after the river miscarries her swell

all-over every path, every bloom, all-over our bottomlands
where baby copperheads abandon mothers

to slither over ridge, to gaze seas of knit leaves beyond
the basin, to want everything beyond the falling

trees. Roaming copperheads latching on-
to trunks, to ankles, milk venom released, un-relenting, unsure how to cease the toxic
grip. Shriveled little coils scared, spilling themselves into strangers.

Thorn bush lining my mother's land tears and fangs

into the crevice of my fingerprint, the map of me. It stings
like a wasp, smells of milky-sweet honeycombs molding walls, swelling

as ground after hard rain. This rainless day
grass browns under our feet. Sky has forgotten July. Droppings of gunpowder

blow hard up here. Juniper quills soothe into brittle, into wind
like tired fireworks. My mother

teaches me the language of blackberries, of healing.
Astringent bulbs sooth her pricks, her open wounds lather

in black, drink venom dry.

We ate blackberry cobbler every July even after grandfather died, even after

his bald head glowed a sick moon. The man who haunted
our fire skies, smelled of Juniper, of swamp-pine fog beating

sweat along the door-hinge, our crescent eyes, swollen-shut. The worst she said
was the moment he came home from the belly

of earth, picket and lunch pail, flooded tar palms.
The worst was never timing his blood-rooting eyes with the next blow-up.

I imagine her bedroom camp-home stained in the residue of dynamite, the flashing
brilliant night vanishing to black, until every kitchen lamp darkened

and she stood alone in the godless hollow listening
to the swallows, death-drink eating his brain

the way a snake bite spiders into veins, into limp limbs, into dark purple, into stillness.

I think of what I have learned from my mother about survival

as the blackberries spread like iodine along her hands, her wrists. She is becoming
a beaten beet, a blood crushed rose, this rooted bush pulling her into its center

like she is the bloom it is missing, like she belongs in the woven thorn
nest, in the rust halos, in the company of snake handlers.

Hallways & Staircase

A Crow Perched Upon the Rubble Pile, River Swell A Few Decades Old

Yellow-orange pumpkin flowers sprout
the rust-holed refrigerator, treadle tires, blood
swathed chicken wire, pitchfork. Snake-like
lianas gobble the crow alive. Musquee de Provence
squash brought-back from deployments form
heirloom rounds ranging the size of bullets to babies—
glow-orangey goggles in the blacked-out gullies,
fern and lily-vine can't asylum. Deep in the gut-piles
night slides. Kudzu skulks to capture all of it. Golden-
rod blooms proof that the gardeners are extinct.
The graying house sheds gutters—clapboards
dip, melt. Cracked glassy panes anchor the grassy
wreck. Hornets stab in and out of plastic shells
swimming tobacco spit, cradling syringe. The ground
was toxic, once. Now that the tenants are gone,
weeds build the miracle.

Blackstar

1.

What if the Earth is a mother who is missing? I look for her
as though she were my own mother, born within the well
of a coal shoot, living in a land that was always
un-ownable.

If she left, she left
after her father was wolfed into a cough of blackstars
like his father, and his father—

in wait
of becoming the diamond that was promised.

2.

Some nights, I count back my fathers
who settled the vale before roads when it was sacred, when
land was unnamable, when names were as missing
as buffalo, fallow deer, panther.

When trees skyscraped the width of a giant's black ankle.

If it was different,
and this road wasn't around, and these houses weren't temples of unblighted chestnut—
needled leaf tall as beanstalk disappearing
in cloud, the width of a Great Sequoia. Hard to believe in, the way it's hard to believe
butterflies grow extinct.

Here where they are everywhere.

3.

And if I dug, I dug for butterfly bones
beneath cracked crawdad dug, dug
until I sprouted the poison well jacketing my mother's ribs—
cloaked like Styrofoam

unable to decompose, blanketing
charred air buoying catfish skulls stuck between creekbed—
the ones whose eyes fishermen forgot to blackout.

If she meanders, she meanders as a fish
through Catrons Valley, through Mary Alice, over Gulston to Bardo.

Bardo bears the crossing
from where she hailed.

4.

As I sleep on the porch, I dream of her and cross the railroad into Bardo,
and there she is talking of Dante and Christmas; windows
scrolled with shaleburn from a mountainside that was struck by lightening.

There the road turned to fire, and the fire kept burning, burning away
the path to some secret—the Sequoia
Energy Company coaltemple flaming, looking nothing
of her memory.

Her gray house somewhere beneath
gravel—where winter squash gardens spill
soft yellow molars.

Less of itself now than I remember.

5.

My fathers carved this road before coal, this road that led to the end of her
and the beginning of me, road that drank her family.

I'm trying to make sense of it—
none were miners, all were farmers and preachers
who became loggers.

Now all the trees within reach are sickly.
And none of this was supposed to begin this way.

The souls of my kin are trying to tell me—leaves are quaking, and the creek
shoots hard to run herself to death.

6.

This gallery of land is a sea without sinkholes, to get lost in.
And, if her heart sank, it sank

in creekrock—shaded in mimosa canopies cooling
as it rained, as waters rose. Many babystones

rise the waxlit hillside, eroding
votives. And, I wonder if we are them.

7.

It's unbelievable to witness the stars cross.

