

Spring 4-1-2015

Columbia Poetry Review

Columbia College Chicago

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columbiapoetryreview

no. 28

Columbia Poetry Review is published in the spring of each year by the Department of Creative Writing, Columbia College Chicago, 600 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois, 60605.

SUBMISSIONS

Our reading period extends from July 1 to November 1. We accept online submissions only. Please submit up to 5 pages of poetry (one poem per page) during our reading period to *Submittable* at <http://columbiapoetry.submittable.com/submit>. The cost of submission through *Submittable* is \$3.00. We respond by February.

PURCHASE INFORMATION

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WEBSITE INFORMATION

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contents

Matthew Burgess	Over the Isar 11
	The Flamingo's Smile..... 12
Max Cohen	Plastic Homes of the Future 14
Sara Biggs Chaney	Birth Dance 15
Elizabeth Sochko	Elegy 16
	Fig-Fuck..... 17
Tony Trigilio	Oct. 23, 1975: Tom Snyder Interviews Betty Hill on <i>The Tomorrow Show</i> 18
	Sightings Journal..... 21
	He was told not to open his eyes and it would be over quickly and he could be on his way. 23
Jacob Victorine	Dear Anne,..... 25
Paula Yup	Ruth in Camarillo Has Emphysema..... 26
	Mother-in-law 27
	Until His Sister 28
Jeff Whitney	Note Left Like Silver on the Eyes of the Dead 29
Laura Cesarco Eglin	Trauma..... 31
	Alive..... 32
	Decisions 33
Craig Cotter	New Thermostat..... 34
David A. Moran	Imperfect 38
	Falling Into the Sky..... 39
Maureen Seaton	Quantum Fiction 40
Jesse Shackelford	Moonlit..... 41
	Arrangements..... 42
Jennifer Givhan	Day of the Dead 43
Richard Siken	Self-Portrait Against Red Wallpaper 46
Talin Tahajian	Explanation After Sex..... 48
Tara Bray	Nests II 49
Dion Farquhar	Dinner on September 11th with Two Eight-Year-Olds..... 52
Daniel Moysaenko	The Laughing Mask and Death Mask Exchange 53
	Finding a New Place to Live 54
Alyse Knorr	I Begin and Begin..... 55
Michael Broder	A Poem about Dead Lovers 59

Denise Duhamel	People-ing.....	60
Brandi George	Why the Working Class Won't Save Us	61
Margaret Ronda	Seasonal Affective.....	63
	Thirty-Ninth Month	67
Matthew DeMarco	Winter.....	68
	St. Paul—III	69
Max McDonough	Anniversary.....	70
Charles Pansino	Papier-Mâché	71
Carrie Oeding	I Have a Minute, Do You Want It?	74
S.Marie Clay	Dear Palestine,.....	76
	Beauty Cannot Be Eaten with a Spoon	78
Svetlana Beggs	Snippets from a Forum for Russian Women Married to American Men.....	79
Dalton Day	In the Settling	81
Crystal Willer	Pillow and Cardboard on Canvas.....	82
Graham Foust	Days & Stains	83
	Federal Holiday	84
David Trinidad	Five from the Archive	85
	For Jeffery,.....	88
Laurie Saurborn Young	Sunday Morning.....	96
Kimberly Lambright	(Re)lent.....	97
Brittany Goodloe	My Last Wishes	98
	Fixes.....	99
	Wading Body of Africa	100
Hala Alyan	Rapture in Absentia	101
	Azra	102
Vincent Poturica	poems i wrote on my arm	103
Elizabeth Forsythe	Litany for Why I Should Stop Smoking Pot	104
	Magic Cat.....	108
Jill Magi	The Economy Poems	109
Sara Lupita Olivares	Numbers.....	113
	Moment Where I Keep What I'd Wanted to Give	114
	What Never Converges	115
	Respond to View.....	116
Aaron Apps	Cherish Our Shared Child Abuse.....	117
Alan Michael Parker	The Sweetness of the Nectarine	119
	Fetch	120

Tyler Gillespie	Casual Relationship.....	121
Bruce Snider	Cleaning My Father's Rifle.....	123
	Ellipsis, Dash, Bullet Point.....	126
	My Father Buys Me a Semiautomatic Colt .22	
	Because I've Been Harassed on the Street By	
	Strangers Who Called Me a Fag.....	127
	Barbie Solves a Mystery	129
	Prayer for the Bear My Father Shot	130
Elizabeth Robinson	On Elusive Spirit	131
	On Stuttering.....	133
Satoshi Iwai	Count Down.....	135
	Metamorphosis Error.....	136
Joshua Gillis	Blocked throat hero—().....	137
	vending machines at my work—(m4m).....	138
Michael Robins	Inevitable Guest	140
	A Broom's Blue Air.....	143
	The Old Man's Name	146
Eric Vanderford	Putney Swope.....	149
Ruth Madievsky	Poem for Summer.....	150
Taylor Pedersen	Snag 1	152
	Snag 2	153
Lydia Ship	Camp Competition.....	154
Kyle Ballou	I Wonder If They Know Laura Palmer.....	155
Jean A. Kingsley	Cold Smoke	157
	Omen	158
Jeffery Conway	End Credits.....	159
Simone Muench &	The Dream Begins, Turns Over, and Goes Flat.....	161
Dean Rader	Are You Having a Good Time?	162
Katy Joy Richardson	[There's no list,]	163
	Lo-fi.....	164
	Call It a Love Note If You Want.....	165
Jayme Russell	<i>from</i> TriStar Pictures.....	166
Philip Schaefer	I Could Win You a Pink Hummer	167
Erica Bernheim	The Flying Lady.....	169
Jane Hilberry	For Us	170
	To Write My Autobiography.....	171
Marty McConnell	Patience.....	173
	Supplication with Grimy Windowpane.....	176

columbiapoetryreview

no. 28

Over the Isar

We're not jostling for the open door, or catching a whiff of armpit, or watching some guy stagger across cobblestones in beer-stained lederhosen. From this height, in this light, on this footbridge over the river, the citizens are suddenly adorable: sunbathing nudists sprawled across the pebbles, naked grandmother wading into the water as if calmly receiving stigmata, two bears sharing one rainbow towel (piercings glinting amid the hairy everything) and this oblivious couple passed out in the shade we cast: as if, collapsing, she broke his fall with her body and they fell fast asleep, his head pillowed by her F#CK t-shirt, her toes touching the edge of the waterline, just so.

The Flamingo's Smile

Who do you think you are, mister
is one answer, sexy palimpsest
or bike with handlebar streamers

rounding cul-de-sac, so seventies
the blurred decade when George
Burns was God. At lowest tide

you can cross between islands
in bare feet, see the wreckage
of a shipwreck yet the instant

you say so the ship in my mind
is grander, Dad. The ingratitude
of children, I would slap myself

but gently. Who do you think
you were, sleuthing in drawers
more for pleasure than intent

to pocket tchotchkes or silver
Susan B. Anthonys—never
the klepto toe head. You think

you liked a little dishevelment
and still do, Eric Stoltz's
ginger bangs in John Hughes'

teen drama, decade of day-glo
footwear. He played Cher's
son in the film about the boy

with the crazy face that moved
you to tears—I can say this
now in the safety of my own

poem. Hovering over the mess
made you imagine you were
a little god, and are. Just give

into the squish of tense—you
will die like this. One way
to communicate with the future

is to paint a dog in the corner
with eyes more soulful than
the royals. The sky is feathers

in this city of tinkling pianos
Dear Bruno, I am back
in the kitchen eating the figs

drizzled with cream. Word
of the day is *Noachian*—
down I swallow the omen

and our valentine is a clay
pigeon again, broken
but redolent of its flight.

Plastic Homes of the Future

I didn't know the guy they left behind
to close the theater, except that he represented
a sadness much darker than my memory
can faithfully render. When I gave him my keys
he thought I was trying to kill him. Distinctions
got pretty fuzzy around 10:00 PM.

Around 10:00 PM when I'm alone
I swear my hands don't stop shaking.

I have a lot of faith in parking lots, that I may find you there
and walk you home. So many helpful beliefs. I know
if I cry it's your fault
too.

My friend showed up to the bench all carb-drunk & joyful
cheeks so full of bread—does he always look like that?
He left with my wallet and teeth which I gave of freely.

I love my friends and my enemies are so nice too.
I can't wait to murder them all in my apartment.

There's a lot to hate about being home,
like spiders under my desk and the fact that I see everything.

Haven't seen you yet.
It's been such a long time. It's been about two days.

I like to assume the worst. Sometimes that means you're dead
and sometimes that means you're enjoying yourself. That scares me
the most.

I'm so tired I swear if I take off my hat I'll fall.

Birth Dance

Roll your husk between claws.
Make mean love to yesterday's skin.

Invite skeptics to dinner.
Let them wonder.
How God's windsurfing sail,
stained-glass terror of the air
could live so long
in such an awkward corset.

Recall that even dead things
in dusty corners
were once part of you.

Deep kiss the carcass;
sculpt a platform for flight.