Our fathers sold the rebuild of a dead sea—sleet of olive & leaf—
to men who forgot how to roam and tend. And those men slit
the earth's gut—her blood-wrist in rivers
causing my mother's skulls of hedge rose

to turn black as the Bible's mouth, and mine later.

8.

What I know of blood is that it shimmers as it unfolds.
And if coal is a blackstar it makes sense
that it ignites, that it is

power flaming, energy belonging inside something.
And when it pours-out, regardless, it pours

out into everything—
shawls and stones the lungs of all who cross it.

The Welders

There within the vanishing
where the sky slides into the basin
of the great well

the end is a burning mountain.
And I know. I've seen this—
the night a golden shield of heat.

This night someone threw a lighter
into a pile of switchgrass.

The flames are beasts
devouring Little Shepard's Trail and migrating Pine Mountain
beneath the Firetower.

We watch it burn for hours, burn
the hunt into chimney and relic, even the gray pigeons
cloud into bats heading south out of the smoke with the monarchs.

Someone wants to open themselves and show us
what they look like, so bad and bald and scalded.
Elk and cub deader than a carcass

hung from the horned owl
limbed in the chestnut—
a beaten rug-crushed dwelling.

Who wants to erase them?

I've heard explosions from the portals that belt the ground and quiver bone
and make the world feel like it's about to inherit the whole gray house.

I've seen the creeks choked with coal hearts
and fishbone, as if the damn unleashed her hells of rapids.
I've seen people bow and kneel like solitary boulders

darkened from the distant nothing, and no one comes to save them.
The rains are lost over another continent.
Fires gallop the mountains into mist.

Souls of smoke form boats navigating the Atlantic.
Our families gather the rivers and link arms to form a dark

human circle of sand and brick.

To Cure a Growth

Into the Wolf Moon scraped in a grave of ivy. Into shade-grove

mirroring a war of cathedral of canary of mountain eaten into beast
and ghost. Someone cleared the snapdragon path, seared his initial into each

log and sent it down river for butcher, to scald the land for retrieval
of black diamond. That's why the walls of my bedroom are holed

with fire blighted chestnut, why the Big Stumps are gone
and a father takes his head-lamp into the coal searching for saplings

to mark with hawk wreath, stag scent, a mother trailing
snow along the feathers. This trinity

like a wedding ring will keep a tree.

Hard, Awry, and Roving like Wood

I thought the world was this swelling valley, brown river, prickled pine splintered with shotgun holes, with wrecked hearts tending our names, the procession of dead beavers, plastic bags, the occasional body wrapped in torrent rags, color was green and gray and black, flowers were heirloom coal-eyed, potato-tailed, muddy lily of the valley like church bells bowing, bruised pulp like crushed tomatoes, hungry, and winter was an old photograph of ripe russet rose golds suiciding the spruce and hollyhock throbbing-out from the frail tapestry like stars, and home was the grandfather spruce, needles knocking on closed doors, flowering through power lines like ivy, like shadow, like kudzu crawling down, down rooting over all the breathing, turning telephone poles into green-leafed dinosaurs spreading and rising like yeast, and I thought the world was moldable and dark at 3 o'clock until I climbed to where the kudzu, the shadow, had years to peak, where the woods were thin and dove turning snow, and the world was eternal like crystal, twisted and weeping as a chandelier, and before me was the drought ocean beaten drift.

Light and Mineral

If I came home, I came home to the mountain and put sound to this
in a reclaimed coffeeshop at the mouth of the first coalmine
dug from our valley—beside the coal-tipple, up the neck
from a camp U.S. Steel formed—long before there was a girl.

The portal of the mine closed, a while ago. The coal-tipple is skinless
as a brontosaurus, a mammoth tusk needing house in a Natural
History Museum somewhere along the Potomac. A bathhouse
up the way doesn't wash the bodies anymore. On the hill,

foreman houses hawk over the basement—I mean the absence.
There's a rushing creek that runs under the coffeeshop. It appears
kind in here. It feels. Feels alive—even if someone hands me a cup
and says they don't believe in Evolution. Even if

a t-shirt on the wall says: On the 3rd day God created Coffee.
And, I want to ask if this is the same as blasphemy. I want to ask
if the book shelved with *Creator* as a noun pulls people
away from themselves and asks love to evolve into a singular

truth. Or, of love—love as dimensionless. Love as duality without organ.
The way a heart does not house what is holy—but moves
anti-bodies through veins of river to keep a beating
that the brain might think of holy as air.

The way it is removable—the heart—and the human
is still human. I want to ask of a tired *Creator*, like a retired judge.
An oldest story. I want to think of a new covenant
as a heart transplant. Of a netherworld for doctrine—worn-thought

dragging a girl into the thrush of woodbine, to hollow there—
because she loves who is unable to mirror the shadow image
of a garden that fell apart. I want to ask if shooing the girl into woodbine—alone-ing
her to the coyotes of her question—is a profanity of love.

But I don't. I'm tired of fighting, and I want the coffeeshop to live and create
cups named: *Fire in the Hole* and *Mayan Mocha*. I want to talk
about lost civilizations. I want to say: I love this
place, this and the window someone built long before

the renovation. This creek below me, this sun that ignites
the decomposition of a fall is a glory. Glory (if a color) is the daughter
of sun—refraction of a birthed light that provides the vision

of gold, touch of yellow. I want to say: the sun was here

before her, before my grandmother climbed to the cliff
and the valley was born in the opening of her sight, before a hunt
or arrow buried the atrium of buffalo. I want to say: This is God's
face the backhoes are defacing, that bodies buried in existing pillars

of the closed portal rest in the deepest recess of a mother's mind.
I want to say: I see the erasure of our parents. I want to say
my granddads' names: Solomon, Moses. My grandmothers':
Jerusalem, Mount. I want to say: God is a mother and a father.

Who will believe me if I say: *I feel it in the pine of my bone?*
The earth is a garden our parents tilled, tilled of themselves.
The mountains are burial mounds—children that died too young.
The pain, the sorrow of that. Way back I have an ancestor

who spoke in symbol. I wish I could remember her. She must be the one
who keeps delivering hawks to my windowsill, every time I worry
that the world will end, but then it doesn't end. I want to speak of these
trees falling. I want to translate: The flood is a scream that shatters.

Water is a glass. Someone condemns this. The memory
of our parents is located. They abandon here, us to us. Coyotes walk
the town as though they run it. Black bears string trashcans
down Main Street glittered as the aftermath of a Christmas

parade. It's beautiful to behold the take-over, roam and play
as they own it. Let them take it. Ivy moves into seams of steel
train cars that forget to move. Let them form their art. I'll photograph it.
Before Henry Ford, there was my grandmother. Let me say

her name was once a possession. Now, let me say her
name is: Daughters—Daughters of Earth—Inheritor—Girl in the
blinds—Of the treehouse who coyotes lick without puncture—
Of her own house—Temple.

In the lamplight of the lead-wash windowsill
of the Lamphouse Café, utility poles form a procession.
In the coffeehouse this cup is a heart-transplant, a breathing, the lamplight
on the dark wall. Electrical lines move the procession into a salvation.
This is the evolution—the warm I drink down. Good never ends here.

Trapdoor

Miniature Copper Key

Open your wooden trunk

to air the box-turtle who spends her entire life

looking. The desert. About waking

up to the un-pinking sky, lace of water

streaks as hair of cloud & snake & evaporation.

Your legs as though

you'd sat on a cactus, the cactus leaking

onto the boneyard, wanting

a sandstorm to swallow you there.

Just as It Was Told to You: *You Should Have Known*

You're standing on top of a cliffside, peering a weeping cave system
and the water is skin-brownish and the sound of water is a lull

and you're here alone, and daughters are safe at home
with a husband who would die for them

and you know that now. Even though you thought yourself a pacifist.
None of this ever had anything to do with them. You just

left a wedding and thought the end of the story
was a funeral. But it wasn't.

The end was a groom washing the bride's feet in a porcelain bowl
with wet linen. And a few men cried when she didn't

wash his.

Carcinogen of the Whale and Desert

She cut out her own whale tongue

and waterspouts swelled and bled

and blued forests weld the sky to see-through. And there the smoke-smudge
welded in the corner of creation like a ruptured sea. And spread.

Like industry, like disease

a woman buries the hurt boys, the boys who hurt her, within her body.

Out of her petrification, the whole universe

coughs and sheds. Instead thank her for that

bleed, rip of eye-seam that says: *I will not hurt you. Unless I have to.*

Housecat on the Sill of Shower Scenes

If she hands you a note, an option—check forever. The truth:
there were days she carried those boys, and there were days
they carried her. The truth:
she can't erase it. She's tried—even if she didn't, she's tried.

The truth:
she scraps layers of each boy with a palate knife.
Shedding a kneebone or the lens of icicle that spiders
the den-window with half a tongue—
declawed as a housecat. Her skin a blend, a calico
of linseed, acetone, dawn, acrid skin-oil. She scrapes each cell
of boy as if peeling a plum
until she finds the daughter, that pit of original color
like umber or tick or the way the first break
of womb is an outcry. Bent as a wishbone.

Black as beauty.

When She Felt Stuck Somewhere Within the Wilderness of it, it Happened

In the mountains; as the mountains are pressing.

When she led with the edge of acceptance, she'd move the boy,
move the girl to Buffalo grasslands
where the reels go and go
into eternity. She'd give the boy, give the girl,
a daughter to light the landscape—
long-armed grass shoots murdered
under mustang trample, mustangs crashing sky
and erasing the buzzards chasing after them.

It seemed to work in the plains, somewhere in a town
only read of in travel magazines bookshelf-ed
in a grandmother's hallway. All those places
clouded in lifetimes of applecores and screendust.

Unless it happened somewhere on a strip-mine; where mountains scrape-off
into Utah, through thornvine-rustsnake to the flattest place in the world.

If she came back here, lost
to barren land, to ask
where this life has gone.

That kind of heartache.

The Bridge and Locust

When we parked and got out of the truck,
I led the boy into the rake of spine and golden aster
down the moth mullein clotted ravine.

It was July

and the foxglove was cast in black sweeps
of cypress syringes and brambles
that sucked at our wrists and calves, leaving little marks—
needles from the wild rose cuts
braided and marred as feral appaloosa rivers
of mane.

The day sanded the green and scorched the steel.
I knelt on railroad ties, my palms and teeth
on the steel to sense for the coming train.
There were always eyes in the trees, amphibian
and tigered as a peregrine falcon—sporadic blinks
of witness.