Elegy

I can't look at the hands, the best part of Rembrandt's
"The Return of the Prodigal Son." Supporting the
shoulders of boy on his knees. Boy in rags.
Boy in the dark. You come to mind. Biblical allusions
fall away here. Here, poem becomes elegy
because that's how it happens. Boy in the dark.
Others in the painting: saturated cheeks,
all three clenching their teeth, biting tongue.
What can be certain: I'll measure all sadness
by means of ignoring parts of Dutch paintings.
One May there was us feeling them. Us in the tulips.
Sometimes I don't even blame myself for forgetting things
suffer so another space can fill it. Wood thins to
almost nothing when heated, stretched in canoe form.
Those were the types of things you taught me. In the painting
we can't see what comes next. In the parable, boy lifts.
What I'm failing to say is: I wish you hadn't done it with your hands.
In the painting, I'd like to move the father's. I'd like to
tilt your chin away from his chest. And do it very slowly.

Fig-Fuck

*Without the freedom to criticize
there is no true praise.* Figaro says.
A marriage plot, go figure. Bite into
the purple pear shape, please. How
do you pronounce *piglet* in French
again? How would you say I feel? Fit
as a fiddle? I thought so. Fig or Fight
or what were we doing out there?
Forgive me I'm foraging the sense
of being stripped of everything.
Figure A moves towards Figure B.
Figure A tells Figure B she put too much
salt in the soup. As if nothing happened.
Add something sweet, a fig will do.
That couple in Eden were minimalist
wearing ficus leaves like statement pieces.
Shimmying them off. Bad to worse.
Oldest trick in the book and nobody even
clapped. Nobody even looked them in the
eyes saying with an accent, *Trust me
you're not going to regret this.*

Oct. 23, 1975: Tom Snyder Interviews Betty Hill on *The Tomorrow Show*

TV producers wanted an all-black
or all-white couple to play
the Hills' parts. Betty held out
until 1975, when Universal
decided to cast black actor
James Earl Jones as Barney,
and Estelle Parsons, who's white,
to play Betty. It was the year
of the most famous World Series
in history, and Betty's Red Sox
won Game 6—the one baseball
historians call an epic, which
in their lingo really *does* mean
a long poem, a tale of the tribe—
and I stayed up until 12:30, riveted
by my idol, portly cigar-puffing
Red Sox pitcher Luis Tiant,
“El Tiente,” Cuban exile.
My family approved: in their
immigrant paranoia, comparing
the number of white players to black,
Tiant, as a Cuban, was not really
black, didn't count in the tabulation.
No one allowed for the possibility
that Sicilians were dark as El Tiente.
I could wager my stupid, ballplayer-
idolizing heart on his tired arm
and walrus mustache and, for
a change, my brother wouldn't
punch me for being a race traitor.

The producers flew Betty to New York—a private screening and an appearance on Tom Snyder’s *Tomorrow Show* the night of Game 7. “I daresay,” Snyder dared to say, buzzing with hyperbole, as always, a cigarette between his fingers, as always, “if anybody had gone to an EKG machine after the Boston and Cincinnati game last night, there might’ve been a few peaks and valleys in the electrocardiogram report” (actually, most fans in the Eastern Time Zone, like me, went straight to bed after Game 6). Tom asked how neighbors treated them afterward: “Did people think ol’ Betty and ol’ Barney had just, you know, gone over the hill? That the pilot light is gone?” NBC played Paul McCartney and Wings, “Venus and Mars” are all right tonight, before each commercial segment, a song I listened to (my portable cassette player, which I carried around like the teddy bear I’d outgrown) while doing spelling homework. “The problem is

the little stories that get in the way,”
Tom said, “like the fellow
in Wisconsin who had 14 million
little men and women in bushel
baskets in his basement who were
going to take him and his wife
away after Christmas until
the end of the world. You have to
shift out all the ding-a-lings
and bushel baskets in basements.”
Someone in Portsmouth painted
a swastika on their sidewalk,
splattered their car with eggs.
The aliens, she said, were not
color-blind television executives.
Abduction itself isn't good
enough for them. Sometimes
they're forced to cast interracial
couples in made-for-TV movies.

Sightings Journal

A swarm of lights bouncing around like tennis balls in front of Betty Hill's car—*some deep purple*, she writes in her diary, the color of spots that cluster before your eyes right before you faint.

Betty marked her wedding (June 28) and abduction (Sept. 19) anniversaries every year in the journal.

She started it almost a decade after her husband, Barney, died. Handwritten in three spiral notebooks, retyped as a single manuscript.

A dead man takes flight in the white space and comes back in beams, flashes, beeping sounds, disappearing cars, and the 22 times Betty heard train sounds from empty tracks.

She called the diary, *Sightings Journal*. Her kidnappers and their interstellar kin come off as civilized, which makes them even scarier.

As Barney rises from the page, so does my father. Betty's deep purple blots dissolve, I wake my father in the nursing home's recreation room—final time I saw him—dark except for the DVD of *Con Air* playing on the television cart between the 100-gallon fish tank and card table.

"It's not about UFOs," Liz said after she read my photocopy of the journal, "it's Betty missing Barney."

I know what it's like to think you can write the dead back to life as if you have any say in the matter.

I'm still angry I remember Nicolas Cage's mullet just as clearly as the light from the flat-screen TV that ruffled my dad's burgundy track suit.

The light hurt my eyes—wind snapping an awning. Last time I saw any kind of glow from my father's living body.

Shrill gun battles, an explosion receding behind us (Nicolas Cage couldn't do anything to stop the convicts from taking over the plane) as I wheeled him into the hallway, same wing my mother died in. I noticed fugitive spots of spilled food spattered all over his collar and chest.

Told him I met someone named Liz. He said, out of nowhere, maybe we'd get married one day. Either prescient or a lucky guess.

Torn right from the bone, the dead disappear into thin air to become luminous objects in the sky we write about.

Barney Hill ascends in the journal like Keats in Shelley's *Adonais*, one more planet kindling the universe.

Betty stands at the edge of the railroad tracks, watching the stars.

She logged 2,998 UFO sightings, 204 trips to the tracks in Exeter, between 1983 and 1989.

"Actual count," she writes on the journal's first page, "less than those actually seen."

I tried not to use the past tense when we spoke. I didn't want him to feel like everything was already over.

The crossword lately made him dizzy.

We didn't talk much. I had to leave an hour later to catch a plane back to Chicago.

My god, how we wreck ourselves keeping the dead alive.

He was told not to open his eyes and it would be over quickly and he could be on his way.

Dr. Simon asks Barney Hill if he can recall what they forced into his body.

I felt my shoes removed, my pants opened.
The examination table too small for my height
or anyone's. My feet dangled off the bottom.
The frightening part was the military precision.
The floors were smooth, the room pale blue—
no, sky blue. I didn't hear footsteps when they
walked us to our examination rooms.

* * *

This is what stargazers see through gigantic telescopes
and they don't even know. The room so clean,
I closed my eyes. They turned me over. It was about
the size of a cigar, like a tube, larger than a pencil,
and it went in easily. Then was withdrawn.
Something they'd throw away after getting
what they wanted. I remembered putting my gun
in the car in case of bears and the hostility of white people
when they see Betty and me. I felt no pain but it hurt
to be in this room. They take us out of our cars.
They know where to find us.

* * *

The examiner said I wouldn't remember anything
because it wasn't painful and I wanted to forget.
And it helped, telling me what I wanted.

* * *

I had an ear infection when I was a little boy—
Dr. Harley wanted to stick one of those
scopes in it. He said you peep inside the body,
light it up. I'm on my stomach, their doctor
pushing something inside me and it feels like
what I think went in my ear.

* * *

I will be very careful. I will cooperate and won't
be harmed. They pulled it back out of me—
came out easily—and counted my spinal column.
All of this occurred and I didn't know it was true.
I sat on my gun when they brought me back to our car.

Dear Anne,

September 18, 2013

Dear Anne,

When I was fifteen my father shoved me against a wall. All your mother wants is for you to say you love her. It's raining here—the sky pushing blue into clouds. Everything seems blue, even the lights on the bus. Today a little girl told me she was scared of her own heart-beat. You press Peter's pendant to your chest, wish him into your bedroom; I haven't worn the one of St. Anthony in weeks—even the last time I went to church with Sarah. There are questions I want to ask you, but they all seem too big. Sarah tells me: *Be specific, start with something small*. What did you eat today? How many times did you look in the mirror? I want to know what being Jewish means to you. All you want is to be known as Anne Frank. Even now I'm tired of people doubting: gay because he dresses well; too short to star at basketball. I wish I could tell you it stops, that your parents and the Van Daans will make up, decide to share the food.

Ruth in Camarillo Has Emphysema

caused no doubt by smoking
finally quit three years ago
says her whole generation smoked
it was the thing to do
no one escaped
she pays the price now
hooked onto an oxygen machine
says my mother-in-law so good
she quit in the 90s
I say my mother-in-law had hypnosis
it worked
that is how she stopped
and Ruth the master gardener
who taught my husband how to garden
when he was a boy in Camarillo
draws another breath

Mother-in-law

says when her daughter
adopted Emily Ann
all of a sudden
around the baby
she couldn't smoke
she quit
a couple of times
until a secretary at work
insisted smoking is bad
so my mother-in-law quit
for good
no hypnosis
five years later
her lungs clear as a nonsmoker's
doctor gave her
clean bill of health

Until His Sister

said so
my husband had no clue
nada
pregnant mother
a man mistakenly
thought mumps made him sterile
a shotgun wedding
an unknown man's daughter
this dead sister
man oh man he says
and I think
lady I hardly knew you
but I wear your shorts
and your red white and blue t-shirt

Note Left Like Silver on the Eyes of the Dead

I want to remember never needing a thing.
That every story we told was poverty and thirst
was our water, that we could pick the fly shit
from the pepper of anything. That we only lost homes,
a complicated beauty like a person balling up
dollars to scatter at the base of a waste can,
so many stars thought up and tossed
into shapes of horses, glittering elephants
above our stupid heads. Tell me it isn't lovely
that things remain—towns with names
like Jasper and the cows in those towns.
Tell me no one is walking to them with a bullet
of air; how any field can erupt with the grandchildren
of moths like the dust of an ancient equation, a cloud
in the cloud-kissed sky no cow could explain.
How you fed quarters into the thin mouths
of machines hoping your initials might stay gold
and blinking. How, once, you found a penny
at the bottom of your oatmeal. Tell me
about the dark and finding a place of your own
like a fox or a people jumping a border,
any border. If poverty is where this
story ends then we pay to see the end,
remembering every canyon was nothing
more than a river further down. It is
Friday, and this is your town. Your wife
expects a kiss and no one else but you
will trace the dark roots of her hair,
this *gold of owning nothing* you want
to remember as wintering peach trees

point skinny fingers to the sky. Tell me
how the years fall upon us. Like any
good story. With so much to believe.

Trauma

An umbrella held over the feet leaves
her back exposed. She takes the cupboard
as an example of cherries and hides them
as blood on her knees that burned
from falls. But she never stayed long
enough for the grass to heal. She
never let blades be green, and for a just-in-case
wore red. The darker kind that hurt
no matter how slow she walked. Obsessions
never leave nightly

Alive

I trace the shape of the heart
I drew. The route
is foreign. I read on but the lines
belong to a hand, to fate—
a life. I try mine
over the page. All directions
the hands that assume
words as an itinerary

Decisions

I left with my dress and a night
full of etcetera
not abbreviated
because there is no need to
shorten plenty. As much as needed
to make believe I say the same thing
when I only involve the tip
of my tongue to pronounce the mighty
weight I use to renounce
hurt so more is imagined on dots I'd rather
were lines to glide better on the creek
that refuses to crack my head open on fall
evenings a window to be safe while I know
that evening a window left someone behind
so I decide to carry the hem of my dress
in my hands to run and drop
the dots each time one foot hits
the ground until I have the line I want

New Thermostat

I carved my high school boyfriend's
initials on my left arm with a razor blade.

AH clear

29 years later.

It will keep my LA apartment no colder
than 65 tonight.

White, plastic, metal,

round, electronic.

27-year-old one

wore out.

A new beginning of heating & cooling

I can direct the a/c-furnace unit on my roof.

Maybe Korey will fly from Michigan

this weekend

says he needs a space to write poetry.

*

Watched porno online tonight

bottom looked like Alex.

Glad I survived

the original thermostat.

All the years David Smith and his wife

& I and Mano spun the dial.

If it were a round time dial

I'd head back to Abbey Road Studios

August 1969.

Would like to get in Hitler's bunker

able to understand German

April 1945.

Chat with General Washington on the porch
of Mount Vernon.
Just read his second inaugural address
pretty dull.

I don't have a Destiny.
Randomness & 3 stacking boxes
to live in.
If I get 40 more years
I'll waste most of it
come to nothing
total annihilation, even my poems.

Frank asked,
"if it won't happen to me
what shall I do"
—I can't pose such a question.
It won't happen to me.
And not because I can't find a
real poem.

I'm a substandard intellect
lacking imagination
and emotionally cold.
I'm a prescription for erasure.

So I carved
Alex's initials on my arm
to remind me of those good
five summers.

They weren't all good though
but mostly we loved each other
complete as we could.

We didn't work at it
we just hung out a lot.
Most nights we didn't want to be
 with anyone else.
We'd sit in his car in the woods
listening to Supertramp and the Stones
and not talk.
Or talk about pussy
and how he was going to make money
& I was going to make poems.
 Yellow
like Vermeer's "Portrait of Delft."

*

I have a water buffalo hide
carved into a Reclining Buddha.
Hopefully it died of natural causes.
There's no way for me to die unnaturally.
I'm relatively tough
was a baseball catcher in Little League,
am surviving polymyositis,
cancer, & an inability to get my poems
widely accepted, studied & loved.
Toast still perfect.
If I could make a poem
good as a toasted Parisian baguette
I could die without being
obliterated.
I would like the carving

of Alex's initials on my left arm
preserved. Stretch it out, dry it,
tan it, frame it &
stick it on a wall
in a museum.

Maybe in the Hammer's permanent collection
next to "Dr. Pozzi at Home."
You'll know why Proust loved that painting
and why I love Alex.

Where is your one letter
you wrote me at Michigan State
in green ink?

I'll make some toast in the morning
with butter and Aunt Nat's jam.

I'll slide the plastic switch to OFF
and drive to work.

If it won't happen to me
I'll make more toast.
If only my heart could glow
or blink.

Imperfect

for Macy

I saw you once in tints of red; those
small hands fittingly cold in between
my warm fingers thinking you could
be perfect in a field of snow & loved you.
Greys & purples cover the small crevices
we dug into, hiding in the corners of your smile—
in mine. I love you still while the trees fail to
yield any other color than brown & the
sky able to grasp any other color than blue.
I kiss you in dreams often, & hold you
in every way promised.

Falling Into the Sky

Abruptly stolen from
the constant;

I can't piece together
(a moon with pixels or

stop tearing petals
off a sunflower

hoping for love)

Quantum Fiction

Frances (a flapper) was entangled with Francis (a bowler)—and off they went to co-create my father, an uncertain principle, if ever there was one (and there were many), of the twentieth and final century in which bowling might still be enjoyed without shame. Frances was a drinking girl, wild (a wave) yet beloved in her misanthropy, and wholly sweet when sober (a particle). I skipped centuries to walk her safely across Broad Avenue; nuzzled beside her when Francis left his bowling arm (and body) behind and headed for a cosmos where alley sports were still respected, and she had nothing, not even a neutrino, to console her. The flapping arts meant little to her then, she was desolate as an electron that's been disconnected from its cohort whose orientation is now horizontal (dead man) when it used to be vertical (bowling champ), and there's death gaining fast on the speed of light and my grandmother with her warm beer and Chesterfields asleep beside a child who leapt into Jersey one autumn and loved her instantaneously.

Moonlit

hollow spoons, ashen
fast in the corner

planetary eye hung behind the window
cigarette burns in drawn curtains

fingernail runnels underneath the
wooden banister, stained black

if my regret is potent should i keep it in a vial?

mother was
kissing blisters on the snow
burying pine trees in whispers

mother was tender
and nervous, in the beginning

Arrangements

household sickness begins at the slow
crunch of a lozenge
somewhere in the living room

maybe the yellow van briggles has
a molar tucked inside its ceramic base

acidic stench from the skookum doll's
hair seeps into the bathroom
sticks onto whoever takes a shower

am i too apathetic for an identity crisis?

when anxious she
goes into the garden and covers herself
with dirt, feet protruding
to pretend she's a carrot

on rainy days she
wears more makeup to compensate

Day of the Dead

I

I had a brother once. Paul taught me
to braid Barbie's hair—

we sang and danced
like the partners in our shiny musicals

but the kids broke him like a piñata.

II

Sunrise and the sleepwalkers gone
mothers cut into grapefruits,
spoon into bowls of sugar

as if two ruined boys are still alive
as if I'm riding home from Nick's through the alley—

it's not my girlhood that burns like a fever
but my body still, the sick tequila Nick
wormed through my belly.

III

I can't pretend I didn't break Nick
that sugar-skulled morning

that he didn't slit his wrists
the way of beautiful black-haired boys

who name you Sparrow
and drip candle wax on your skin.

IV

The story I don't want to tell
finds Nick at sunrise with my pink Bic razor
after I screamed at him for sucking a boy's

dick, the way I'd heard the kids screaming
at Paul the morning before he disappeared.

*Brother, take us to the singing place—
where you once sent nightmares of owl-dogs howling
through windows.*

I close my eyes to piñatas strung from Mesquite trees
their candy junk toys jetting
like bloody noses or faces streaming

shredded papier-mâché.

V

There are other ways for the story to end.

In one version, the brother comes home.
Nick moves to San Francisco
and finds redemption in the Badlands.

In another, I'm still pregnant at seventeen
and bicycling across town to tell my child's father—

on the outskirts we climb the dead caldera

call it home, bellyache, unsafe. I carry
that baby the whole way up, her cheek flat
against my chest as she sleeps.

VI

How do you walk away from daybreak?
In cities obscured by graveyards

scraping Clinicas de Salud

where smoke from the beef plant rises at sunup,
musical deaths in the drama department:

You slept with the gay boy.

I did more than that.

I loved him.