The steel was mute as a stagnant lake.

I led him through the train tunnel, the black bat—his grip
a tremble of limbs.

He groped for my wrist and missed.

His fist clutched for me through the bear-bat dark.
His teeth starred as yarrow
through the grave of his mouth, his grip
a coming glove of cement
on my wrist, pulling my shirt into his.
He kept mouthing holdups.

And once, I swear, he said: *Please don't leave.*
I thought about it, about the hanging bulbs at both ends
of our blackness, the hole of our space—
an unused room of belief.
He might turn back, and I
on and on without him.
And the fable would morph into something half-human.

But inside the tunnel, coppery lightning lines swirled
the way the mountain swirls with coal seams
when the ground is halved like the spleen of a buffalo.
Bloods from the rips
in the mountain drowned the steel and ties

in drips. Our boots sogged under the roof leaks. There was the scent
of the tomb above us—
basement of marsh and echo, a snaking faucet.
The ceiling had its chance to collapse but didn't.

On the edge of the tunnel the light was a swamp candle.
The swamp candle burned and burned
until it opened

to the bridge that gloved hibiscus wetlands, dragonfly larvae, and a clutch of quail eggs.

Where black limbs jabbed out of the water like un-
mummied pharaohs, and hawk-billed snapping turtles
shallowed like baby lockness
out of the swamp to eat algae.

Everything between us was marigold.
The water, a pondlily.
My bodiless shirt a black lake in the stargrass.

Then he pushed me, and I showed him
how to splash my gasps and kick
up and up from the mud-gut like a bound and gagged Houdini.

The cathedral of the waterface grayed into the husk of a locust.
Anything we made between might have died there.

Sleeping Porch

Black Hair at Bedtime through the Telescope

The night is a multitude

of Arabian horses, blackish amber lassoes

locked in wild

hedgehog nests, holed and knotted in the boughs of a leaky pirateship—

nightpocked with afterlife, dotted as the dalmatian backed appaloosa

left to raise herself on the stripmine—

her coat grown thick and longish to survive

the wintertide. She weeps

and melts runoff over the rockcliffs.

What the End Will Look Like When It Comes

We leave for the fountains of Rome—
Fontana di Trevi holds my quarter

sea-cruised in wish and chlorine, long before I knew you.
It speaks to me.

We are better equipped, wrapping voltage conversion
plugs in panties and toothbrush, unraveling

archaic train maps gathering crinkles and pleats
tucked in mortgage & the wickless Virgin

candle & babynome & prayer
booked in our shelves. I rip a page

for our daughter to color, to buy time to buckle
our spilling luggage. The serrated film

of endings I may never speak.
We are going to find ourselves hiding

in the lemon trees, bright bulbs molding
daylight at our feet.

We are going to gather the knottings—
as we gather our daughter

tangled in paper & glue & shoestring.
You will recognize me

the way foreign language speaks in dream.
And we will walk the outskirts of the cobblestone

village, meadow and sea,
lifting her heirloom

hem, bowing
olive and dove—

salt-carved boats floating in from where the world falls off.

Garden Gate

There is a Wife Who Watches Tarkovsky's *The Mirror*, 1975

I.

The wife is a house, the figure of exploration, the screen—a vintage warming of black reels that still the build of climax with resign. She is repression—

hypnotic, anticlock-wise progression, a film akin to opera, or legato line birthing a phrase. Her child is a phrase.

The wife of the house is a still-life of rooms, where no one is really saved—
theoretical, spiritualist, an expression of consciousness—subliminal, un-intelligible,

speechless.

This is why she is a poem rather than a sentence—

communion that unlocks what only the hypnotist might reach, pure release.

(This is what the wife wants in the shower, a satisfaction that is never granted—as water

quits, always quits.)

II.

She wants God to speak to her the way he spoke to Moses.
What life allows her is a barn burning that stalls, silences, moves her
out of the rural genesis
of an unkempt landscape.

The wife is the destruction of the country.
In the city house, the husband watches and admires
her as himself—only from a distance (as that is how he knows his own
mother.)

III.

The husband makes the wife feel as though the house is not alone, the house is hovered, governed; while in truth the house is always alone (separate in the wife's mind—that element of existence the husband is unable to touch.) That element we only see in phrases, through the expression of her child. Inside the house, the wife is a mind—feminine, a construct of time, pre-pregnancy, post-partum, war of marriage, post-war of marriage—all of which are breakage, loss, depression in a dome of domestic ground-war (and thought control as witnessed in her attempt to close the door on the absurdity of cubical-like work that represses, of authority, of everydayness.)

Inside the house it rains through walls and the wife is caught. Everywhere she walks is a flood.

IV.

Her hours are a Rubik's, dimensional, sectioned
in time, in memory, and cuts
of line. Every scene twists
the Rubik's—upsetting the reveal
of her sadness of her
displacement within the containment
of marriage, within the wet walls of the city.

(The wife as a house, an object, a tour through rooms, a window-silhouette
lit in the shall of a husband's darkroom, or of God's room—
as though she's a photograph appearing to form his sight.)

V.

As the wife washes her hair, the gloss of sepia is more like an expression of water
crystalizing her, horrifying her, salting her.

Her mind is a falling-down
house. She doesn't fit within
the romanticism or the fractured
framing of modernization.

That's why she floats.

VI.

She's otherworldly—eternal, picked-upon, flawed,
but gracious in her devotion.

Everyone follows her around asking what happened.
She's looking at nothing, correcting nothing. But she saw something
that is no longer there—this is the entrance of what was
missing in her marriage—seeing a truth
that wasn't there or that was lost. An absence of
message. The husband is watching all of this, attempting
(in memory) to understand her, to know that trick
of the eye, what is ineffable, what broke.

It's like truth was stolen and restored by the warm
of a woman who second-guesses everything.

VII.

She cries over her desk lamp. She cries over seeing something that wasn't there.
She cries in relief, but in fear that she is losing herself, her mind.
Or, that it was there—
an act of betrayal or belief in God
or discontent of government—and was erased.

VIII.

So, the husband never knows the word that caused his wife to run out of the house through the rain to erase it. In the wife words are suppressed. Words are revealed through bouts of explosion. It's a wall of communication that never seems to fall.

The husband's memories are warmed and fractal, nostalgic and horror, of wanting to know his wife—himself—after she leaves, and he's abandoned to the unanswerable meaning of lovesickness.

In Want of Connection

The way harsh sun might blind a person or scald the skin if it beats
too hard through the ozone as it is erased through cigarette car-exhaust—despite
attempts to maintain. The resolve
is a return without
violence, or claim.

First Story

Forgiveness Garden

I.

We sat on a golden carpet thread in blue and wheat,
grinding watered coffee in a silver etched dallah.

I remember you, there beneath the sadness, a sandstone arch.
There was no gate or thunderclap or exit-

cloud moving through like an unfolding arm
of floating nuclear-water—all around us the blind sea

as monument to our existence. As warning.
And if I had to, I'd consume the deaf sea

to find you all over again.
You as relic. You as Art.

Dear son of son, I remember now the X-spot of our humanity
and the trail of cloud that arose

over the blue spine of the blue mountain
like a crop circle, our bodies enwinged as a bonsai—

rosy as a bull's-eye. No, no. The blush-eye of a peony.

II.

You were there among the jasmine starring-out of the urns,

unbutton of petal, white star-
fish wound in light.

The true jasmine, dangling loop vine.
Our lungs blued as chamomile.

Nighjars. Dove.
Parrot allies.

In the Forgiveness Garden—ruin of our civil strife—among the wall
of mosque, among the wall

of temple, church. Unscripted sphinx.

Absent desert. Though the cactus bloomed, sewed
turns of camellia

into white and pink shouts.
Lassoing olives, tonguing the seed

beneath the tree.
We broke lavish.

Thumbed into dust, into us
of willowed ground. Unbroken mouth—a reaching

slim branch. Between the rivering tigerous
lily, among nipples orange

flowers. Red
carnations sailing our glass, melt the water into pink

and our lips silvered. Blue star—the begonia
as a crown within you, naked as the absent grass.

III.

When you came to study the ancient ways of translation carved into the citywalks
the city was a blossom; and you met me in the center of it. I read decrypt books
open-aired in the street cafés and sipped half-cups of amethyst. Persian tea.
You were an array of American. Your hair was dusk and long and wavy as rain.
I remember the smell was rain. My skin was sunned earth. Your hair was dusk
and skinned as earth, as well.

*How did you find me there? And why did I have to go back to forgiveness without you—
and you to the mind of war? It was never the same, you know this.*

Now, here you are and still everything has changed.
Our skin our hair our accent translated into variants of light.
It was never the same, you know this. And this was as good as light.
And this was as good as darkness. You see, we are all alive and well in this.

Crawlspace with Mural

Return to Her Work

The way a tornado over the plains will eventually
pull back into its eye and open the sky
as if winds never occurred. This is the way
the movie ends with her asleep, as if homeless, locked in her
fold.

Tuesday

I painted the new heart today on an unprimed canvas.
Years from now oils and linseed will eat through the fine

Belgium linen to the wood cross-hatch holding the passages together.
This oil is a word on parchment, afterall. This is a story, arranged

canary. Canary as a lamp. Life yellowed—a vintage of containment.
Beneath the miscarriage of sea is a sky named: *The shedding*.

As though the rose of a saint fell. As what turns light holy.
The water-cycle as a cut of cloud wetting the desert

the way a body is a lake, the way a body is never speechless.
That's what it is afterall, isn't it? A continuance.

The way a film stills with paused image and light-print lingers
ascension over the night screen.

It's caught light. Where the absence goes
to tear canvas in a basement. The painting as lantern,

organism, transplant. A heart beating inside of another
heart. How nothing is erased. A question that I've known

since I was old enough to know. Where
light goes when the matter is a hideaway.

Alone in the Gallery of Fatherless Art

Someone often dies and there's nothing ordinary about it. I save
a seat beside me, an empty blue chair. No one sits beside me.

God walks with me into the museum. There are threads and intersecting lines
the way smoketails of jets crisscross and portal through lilac womb-ed clouds.

I'm thirsty. The walls are a milk, salt, sea. I am studying
signs—something untitled, something I am unable to name.