Self-Portrait Against Red Wallpaper

Close the blinds and kill the birds, I surrender
my desire for a logical culmination. I surrender my
desire to be healed. The blurriness of being alive.
Take it or leave it, and for the most part you take it.
Not just the idea of it but the ramifications of it.
People love to hate themselves, avoiding the
necessary recalibrations. Shame comes from vanity.
Shame means you're guilty, like the rest of us,
but you think you're better than we are. Maybe you
are. What would a better me paint? There is no
new me, there is no old me, there's just me, the same
me, the whole time. Vanity, vanity, forcing your
will on the world. Don't try to make a stronger wind,
you'll wear yourself out. Build a better sail. You
want to solve something? Get out of your own way.
What's the difference between me and the world?
Compartmentalization. The world doesn't know
what to do with my love. Because it isn't used to
being loved. It's a framework problem. Disheartening?
Obviously. I hope it's love. I'm trying really hard
to make it love. I said no more severity. I said it severely
and slept through all my appointments. I clawed
my way into the light but the light is just as scary.
I'd rather quit. I'd rather be sad. It's too much work.
Admirable? Not really. I hate my friends. And when

I hate my friends I've failed myself, failed to share
my compassion. I shine a light on them of my own
making: septic, ugly, the wrong yellow. I mean, maybe
it's better if my opponent wins.

Explanation After Sex

I want to explain to someone that there is a weight to it. This cannot be described in words. I have tried

flaying wild salmon. I have tried killing a deer, skinning a rabbit. None of this works. As if it could be explained

through any sort of art. It cannot. I would have found it by now. *How to skin a rabbit*. Not something I normally

have to explain. But listen: choose a knife. Cut into each leg as if it were a different type of precious linen, hide

a soft leather. Everything could be described this way: *soft*. Slice hide from tissue. Pull it from the muscle, flesh

slipping from skin. Do this softly. This is when head leaves body. Someone asks whether this thing was ever

living. You say *I don't know*. This is the type of weight that cannot be explained in words. I was living. Now

I'm inclined to believe I'm not. Yet here I am. Skinning the rabbit. Pretending I still know how to use my hands.

Nests II

I remember that year of tadpoles so thick they made the water black. Shirtless girls we swam with them, jarred them up, finger-tipped the tiny frogs they turned into.

*

Nickel-plated, cold, not rented out, the coronet and flügelhorn were mine. For competition the band director corked my friends' horns, but let me play on with the high school kids. They said it was because my father worked at school. They didn't know the music dozed in me beside a death so new, my tainted scales tattooed themselves like profanity written on my neck, the deepest knowing unearned and skeptical of its own clear song that was never beautiful, but steady, facing forward, opened just enough to let the death slip through.

*

I watched house finches breed on the porch rail, then make a nest in my hanging basket of petunias. Now centered in the tangle of deep purple blooms, the tiny begging bowl, one impish egg, barely blue and whole.

*

At the church camp on the edge of Lake Seminole, Brother Herndon shuttled us kids with his olive green sedan, down dirt roads, red-faced and rattled. I don't remember why or what he said, but he yelled at us, bedeviled from our ceaseless energy. Confused we stumbled off to play four square and shake it off, keeping the sun-bleached ball inside the box, and this is all I know of him.

*

The aging eye now weeps in cold.

*

And when the dying starts to show, I miss all I've cut away, the neighbor boy I knew so well I could taste the stink of his feet, his meaty breath, the wet of him in heat. It was supper time. He had to go home. "Coach Bray, can I tell Tara something first?" He leaned in and behind a cupped hand whispered, "To hell with you girl." I pulled inside and stayed.

*

Today I think of the spine in winter, the spine in June. So many ways to break the bread.

*

My father taught me how to take care of a name-caller, to use the heel of my hand and shove it up his nose. He showed me the angle of it, said to push the cartilage into the skull and snap the neck to shut him up; there was a ground you had to stand. And I did it once, bloodied a boy's nose, but he ran me down and beat me with his belt.

*

There's no sorrow, just thickness, salt, the raw hand wiping down the tears.

*

At the public gardens where loud talk and trampling is the way of it, a heron landed in the dense pools and let us all come close, cameras clicking, and the bird so brittle I wanted to smack it down and hear its breaking. Its beak gelled in scum, and the stupid, ancient thing went after the carp, large as a human child.

*

I sit, try to call off my own dogs.

*

Once when I was a girl, her parents came before dawn, wrote “Knights of Satan” at the end of my driveway with chalk or a soft rock the color of bone. My father photographed the words with a Polaroid. I never knew if there were devils in our soft family bones, but heard the crows forever making ruckus at our expense. We’d follow the girl each morning, trail her to school so they could wave their secret waves, then my father married her. Crossfire. The work of the Lord.

*

The traveling skinny man with a shaved head, so much white hungry skin and India residue in his eyes, makes shapes of my body, decades stiff, but strong, forever hungry to be made new. He is kind and strange and lit from within, but I’ve got this dark humidity, this homeland in my breath.

Dinner on September 11th with Two Eight-Year-Olds

The night of 9/11
we sat down to dinner

Alex:

*If I was on that plane
I would have punched
those hitchhikers out
making a fist with his hand
and hangs a punch in the air*

Matt:

*It's good they hadn't served the food yet,
so after it crashed into the building
they could serve the people food
and then they wouldn't be hungry*

The Laughing Mask and Death Mask Exchange

A friend capsizes
in Lake Ontario
within sight
of farmland
and its family standing
by the silo
wanting
another example
of horror.
A room
that used to be
populated
is lonely by default
but less lonely.
A light bulb
off and cooling.
Today's sky
is darker
after the sun
red and chomping through
turfy hills
points to the barns
coated in rusty paint.
Forbidding
as they are submissive.
Glowing
behind the wood.

Finding a New Place to Live

I don't invite the Italian shepherd
into my meditation.
But he strolls in anyway.
As I doze off he keeps watch
and vice versa under an olive tree.
Its uneven light
silver and matte.
Depending on the wind.
Wolves are the same
color as the grass
and I'm grateful to them.
To every hidden thing
I say come close but don't
make it obvious.
The horizon is a red and green
striped blanket.
I toss my meditation
pillow into a ravine
and amble down the pasture
to see what microscopic creatures
I can scare away. Scare
into being seen.
The shepherd nodding out of view.

I Begin and Begin

a sonnet

I

My mother wants to know how I know.
I tell her I remember playing house with
a neighbor girl at age four and wanting
to be the father. There was a plastic pipe,
blue and white, and I put it in my mouth.
Why would you want to do that? my mother asks.
What part of being a woman do you enjoy?
And I want to say, all of it. And I want to say,
the part where I smoke a blue plastic pipe.

II

In my childhood bedroom there is a closet. Inside this closet is another closet where I
kept my books. This is the place I went to cry, to read, to think of and write about the
women. And still this was not enough to make me understand.

III

Following Rachel up the stairs, I look at her
long golden hair and gray dress and think,
When did she become 17 again?

IV

A closet is a small inner room.

V

To look inside her is first to see
an intricate system of muscle
stretched over tender white bone,
and to look further is to see
the spidery yellow nerves—
much more delicate than hair—
spread throughout her like lines
on a highway map, and to look
even further is to see chains
of axons holding hands,
linked by gulfs and chasms,
doing what they must to set her on fire
when another woman touches her.

VI

Stacked in the childhood closet are nine hardbound black journals with the names and
sketched faces of at least five women. I consider presenting these to my mother as
evidence.

VII

Dozens of men had loved Rachel, some successfully, some not, by the time she left for
college.

VIII

In the childhood closet I wrote songs on a black electric Washburn purchased from my first boyfriend for \$75. He threw the whammy bar in for free. The refrain of my first song: "I'm losing what I never had," and it was true that I never had any of the five women, except as suspiciously close friends. And now I wonder: by writing about them, do I now have them?

IX

Rachel's first girlfriend also worked at the summer camp with us. When she mentioned her coming to work there, I said it was a great idea, and then she became Rachel's first. The next year, the head of the YMCA found out about them and they were let go. The parents said they would have molested the children. The children asked them if they would get a dog or a cat, and how many kids.

X

A colleague asks: *When do you feel inspired?*
In the shower, I say. *In the shower, I feel inspired.*
The British call the shower a water closet.
In the closet of water I am naked.

XI

Rachel's father used to joke with me that I was his third daughter and then they adopted a daughter from Korea so I was his fourth daughter and then they adopted a daughter from Kentucky so I am the fifth daughter, though I am the oldest of all of their children, including Rachel.

XII

A teacher once told me poetry is wanting
always to close itself, so you must constantly
begin anew, over and over again—you must
create whole new worlds every time you write.

XIII

And now I am here in the closet and I am naked and I am writing.

XIV

One day it was so hot at camp that we ran into the murky red river with all our clothes
on—just left the kids in their military-file lines near the changing tent and plunged into the
scalded lake all in one jump, and she laughed and laughed and we felt so relieved and we
were sticky drying all day long.

A Poem about Dead Lovers

Only ever what I need
at any given time,
as if to take a jewel
and put it in a box,
as if to take a stone
and polish it and put it on a shelf.
You, your face in my hands,
bones of your cheek and jaw
between my fingers.

Shoebox of a studio apartment,
all the space in the world
between love and love,
the slats of the boardwalk,
between the hem of your shorts and the hair of your thighs,
your skin, all the space between the night and the stars,
between toast and French fries.

That night on the boardwalk, Cyndi in my ears—
Until it ends, there is no end.
Sometimes when I'm drunk
I understand a song lyric I could never make out before.
Like breathing, second nature, nature.

The problem is I needed to be a drummer.
The problem is I needed to play piano.
The problem is I needed a rhythm guitar.
Until Randy. Until Tony. Until Marcos.