Here, I'm studying the threadlines—an apple core in the bluegrass field. The hand-drawn blank
sky gauzed in linen, silk, quill, twine. Window as a freeway of green and blue river-

birch, napkin, inside of a gyroscope, blood-dew of a pinprick. The way my
blue sheets at home in the sink hold the spill of my papercut. The way the sheets caught

the miscarriage of my mind, after I fell, after my husband climbed off, and I lost someone
my body loved. There is no redder pulp

than the bloodfall from inside when the blue bed is given a crush.

I'm studying the wall of forgotten dahlias and gator-bites, matchsticks left behind, bleeding-
out tears of flame, blue within the roomless view. I see an aborted room, without doors.

A mother looking for her burned-out sun. Windowless buildings and a white dove
on the edge of skyscraper brave enough to jump. Jagged embryos

in six panes. As if looking through a microscope and watching a virus multiply.
The fractured and re-formed world, everything in blue: huts of tribal masks, my lips after

drinking my husband's weathered neck. Like looking at sound or water molecules
after a long rain or dam break or the misting of the atmosphere after a nuclear fallout.

Sometimes the sky is a dustbowl and the night is removable, felt.

Born to Bare It

We're molding a bowl of recycled clay that has touched many hands—whose hands our bodies will know only through osmosis. My friend's husband died, and she talks of taking her kids to the east and never returning. We talk of how horrible it must have been to live as Hagar in the desert with a fevered son,

the dismissal of her body as thirst—and we talk of dismissal, those who want to know how our body rims within a single wave of wrist, the way what is missing might puzzle into the clutch of a cell that forever resides within a body—the way of DNA as it gives and un-forgives like toxin. Of the dismissal—how easy it was

never to come to something as incredible as distance. Or, those words: Follow me that *you* might study of me anywhere; meaning: Exist with me in the want—to want forever. Of dismissal in a way that is not dismissal—but a dissolving farewell. The worst as that sudden: You will never see me as physical, again.

My body removes from you—that part I don't get. This exit as the real break, then the coming back from that. And through her, I think on the loss of you and of *you* saying: You must leave before I leave to imagine love as a ghost—the many ways love returns as feather, entrance, animal in sleep; any flying—

even airplanes that shape an initial etched into an initial, the way we never possessed monogrammed towels. I'll think on those things and remember you. Remember me as a feeling. This bowl that opens as we press thumbs in the wet center to part the desert, this way we anchor fingers to pull the wall of bowl up & up

is just how we were made. And when the clay is off axis, we feel it within rhythm of the bowl, our palms cupping this throw of slip. We feel what the center is, the image of someone's light remaining in us; yet we have only for a moment known them. And only for a moment did they leave us. And of those moments, we crashed

their doors. We are the graying where the electric line and limbs met for a time in the evening after the storm. Fingerprints of strangers reside in what was made to last 100 years or more. My friend was left to death and that is everything that continues to exist. We say: Out of her deathwalk in the desert a well appeared to Hagar. Today,

this gritwater is a miracle, a wayout of the grave. In a bucket of stonesea we release our cuts and failures. We pull and tug the earth's story to reform it. This is what the beginning looks of every now and then—two girls smashing a brick of handwarm clay over a hold of cold coffee they are too engaged to drink.

Beneath Bluest Thunders of Babyblue is *this* Gold Girl in the Corner Who is Worn with Surrender, the Corner is a Marsh a Gold Bird Erasing from Her Shoulder

An artist washed the sea. I unwash it—sea oiled in snake-line, holes of humpback, sailboats shadowed of themselves. The sickish sea.
Boats of ghost. My daughter splattered pollocks in the corner of the canvas. It was time to paint over him—him who I desire to remember, as kind.

If he was kind, this is co-creating. If cruel as the word of a distant god, this is an un-wounding.

Let us begin: Cover the oil-light of creation—sun-wound in mist of a set sinking. Wipe-out the way a man sawed through-it, the way a backyard tombs limbslit from the powerline, the way hurricanes skews land and house to relative nonexistence.

I cover him into her black—the everything-color combined. I name the canvas: *My Son*. I un-title him, frame his oils (in bleeds of containment) turn a husband's son into a moon. And my moon bows-out extraterrestrial, blue. Blue. Blue-hearted candle—flame at the tip of a burn.

The canvas kilz of mold, dead thought, skein of a ridge jutting crumpled love notes petrified to mail. Paint him in womb, paled pinkish. Paint over the womb of parchment stoning the un-sent word, the un-expression. Of love? How moored—how dumbled to never, that light of want. Unwanting is mute-ink, a saltworn cliff of gray sea. Paint over the words in blue-night.

Who decided the moral of a color, anyway?

See: there is the father's hair black as horse. See: there is a girl, half-horse, half-hidden, half-father. An inheritance blue as raven, blue as the core found on an evening a child dug and dug to Prussia out her mother's mouth. And on the otherside, the world was an orange peel—brokeopen. Slipping.

If God is an artist, a painter who housed the seaside in a basement? Urned white into variants of expression—a mouth as black. *And him? The Father?* Speechless, when he opened the door to her foyer. And him saying: It was like Jesus, looking back at him. As if he were blinded to all that was ever known—the naming of the marigold, the orange.

If I handed him the fist of a rose? After all that's what it was:
Petal upon petal, a re-weaving of autumn. The way we unwinter.
If we must paint for survival—to put down a gun and move the gun
into an expression of rose. I did that. We did, that. Call this absolution.
Call this touching the out-line of bluelight,
deadlight of the chin in a hospital-white room.
Call this a resurrection. Or, just call it
by nickname: Blessing.

We wove from the heart-attack, outside the woodframe—a soul-drip
like bloodstain onto the studio floor. This is the first kiss, evolving.
This is God let go of the silent, welcoming back her oldest.

Earths Without Form

I scalp the dining table in one hard swipe of forearm, abdomen, swan-arched neck reaching, lying smack-flat on the plank of butchered forest, knife forked into the hand-me-down artifact—carving our names of snowfall, flame, shine, and flood; out of basement windows, daffodils eavesdrop, the thunder masters ways to make it. Scratched and scuffed, I've let them make of the table what they want.

In our house, the screen hums whitenoise over my loves. It feels too quiet, too right—letting them sleep through it, tiptoeing—as I throw the ocean pallet onto: *House of the Week*, onto *Obituary*, onto *Butchertown Street Revival*, onto her, onto his portrait.

When I felt alive, it was pre-Christmas and God invited me to his house; and God was an artist (or someone like a relative.) And the house mirrored the house of my childhood where attic tenants slept on oily rags and a floored mattress, where painters came and went as desired without a creak as they painted girls like that runaway whose father punched her so hard out-the door her heart ground into earth and graveled-over (then she was another ghost gliding in and out of rooms like our parents, or poets who took place in the attic.) I was so unmindful and dreaming. All that I knew was to call each artist: Owl. Owl quaking the planks, quivering the walls with breathings after midnight.

I was too young for Owl, but he liked me around. He asked to snap me in an old rocker in front of the window and pasted that portrait on the water-stained wall—in that image I was his capture.

It brought me back to life. I was the outline against the darkness begging to be the light—but not wanting to make much noise about it. All those years later when I walked into God on the city street (and he remembered the fall of my smile and crooked brow, and invited my husband and I to his ritzy Christmas Art-party, because he'd made something of himself and lived in a home with a myriad floors, and every room was his own) he was like that long-lost relative you accidentally un-earth living within a manor within a historic preservation within a crow's nest and telescope that captured the galaxy and made you feel small, made you feel the size of an atom inside of a speck, enlightened and ancient.

The entry to his home was lined with balding antebellum columns large as a whale's bite; and when the doors opened, I swear I tasted salt as the foyer wove into ocean and abstract; and I swear I was gliding into the heart of something—into the belly of a great white after he satisfied a hunger and still hungered for something; and it looked as though the earth burst—her gut and our names as her being; and the tails of our comets passed through

and our trails of dust tornadoed with warmth of soil and scarlet and gold—our color upon color
furious and waiting, the color of blood & sky & bird & wolf & winter & winter
& royal plum; and the memory of summer was ochre city dusk as something that never dies
but fails and keeps coming back from the graveyard dirty and drift.

Walking through his rooms made me want to know him until he forgot how to breathe and went
home. Most of my life I felt people edge through me. And that time he painted me, even though
he never touched me, I felt whole.

See It—There. There Above the Fire and the Mantel

When you let me sit in your living space, and I was too broke to afford to touch anything, you gave me your cup of noir and said drink, drink, drink *love* and tell me: *Are you creating?* I was spinning—

and the canvas the size of school-buses; and buckets leaked hair and nail locked into the acrylic; and the bodies (yours and theirs) and the birth; and you making me feel real sitting distant at the end of a chair in evening splinter; over there someone wrapped in a blanket, someone with a bath-towel cleaning up the splatters; and there the infant someone (that whitespace in the far corner the size of a hummingbird, a star) and movement like thrashing, swirling, weeping, and break-through of laughter in the middle of spilling onto concrete; like being seen for the first time; and black splinters as the earthquakes, moments when we turn away from each other and get up.

Teatime

The orange coy on the lamp swims in aquamarine, porcelain sky, lotus yellowed
as pineapple skins, seagrass, a cobalt blue dagger.

There's a framed watercolor above the fireplace. In it an empty canvas and an empty chair.
You live in that painting of mute walls, insipid nimbus, concrete floor, a pigeon-gray.

Grains of easel and a metal folded chair erase the walls and floor.
You are alone most of the time in these walls. You have been here for years, or more.

Sky is an alone-sea and treeless. The ghost of this house could have been you
clattering the teacups, dampening the knockouts, opening and closing the wardrobes,

un-tucking children from white, white sheets. But it isn't.

This morning flewout into the florescent, and a daughter asks & asks why mothers
vanish into sepias of held light. You wept her into a held light. How lonely the lawn

looks and looks. This is why the painting is a painting and not a vacant body. Why
an empty canvas becomes the foyer and drips fluids of puddle on the floor.

Inside the walls is this present hang of evening.

Expedition

I was too busy, studying
her light to notice an escape.

In Response to an Absence

You are not here, but you are here
with me today under the lamp of afterhour

in the café where there is only room for white tea, a letter of air, the Eiffel
of an electrical tower that says: I am here

arriving below the jet-stream.

And I think of the ember of your voice as a shade
over the hot concrete on this day I've come to know.