People-ing

A small group of birds is fascinated with us—
our vocal humming and mechanical honks, our echolalia
and rages, our pop tunes and symphonies.
These birds watch us in our natural environments,
the common cluster of the tops of our heads, hoping
to see a truly remarkable and rare human,
someone performing telekinesis or being struck by lightning
and then surviving. When they migrate, birds
differentiate the languages of the human species
in Florida and Cuba, then Jamaica. These birds wonder
if we can understand each other. If we understand
our dogs, and if our dogs understand the squirrels.
People-ers keep detailed lists, dated with the times
we humans were spotted. Most birds come to the bird feeder
simply so they can peer into our windows.
They flutter near delivery rooms, hoping to show
their chicks a human birth
as a way to ease them into a discussion of sex.
If a bird dreams its feet are heavy, rooting it to the ground,
such a dream indicates creativity.
Some birds are working on a plan to lure one of us
into a giant cage with just a bed and a mirror
into which this captured human can preen.
Are birds freaked out when they see one of us
eat one of them? Is that why they fly so low at picnics?
Is that why they shit on our cars?

Why the Working Class Won't Save Us

So Miss Fluke and the rest of you feminazis, here's the deal. If we are going to pay for your contraceptives and thus pay for you to have sex, we want something. We want you to post the videos online so we can all watch.

—Rush Limbaugh

Giant Cow on Main Street, Deity of Broken Bottles,
Goddess of the Dollar Menu, you know a six-foot-tall
German-American wearing a Pantera t-shirt
called me a dyke, then spit in my face. When my stepfather's guru,
Rush Limbaugh, calls law student, Sandra Fluke, a "slut"
and a "prostitute," I think of corsets,
clitoridectomies, fusing the labia-wound,
the miracle-womb, fetus-fish feeding, the cervix
widening and the infant's brain-burst
into air. *Bitch, ice queen, feminazi.* Every woman
in my family has been raped. My belated protection:
petrification, the tree's innermost ring drained
of sap, black lipstick and necklace-dagger. My stepfather said,
eyes factory-dust red, oil-stained fingers:
"You're lucky. You're a girl so it doesn't matter
what you do with your life." He worked third-shift
at Sealed Power on a steel ring assembly line, said: "I've read
two books—hated both." My grandma told my mom
she was a fool to divorce "the kind of man who puts food
on the table," and hell, I thought her a crazy old lady
until my mother brought home a lineup of abusers.
My mother: "There's no way around hellfire."
Confusion is the devil. Doubt, devil. Questions, devil.
Me, devil. I escaped the blonde spitter,
made a doll of his likeness and stuck it with pins.
And no matter how many times I hollered at those farm boys
they tortured the newborn bulls.

But I met my true love by a river.
We couldn't see the river because we were really at a burger joint.
Yet a single eye opened beneath that muck, colored
like a monarch's wing. And the eye rose and with it, a face,
then breasts—Eva, Eva, my ancestress's corpse
lit up and I finally understood the way around hellfire
is a pure cleaving to the present, that I would kiss the Goliath
bird eater tarantula's web of your frontal lobe. We painted
each other's faces like dragons, and the river's song
doesn't change, not even when it's toxic, littered
with plastic bottle caps and sludge. The soul cleaves.
Supernal lights wink through the branches, and I cling there,
listening to you read Mina Loy poems, the sun
half on my face, and we're cut from a chrysalis
like super-monarchs, like those goddamn
Nymphalidae flying to the high mountains of Mexico, miles
above the cities like airwaves, fearless,
prismatic with the strength of what we've learned.

Seasonal Affective

for HG

Autumn industrial odor

neoplastic rusty fog

nearness

neighbor she

all circulation

all weekday traffic flood

salty tea or schoolkid alley

kinds of rain: milky, tender, steeped, clawing

each joy slept off

corner of birds colliding

only yes, more, goodbye

Crossed-off mind swarms

the sea an eyeless bomb

rearranging shaken

always blowing in

war and ruin

as if unwoven

without expression

Long sleep shipwrecked

a wrong present try-again

to carry forgetting

the tide a responsibility

to be carried away

with debris

pure welling up

impenetrable voice

but you have to try

Bad weather never yes or no

heaves on in the lungs

horizontal too flimsy

a debt unkind

a heavier impatience

is sleet and time

travel

a body growing distant

to love is

darkness

Thirty-Ninth Month

At the cusp of Aquarius & Pisces a young hour steals through the orchard.

A passage under one slowly rotting tree.

One apple tumbles down then, an overfed second yawns shut.

& the calendar spreads her legs, tear me open jaw to hip.

Pressing blind now hot unsteady.

O gaudy trespass in the split sky of waiting.

A please, an aching little pastoral unrest.

The future with its seasons still gagged & blindfolded.

O torrential downpour at winter's edge, green clamors vagrant careless & wild-eyed.

Rain destroying the figs, spinach battered to shreds.

Mingling tincture of time, occulted flower, ungrown husk.

Sever & break me blood & leaking hour.

O sweep the leaves into the next storm, dark sodden spots of spring spreading.

Black seeds smashed now into flat-faced joy.

Winter

Strange things
have appeared
since the snow
froze.

First, there was the mail that hadn't come.
My roommate yesterday got something old
from the Mayo Clinic, and the carrier
had written "icy steps" on the envelope.

Then, yesterday, on my way to work
I noticed that bunnies had shit
everywhere
across our backyard: there were little blossoms
of bunny shit in clumps of three in my starched
white footprints, stray pellets in the plant boxes,
even where the pumpkin vine had been. I kept
expecting, sometime, to catch the bunnies
as they dropped deuces, but they have hidden.

The other thing that happened
is that I found a dollar, a single buck
half uncovered, plucked out smooth,
wet, but not hurt. The breeze
couldn't blow fast enough
to keep it from freezing. So now,
I have another dollar. How little
it changes the balance of things.

St. Paul—III

I smoked cigarettes and I ate meat
two nights ago.

Mostly, I ate the meat
because I didn't realize I was ordering it.
It was bánh mì.
The waiter didn't know I was trying to be a vegan.
So he was very friendly with me.

It's almost Lent.
I won't get ashes.

I think I was more Catholic than her.
On the news they say the Pope can't handle
being Pope anymore. So
he just decided to stop.

I burn sage and I wonder: if the Pope
had a lover to talk to about how hard it was being Pope
then maybe he wouldn't be so worried about being Pope.
Maybe he would be more worried.

I burn more sage and I wonder if I could be the Pope.

I put out the sage. There is char on my fingers. I let it stay there.

I can't say why I smoked the cigarettes.
I think it was because she told me not to. I had some more the week before.

I'm not giving them up again for Lent or for her, I swear.
Shit.

Anniversary

Tonight a storm scrambles the clocks
and I'm sixteen again on the bank of the Tuckahoe,
throwing rocks into the starless water

while Doug, still alive, rummages the construction site
for things to set on fire—soiled rag, concert flyer,
bird's nest flung in the scrub-reeds. Soon he's

found something new under the bucket loader,
but his yelling blends with the tire sounds
funneled down like shell-echoes

from the highway overpass behind us. I sink
another rock as he comes closer, corpse
of a bird dangling from his unsmashed hand,

a high beam's yellow wash across his face a moment
before it flees from the unburned
skin. He says *hold it for me*

pulling the lighter out of his right jean pocket
with the thumb and knuckle that bend
when he spins the striker, and the wing of the bird

I can't save, already dead, can't
douse in black river water, catches—
& we watch the flame climb the feather-tips

into the hollow quills, where the air,
trapped, has nowhere left to go.

Papier-Mâché

to swing
into
the swing
of
feet moving
on sidewalks
and
the calm structure

*

each place
has coherence
and
each time
I take a step

somebody
just jumped
out a window

*

papier-mâché
mask making
at the corner
of
the street priest
is again ranting
and

the
butterfly advertisement
walking
a Charleston
towards
the
drugstore

*

cigarette
coffee lean

feet present

and I
see the smoke

turning itself

*

cross ribbons
turned
clover

too
much have
willow branches
cupped

sea turtles
in
computers

*

we all
turned toward
a different
crowd

I
have
never known
the
warm rebellion
of stars

*

I Have a Minute, Do You Want It?

I guess we don't need another voice explaining why women loathe
catcalling. Everybody knows why. Everybody should know
a number of things, but here is a hand, red from poison oak.
It's reaching out to help me off the bus.
Everyone knows what age we'll sag. When that sound is fireworks or bullets.
Most people will listen when you say it like you are saying it.
You finish the antibiotics or the infection will come back.
The hunch about Gary from the philosophy department,
I have it, you have it.
The simile for mushrooms invading my houseplants.
Why even go into my classroom and teach.
If I have a baby, it will slide out and say I know I already know.
I probably had a baby. I wasn't invited.
She's already in Dayton, OH, shooting the documentary films I wanted to make.
I wanted to film someone home-birth or tag trains. And if I can't,
because I'm 35 and wanted to wait just a little longer so I can finish a thought
and also this trip to the elliptical machine,
if I can't procreate you can read about it in my next book and be bored.
But everyone knows why we read poetry.
I thought I was done with it,
but I'm still writing about what is between us.
All of these states that are most of a country.
When you hold a newborn, and I've got what you've already figured out.
All of this Purell. This old whistle *baby baby*. This new way to call you my BFF.
Lana, can you not see the look on my face? Sometimes you are Lana,
talking at me for three hours about how you banged the real-life
Kramer. You've charged me your drinks.
Lana, believe that I'm actually a terrible listener, that we have bad chemistry!
I worry about right moves. Chin up, tits out. Nods over noise. Confidence over

that line you wrote. Everyone loves it. Everybody knows you should.

Don't remind someone they've already told this story.

My poetic poetry's ringtone is *already already already already*.

Just what the world needs, another cynic. Everyone knows what a cynic is.

Dear Palestine,

*That fan-like sound
coming from the sky . . .
childhood has no place here
—anonymous Palestinian girl*

Say that 90%
of the body is
ocean drowning

inside your
nativity. It too
wants to swim

wants to close
the screaming
anemone gap
in the sky

just as the trees
inside your lungs
want to climb out

as synonym, as
fatherless
as stalactite

Most mornings
begin like this,
rubbing the red
anthills from your
eyes

listening for funnel
clouds to develop into
helicopters propelling
the world away from

your elbow, precision making

and unmaking.

Say the stars are

ungodly,

say the twinkling

is dynamite and

tonight is a short

fuse.

Say it to the

minutemen who you

couldn't tell apart,

who couldn't tell you

apart from the neatly

parted lawn

wet and dark until

opened

like seeds.

Beauty Cannot Be Eaten with a Spoon

—Romani proverb

Today the table has set itself. In Romani, *I love you* is translated as
I eat your heart, as

embroidered swan, neck unfurled as napkin just for me & even though I am only
one third

of this park bench, my love is this park; as caravan, as flute-tree, as unleashed
as Ambrosia.

Make love meaning *stay where there are songs* meaning stand beside yourself in constant
combustion

rhythm & blues & floret yourself because to love doesn't have to make sense like
wet grass me.

Pyre me. As morning takes flight, catapult your eyes into me &
victory.

Snippets from a Forum for Russian Women Married to American Men

He started screaming at me that he will send me back to Russia because it would be cheaper than divorce.

I have no friends in the US, just one Russian acquaintance who told me that she has a lot of problems of her own and would rather watch TV.

My husband gives me money and pays for clothes and trips to reward my good behavior, but when he thinks I don't behave well he takes it all away—I think it is unfair.

My husband is traveling to Kiev for a conference. He is a strong man, so I know he will be fine, but I'm full of fears. I worry that women there will give him attention because he is a foreigner and because he has not received a lot of sex from me lately because we have an infant.

My supervisor called me “a mail bride” repeatedly. At first I was patient, but then I told her that the best goods can be ordered only over the Internet or from a catalogue, and that cheap garbage like herself can be found at any dollar store. I was fired.

Often when my husband drives and the light turns red he yells so loud FUCK FUCK, or he smashes the side of the car (recently he made a real hole on that side).

My husband said he wishes for something awful to happen on our planet so that half of Earth's population would vanish—we have far too many people he says.

Is it true that men who are born on November 27 on leap year are fearless and like being in control?

Sometime after we got married we started having problems with sex, so that I stopped coming to him because he always cried when I initiated.

I just found out that my husband is 54 years old and not 47 because I found his passport, and he also has two children I knew nothing about.

My husband sent me to Ukraine for a family visit, but a few days after I arrived he informed me through email that our marriage is over and that he won't be buying me a return ticket.

My husband has to go shopping with me to make sure I don't buy revealing outfits. How do I make him trust me?

My husband was on a business trip driving home from another state; he called me from the road to say that he is almost here, but then he disappeared and I haven't heard from him in two weeks. He doesn't answer his phone or Skype. What do I do now?

I bring home stray cats, but I now have three very sick kittens and I'm very depressed. It would have been better to just walk on by and not suffer like I do now, knowing that they will die anyway.

In the Settling

I ask the window if I may borrow some light & the window says No I am sorry but today we're running on empty but here take this rain & this dust & get yourself out of today. So I take the rain & the dust & I make a landslide & I wash my house away & I wash the trees away & I wash myself away because this is why people make landslides at all. Thirty years later I decide I want to be thirty years old again with responsibilities & breaths & weight. I come back & build a house for myself completely out of windows & every morning the sun says Do you have any rain or dust & I say No I am sorry but those things have never existed. & every day the sun rattles its blood as part of its gentle war with me again & again. I am losing. I am losing everything.

Pillow and Cardboard on Canvas

You assemble in small pieces:
eyes the color of the house
next door, hair dark with
shadow, voice a mud hook,
desire seen like water
blooming through drywall.

I smile at anyone, everywhere
I go, in case you're watching. I act
in perfect accordance with your tastes.
I dress carefully. I pay attention
to pattern, color, texture. I arrange
my hair. I say *adore, entire, my*.

You appear sometimes as nothing,
and I want to turn your blank face
over but I need you to be the next story.
I need my next meal to be a new beginning,
a new portrait, and you,
there, in the grass with the gun.

Days & Stains

“Probably no one’ll die if I do it”
was a thing I said back when to take courage.

Days and stains, days and stains—
I couldn’t cartoon a cartoon.

*

Asleep in class, fatigue’s dark tack in me,
I thought I ought to be the ghost in the truth.

Federal Holiday

Down in the dream, I think in smirks and flinches.

I mow what's overgrown and then I grill.

*

The wind picks up and blows a spork against my cheek.

This is further grounds for laughter.

Isn't everything?

Five from the Archive

4:11 a.m.

Just in time to see
Carol Lynley get
eaten by the Blob
in *Beware! the Blob*.

*

October 22, 1988

It's cold, wet
and windy in
NYC. Sharon,
Carl and I take
the 2 train up-
town to hear
Eileen and Paul
read. Joan will
be there. Elaine
is at work. Dennis
has a deadline.
Jerome has a cold.

*

Subway

Below:
vornit
& piss

Above:
whiff of
fresh
donuts

*

What Debbie & Cameron Lost in New York

Cameron's Walkman
Debbie's glasses
All of Cameron's demo tapes
Debbie's lipstick
Debbie's earrings
2 hats (his & hers)
Their return tickets
Approximately 100 bucks

*

At an Opening

You look—Great!

Isn't this a beautiful show?

It is now.

(Silence)

I didn't say that.

For Jeffery,

a poem in the offhand style
of Jimmy's post-Pulitzer period
to wish you happy birthday
(your fiftieth) and say
thank you
for twenty-five years of friendship.
Have we really been friends
that long, and for half
of your life?
I can't believe so many years—
a quarter of a century—
have passed since
I saw you, a handsome
young man (of twenty-five!)
standing at
the back of the bookstore
in West Hollywood where
I gave my last reading
as a resident of Los Angeles
before moving to the East Coast.
Years later we'd joke
you were my Eve: lurking
in the shadowy alley
outside the stage door
in her smudged trench coat,
stalking her prey:
the incomparable Margo—
aging and vulnerable, an imploding star.
We did end up living our own
version of *All About Eve*, didn't we:

two innocents from The Valley
bumbling our way
through a Lower East Side
poetry scene rife with Eves.
Slowly losing our idealism
(not to mention our tans).
The film only verified what we'd
learned from experience:
the "hurtful desire" for stardom
is the original sin.
Our flirtation, in those
suggestive letters we sent—
me in Brooklyn, you still in L.A.—
leapt straight to friendship
when you finally arrived in New York.
The romance just wasn't there, in person,
a deflation as easy to accept
as you were to trust.
How cinematic memories are:
scenes from a movie
that happens to
have been my life.
We plod up Second Avenue
one frigid night
after an A.A. meeting,
heads bent into the wind.
Your eyes watering from the cold.
Stubborn cigarette in my stiff
gloveless fingers.
(I believed, mistakenly, that

smoking would keep me warm.)
We sit, scarves wrapped
around our necks, at
the Ukrainian restaurant
and talk poetry and poets,
unable to reconcile
the admirable work
with the abominable behavior.
It's the late eighties
in the East Village
and Morrissey's plaintive voice
is everywhere.
By then, you'd been
evicted from two apartments
(due to non-payment
and the antics
of your HIV-positive,
drug-addicted, Barbie-collecting
roommate Michael),
gotten sober,
and moved into
a room of your own
in the same SRO
on Third Street
where Quentin Crisp,
purple hair tucked
into his fabulous black hat,
was living out his
elderly years. Oh
to have been famous

when fame meant something.
The two of you waited
each day for the mail—
you for postcards
from a boyfriend
in Paris, Crisp
for letters from fans—
and sorted it together.
Your room, you told me,
was so small
it fit only a single bed
and side table
and shoe rack
on the back of the door,
which you filled
with espadrilles
of every color and stripe—
taupe, army green,
brown, black, yellow,
navy blue, red, white—
your final splurge,
via mail order, with James’
(your ex-lover in Los Angeles)
credit card. You never
wore them, just liked
to look at the colors.
“Every time I turn around
it’s midnight,” you
once said in grad school,
overwhelmed, as was I,