There is no particular reason. Except, today I've no one to tell
of the chrysanthemum vines dying—

but to know they are not dying

to create the concrete and fashion the walls.
I want to say that they must, you know—

everytime January says: It's time for nothing extraordinary.
I want to say something extraordinary

has occurred—that someone has arrived

that someone once died somehow unexpectedly
and it finds me & I think of your voice

within the wire & I think of the air as ocean
& memory as a scroll bound in the twine of parking-garage vine

in a blueglass, blueglass as the sky

and the sky as you—as your intention unfolded
like the tongue of a graying bullet

(but the bullet as an arrowhead
and the arrowhead as a folded leaf

archaic under the boot of an Art student drawn to class

knit in crochet, as if he were hiding within a lamb.)
I want to tell you of the student, that he kicked the map of a leaf toward me

as I sipped the foam-heart out of my almond milk

& even the museum seems hurried.
Just that, I come when I am uncertain.

Just that, I am uncertain
of nothing particular.

And there after all the years of needed arrival, the leaf.
Sometimes just to know the way of another's language. That's all.

Often, I walk through January to return

a library & how decadent it is to walk
alone—vines upping the parking-garage, vines as wishbones

someone forgot to unhook.
The boy is running to class, now.

I like his glide & hurry

toward a book someone has ordained worthy.

How I long for a typewriter, a pot of ink that turns

your entrance. The stain of a tree folds into my ribcage.

To Echo the Electric Lines of a House

My pottery teacher sat down at the wheel in a low chair with a student today and just talked about what it's like to throw a bowl, to pull clay as if to never touch it, to build a lip, a wall. She asked the student to hang the air, palm the air, like a stop sign; and set her palm to push against the student's, a slight touch—to know the resistance of energy meeting, the tension, the pulling-away and pressing at the same time.

This is how a flat fist of earth moves into the body of a house and makes something useful. It's that she wasn't afraid to sit with her, beside her, and say:

Hey this is a hard thing, let me show you how it feels to own it.

It's that she saw a need and filled it with her presence.

God of the Badland, God of the Good Ground

Take her home to the dam and the spillway
covered in a spray-paint of name—that family farm under a man-made lake
armies of engineers swamped, where a tree holds her. Carve your name
beside hers. Leave the bones or whittle them away with your pocket-
knife, to a bald-spot of memory. What she remembers is that she's felt
love. What she remembers is the well of lake around her ankles.
She's the walk into the sundown of that train-tunnel. She's the jump off the bridge
into algae, lily, watersnake. She's steam inside the shot-
gun of truck. If she wants to kiss you on the cheek too close to your lip.
If she wants to loosen her shirt to sun a bra or not,
when she is a sky too boiled for clothes. If she wants to talk, she'll talk. If not
she'll fall from the tire-swing to swim with or without
clothes, to dry on the bank like a cat-gill retrieved from the drainage-pipe.
What she remembers is only wanting there, with or without you.
What she remembers is asking you to stay longer than she asked any other.
There with maps of pathways out of a mine,
where coal is a lamp. In the valley of occasional explosion—
where rarely—a house was shelled. Back to the coal-monument
& roadkill. Back to mountain-flat where the sky is never an ending
and milkweed is real and bent. Back to waterfall & creek, rare ran-black,
black as moonscape—clearer now that mines are boarded.
Back to spill, alone under dark until it clears. Let her burn
sun-wrecked, pollen-ed, fevered under that early fall over the laurel.
Ask her five times if she wants you to know her in a way no one has ever known her—
radio from the truck as her background, stoneface of a ridge to keep you
glancing over a shoulder feeling guilty enough. Hook a carp
if she's half-naked or not, as she writes what she's never going to tell you
in the crushed snail-shells and worn-worry bed of the bank.
Turn as though you're not seeing what she wants. Keep the shot-
gun window down—windcut, tornado on the drive back
pulling her hair. Pull into the drive of a house
that is hers before it will ever be yours. Let her walk away from you—
without any touch—into the night of that house. Don't look
for the lamp of attic to wake, after she leaves you. Goback
to the spillway and stoneface. Sit alone, without her.
It was always about the way wood smelled moldy and alive,
as though it were dying to shelter her. Day and night over
the water as holy.

Real Enough

There's a growth under his arm.
He's leaving
for a fishing trip on Grayson Lake.
He tells the doctor
that he'll cut it out himself
before paying to remove the cost of a roof.
Sometimes I feel shame
to consider what would have been easy—
to lose us before they formed our names. He can't leave.
She pulls his suitcase into the closet of flashlight, blanket, book.
I consider jobs, this: He's inside that whaleskin, hiding a sickness.
To press harder against him. To sometimes pull away, to turn.
I don't know how to form: There is no after you.
After you is an eternity of bark downed by powerlines.
After you is smoke.
There is no after you, he says it.

Often to Ask If You're in Precise Space

These nights in an unnamed church down the street
the female priest reads Oliver poems
from an art book, then we paint with
fingers the story of what led us to where we've arrived.

It is

the red doors & stone & pine that look
of home at a time of loss. At a time when I was lost.
After all these years, finding a view
back to beginning, within the city block of what kept
failing to kill us.

In the painting the door is
a death that remains. As it was
in my early house. Colors are
as they are, as that is how
they've always been and will remain.

The priest is unafraid
to ask why this pine is the palest rose.
I finally tell her it's nothing more than a sunset—
as sky is the reflection of what is only the consistent
improbability
of crying into spheres of net held within loft
within a downtown brick building. The strangeness
of thinking we are held
in rooms as rainclouds, without knowing

we are held.