by the speed of New York life.
I met and moved in
with Ira. You met and
moved in with Ron.
The next time I turned
around, more than a decade had passed:
Ira and I had broken up,
9/11 had happened,
and I was about to move
to Chicago. We stand together
at the going-away party
Susan threw for me
in her Washington Square apartment,
ten floors up, at the window
of her south-facing dining room,
silently taking in the Towers' absence.
"It was the kind of
evening I always dreamed
of living, or walking into, like a movie,"
you would write in *Phoebe 2002*,
our 650-page collaborative epic
based on *All About Eve*.
"All those smart NY writers.
To honor a first-rate friend,
to say good-bye,
wish him luck,
and mean it,
even though I know
his absence will sear my heart."
The fruit balls, you noted,

were speared with picks
with paper pineapples
on the tips.
My parting gift
was to refer you to Laura,
my own therapist—
an Eve-like move up the ladder
after all! But you were in
crisis, it was the decent
thing to do.
And look how, more than
a decade later, you have come through.
So many memories, Jeffery.
But no time for more
if I'm ever going to finish this
offhanded poem. It's
already much longer
than I imagined it would be.
How did Jimmy
keep his so concise?
I must get to the mailbox
on the corner if it's to reach you
before your birthday.
I'd wanted to write about
the first Thanksgiving after
I broke up with Ira,
how you and Ron invited me
to your house in Woodstock,
how I walked along the towpath
alone, crying my heart out

to the white mist drifting
off the river through
the naked trees, not because
I'd broken up with Ira, but
because the shallow queens
who came to dinner
had promised to bring
a pumpkin pie and didn't,
and that was the one
and only thing I wanted.
But that's more about me than you.
Except that, out of kindness,
you made sure there was pumpkin pie
(and whipped cream) the next day.
Happy birthday, Jeffery.
I loved my fifties
(I'd escaped from New York!)
and hope you do too. And thank
you again for your friendship—
I don't know where I'd be
without it. Those suggestive letters
you wrote me, incidentally,
are with my papers
at NYU, for all the world to see.
I'm sorry.
If you still have the ones
I wrote you, please burn them.
I'm sure I sound an absolute fool.
When Rachel Zucker returned
from her trip to Schuyler's archive

in San Diego and told me
she'd read all my letters
to Jimmy, I was mortified.
"What were they like?"
I reluctantly asked. "Well,"
she replied,
"everyone's young once."

Sunday Morning

As instructed, I erase my German
childhood. Omit my mother's tiny

stamping foot. My father's vest
I catch in a great & laughing

fire! Cut across chickens & there
spring feathers. Cut across our lawn

& there waits the street. For weeks
I take the days two at a time.

Hawks turn to flower as my sister
sends tutor after tutor away.

(Re)lent

He needed that lack
of spin, the holy spring

Hers was a rust
rainbow, pinked-out edges

It's my place not yours
to say what in my hands

is failing

My Last Wishes

My sisters, wear black. Wash yourselves with soap made of plant ash. Cut out your
straightened hair strands until kinky coils decorate
your crown and your temple.

Mom and Dad, if you two are still alive, make chicken & broccoli casserole. *With
extra rice, extra cream of mushroom soup, and a couple dashes of black pepper.*
Mom, overstuff yourself with it. Dad, rub her full belly.

If you can't control your sadness, dance like a Chicagoan. Step, the name of
laughter. Footwork to House Music. *Always an Electric Slide.* Form a Soul train
line through the aisle while chanting *GO [My Name!]*, dead
last.

If you want to remember my poems, shred them. All of them. From old diaries,
from magazines, from the Library of Congress, and turn them into confetti, so they
can't be read anymore. Then send me off as your
Homecoming queen.

Fixes

-ESS: added to the end of a noun to make it feminine, to make it woman.

Examples: lioness, priestess, actress, poetess, princess, empress.

-ESS is the woman ending.

-ESS [woman] in action: suppress, depress, repress, process, process, process, possess, dress, compress. -ESS is ending woman.

-ESS [woman] being other things: mistress, murderess, enchantress, adulteress.

-ESS is the end of woman.

-ESS [woman] being described: less.

ESS, in the beginning, is described to be Essential: natural, the essence of plant, absolutely necessary, in the highest sense, indispensable.

Wading Body of Africa

Y'all stop playin' in dat watta! I already told y'all kids 'bout dat!

The white and colored drinking fountains are in Elliott. Erwit's photo.

We don't swim!

Thrown or jumped overboard in hopes of returning to Africa.

It's rainin'! Be quiet while God does His work.

Moses splits the Red Sea.

I seen Titanic! None of us was on there fo' uh reason!

Crammed in a big ship, men, women, and children, floating in feces, urine, and blood, without any room to move.

Uh-uh! I ain't tryna get my hair wet fo' nuthin'!

The shower-bath, a water boarding device, was used to encourage submission.

Havin' sex in the showah?! Won't catch uh sista doin' dat! Nooooo!

Master filling urine in slave girl's mouth.

Ray Ray 'n 'em got baptised two Sundays ago.

Humans depend on drinking water to avoid dehydration.

No! No mo' juice, no pop! Drink some watta fo' a change.

"... Wade in the water. Wade in the water, children. Wade in the water. God's a-going to trouble the water. ..."

Rapture in Absentia

You found him in the riverbank, his mouth
filled with silt. How like skin the sky folded, softly

into a flesh of blue. Damp soil. Damp hair,
birds making a nest of his throat,

and nothing left to love in that land. You lit
tremulous fires, built a ship of nettles and sailed

into the starless month. In the new city,
you watch the rich women love like rotted fruit—

bruising, messy. They ash themselves onto
unfamiliar beds. You, who ate cacti with its spines,

are a lighthouse for sharks. You carve his name
with their teeth. You split and split and never break.

Azra

There is a tunnel, elsewhere, that I live in.
It is a house full of nails and not one hammer.

Mornings are shrill, cicadas in the garden,
and I am bleak with wifehood,

staining hair copper instead of black,
or naming a daughter *Akka*.

If there is a husband he rakes the soil.
Nothing is merciful with him

and when he laughs I see a thousand
women ripping satin dresses.

In his throat is the sound of finches
swarming the coastline.

He says I have hands like Baghdad.
I wonder if he means the tending or the torching.

poems i wrote on my arm

God help me be kinder less negative there's a piece of gum on the sidewalk shaped like a rose it didn't smell like a rose

thinking about that tuk-tuk driver in trincmalee who only ate carrots who shot a polecat by mistake and buried it like it was his own son

to suffer pray sweat suffer and still know nothing makes me laugh at all the shoes hanging from the telephone wire now i'm walking barefoot too

jerry write a poem right here BE EASY BREEZY BEAUTIFUL BROTHER that's what jerry wrote i said that's a makeup commercial jerry jerry said that commercial's a poem straight up

so many questions so many important thoughts that skinny dog those birds red as new pennies that light between the leaves

if i had my grandpa's gun i'd blow a hole below my ribs to give my heart room to expand

thinking about carlos about one afternoon when we were kids smoking meth from a grape juice jar it was springtime we were lying in the grass we promised each other that we were gonna be okay and we were right

no more worrying about the world about God's will remember the bus that broke down the driver walked away it was raining me and dave made little boats with our tickets raced them in the gutters

Litany for Why I Should Stop Smoking Pot

I

I spun a prayer in filigreed gold the night I left
our house, too whiskey-drunk to drive but
determined to get out of Indiana somehow,

even if that meant closing my eyes on
Highway 2 over by Fail, the same intersection
that collected little Mallory Lang back in seventh grade.

I found an ocean of briny headlights, phosphorescing their
S-O-S like a beached whale: plump for the explosion, then
sending meat-hunks like petitions into the constellations.

Hopped a one-way ride to Mars sitting on the bumper
of a souped-up starship, little green men at the wheel.
Thought I heard Kurt Vonnegut in my head.

II

The back-porch party: smoking pot with Dylan,
October-air shivering while we passed
the joint back and forth.

He wanted to sit on the roof but I couldn't
make it up the ladder. We watched acrid tendrils
dispatch a nimbus around our bodies.

Dylan blew smoke rings my asthmatic lungs
never had the patience for, and I remembered
someone telling me once that marijuana

can cause anxiety and
psychosis and
depression and

someone must have found me later,
damp-huddled beneath the tree line,
hyperventilating.

My lungs have never done me any good.

III

My mother smoked pot well into my childhood, embers
on the front porch like a lighthouse beacon, beckoning
me and my brother home from the neighbor's, sticky-sweet

with July popsicles or October cider. Our quarter-mile road
was vast enough to cleave a canyon between us and
our mother's cinders, cascading towards her feet like waves.

She woke me early one morning, carried my sleep-heavy body
through damp grass and post-dawn fog to reveal a stray
monarch on the back porch, encouraged me to pet its silky wings.

If I close my eyes, I can almost feel its feathered veins
beneath my yearning fingertips. Death became a pet that day;
my weed-hazed mother hadn't realized we'd been stroking a corpse.

IV

On the way to the gun range, my father mentions my mother breaking
into a stranger's car, not on purpose but because they were watching
Van Halen, tripping acid, and my mother too high to find Dad's Camaro.

He tells me about the time she sandwiched herself between two
semis, stumbling drunk with bloodshot myopia, nearly
becoming a bullet fired the wrong way from the pistol.

Dad made sure to teach me how the safety works.

V

The boys played beer pong while I lounged, catlike, on
my ex-boyfriend's shitty blue sofa, remembering when
he asked me to think back to the beginning, as if it were

possible to compartmentalize everything into little
cinder blocks of time. I tried to build a house, crushed
the concrete into fine powder instead. Neat mirror-lines

broke like filtered ocean light beneath my discoed eyes.
Twenty-three years old, found my way home, alone,
no porch light beckoning. Called the last boy I kissed,

the green-eyed and tattooed trumpet player who tasted
like gin and smoke. Brought him inside, played Nirvana
while he exhaled a trinity:

oh god oh god oh god.

VI

Only on Earth is there any talk of free will.

This is what I learned while trailing the starship to Mars,
lit up like a comet's tail, circling the universe as if

I had any right to call it mine. Explosions between
my eyes. Rapid-fire rivers snaked around my thighs,
fast-pulling me toward oblivion. The cosmos wept

in beams of ultraviolet light, ephemeral profundity
I almost grasped before hurtling back Earthside
to wake, gasping, alone on the side of the road.

All this happened, more or less.

Magic Cat

for the Alleycat

On days I want—*really* want (as opposed
to *kinda* want, *almost* want, *want*
people to think I want, do not want)—to die,
I always think about my cat.

Alice Ygritte, Alice after Wonderland,
after Notley, Miller, in Chains;
Ygritte after the fiery Wildling woman.

You know nothing, Jon Snow. (I do know some things.)

Little black fluffball running around my apartment, pawing
polyester mice into the air, curled on my bed in her own
circle of life, stretching like a comma when I come home,
figure-eight weaving through my legs,
climbing to sit across my shoulders like
a particularly heavy scarf. Most nights,
I wake up when she cradles herself into my arms.
Sometimes, I like to think she's a magic cat,
suctioning nightmares into her fur.
My magic cat lets my anxiety paint her black.
And the one white splotch on her chest,
over her tiny kitten heart,
this must mean something, too.

The Economy Poems

See the Monetary Control Act of 1980

see deregulation of airlines,
trucking, oil and natural gas, and
finance, see Carter, then Reagan

See the Growing Inequality of Public Education

see families stretch to buy
in good school districts and
take on vulnerable-making debt

See 2008 & the Fear of Socialism

Interest rate cuts: no solution.
Needed: government spending.
It worked before: see New Deal.

See the Academic Jobs Wiki

\$44,256? Is it 1950? Could take
part-time work in those fishing
villages or blueberry barrens—

See the Fifty Million Refugees

of war and conflict currently.
Monetary policy does not make
a mother world stop.

See Accepting It

for the profession, for the arts,
for to be grateful for your peanuts un-
less for your parents

See 1968

The TV looked back
and white is how a family
ignores that June.

See Debt

ratio of crumbs
to teacher—she wills
to recover her walls

See Redlining

Whose 1950s was better
is white and underwrites
the new normal.

See Purse Strings, or Democrats Also

Bill Clinton dealt the final blow
to Depression-era regulation
by lifting the Glass-Steagall rules.

See “It does not have to be this way.”

The knot writes
and the world opens
the matter, this matters.

See Who Can Pattern Innocence Enough Now

Gandhi asked lawyers, managers,
editors, doctors to give up.
It is freedom to not drain.

See Futures

I do not fear myself
or real value confidence.
I hope, I tell myself.

See Inequality Levels Not Seen Since 1929

“Another Great Depression?”
“Not necessarily so . . .”
“Well, whaddya know?”

See How Austerity Measures . . .

me a thin dress—white
cloth washed in rivers slow
and underfunded

Numbers

a. fell in snow,
stood up
and counted
imaginary feet
to measure
her width.

Fish swung
under the
frozen lake.

The body's
intentional
everywhere
faints and blooms.

Moment Where I Keep What I'd Wanted to Give

once they appear
I reach out to touch
the minnows
a loose hinge of me
opens and closes
normally

I halve my life
to see how
want balances
want lessening
the light's
threads

What Never Converges

memory singing to its cardinal, memory
carrying its home inside its mouth

the elephant statue worries rectangular
having watched the meadow

crawl inward, having watched
clover weed its bells
flower

we play house to learn
what else
to say

Respond to View

sews finish beginnings

watch a wall grow candle laughs

grace grows enduring threads

horizon's shadow marries soil

it is quail contrary and gray asps

it is sea contrary and furrowing

a height-raised impulse

to the bird giving sun

its gold torn speak

Cherish Our Shared Child Abuse

Child, sometimes my child is literal like a blunt rod taken to the face, crack, literally: when I was eight my older brother talked me, talked me slowly in, into dressing up like an LPN, like my mother, like, in my mother's clothing, in her whites, and as white children we were in the white hospital light of our chemical imaginations, white all over our skin like white fluid, and he rubbed his white erection in my white crack. When you think crack, in your imagination, think many cracks, like I crack open, open at the memory of this instance multiply, crack on crack, wound on wound. The crack of his foreskin between the crack of my lips, the crack of my lips, by association, then, between the crack of my ass. This shit that speaks out into a twisted mimesis of his rod is written into "I" and cracks open the representation, because the moment is addictive like crack, which I reference through a cracked lens, cracked and aware of the privilege of even speaking an identity through such a twisted moment, through crack as a metaphor, as a drug, as a sound, as if darkness through a crack of light as the world starves. Child, you're supposed to think *this* pornographic moment defines everything—so, represent it, or, inversely, avoid representing it, or, cup it like a small animal and kill it into repression as you represent your heart like a sentimental crack. Child, our brother was twice our age, but was a child himself, more of a child, even, and as this crack of a moment opens, it remains small and strange and indefinable like a child and . . . child, my brother, child, myself, I mostly have compassion for you, and I find it hard to take a single, blunt moralistic object to any moment, even when the children become adults and their acts become accountable. I was acting like an adult acting. I was in adult shoes, both then and now, and both then and now they don't quite fit, like child wearing white nursing shoes while nursing from his brother's white . . . ellipsis of white noise. To erase the moment is to make it louder, and it is more silent above in the literal transcription of lived body parts, in part, because children slip silently through the night of another body's organs taking the form a Zen warrior's practice

sword, blunt and indescribable like the rod of his shaft. Murder me in practice, child. In practice, I wonder if this is too much information, like all wonder, I wonder if to provide this moment that feels small, small compared to class, to race, to queerness, to fat, to all of the multiple things filling the facticity of my jeans. I wonder if I am wondering too much about a few moments, about a few minor slippages of my subject. I wonder if it allows queerness to be associated with abuse, and I wonder why this moment is even interesting. I too wonder if I liked it, even a little bit, because I remember liking his skin between my skin, and I wonder if anyone can handle that unacceptable emotion that is no more true than any other attempt to represent the child being the child outside of itself . . . are we not childish together in this failing compassion? Is the erotic not a swelling membrane pressed against another swelling membrane like a face, like a face that is, like, itself in the mirror of another face growing out the genital womb. Is the eros in our eyes not slippery in its ethics to the point that any accusation is an opening thereof. There, of me and of you, child, we are made into love as we make love poorly. There we are failures, we admit we are failures, in the compassionate anger of our imaginations.

The Sweetness of the Nectarine

The really old bent-over guy
trudging up
a rocky hill toward death
while munching a juicy nectarine
feels okay, not great, just okay.
His watch is broken.
Twice a day, he stops
dying.
He thinks, I should
never have snapped
all that anger
over my knee.

Fetch

Oh, to be the happy dog
trotting back.

The dog's named Please
as she waits,

Thank You as she goes.
The sky helps, too.

And God? And God.
Really, love, I just want

to bring to you the moon
dripping in my jaws.

Casual Relationship

Last time I saw him
naked
was on the cover
of a gay porno
mag. God
damn
I was jealous
of his body.
Of course, I wanted
to feel him again,
but my first thought
I need to hit the gym.
He held a paint brush
b/c the porno mag was,
like, artsy.
God damn.
The worst thing
in the world is
to want anyone
for anything.
Especially men
with god bodies.
Last time I talked
to him
he said
he wanted
a casual relationship
with cigarettes.
I wanted to fuck
then cry

next to him.

We split
a smoke
instead.

The worst thing
in the world is
to want anything
ever.

God damn.

I've never been
so jealous
of a paintbrush.

Cleaning My Father's Rifle

With a soft wire brush, I scrub
darkness from
the barrel's mouth, erasing
the last
look of

the doe crouching
in wet grass, eyes
wide, breathing. I smooth
away clay and oil,

his fingers'
corrosive prints, even meat
spatter, microscopic
chips of bone. I wipe
away the field—bees
and pears, crisp-

leaf clover—the slow blue
seam of
the creek moving
past. I erase the bullet's
velocity,
the dizzy

stink of flies. Scrubbing
night from
the weed-choked pond, I erase
the dense

shroud of fog that speaks
his name. I wipe away
his good
judgment, his better
aim, scouring

loneliness from
the huckleberry
patch where he knelt to split
the body open,
lungs glistening in
their bone-cage,
gut steaming

its sour gas. I wipe grasshopper
and mourning
dove, buzzards circling,
copperheads coiled
in the long grass.
Nothing can be

left. Not the still heart's center.
Not the blood
pooled, clotting. I wipe
away thorn-gash
and the wild
cherry's deep sweetness, the cold

body as it stiffens, summer
collapsing into
teeth and hooves, ripeness
and ease—pine
shadow

over his unlaced work
boot, sparrows, smashed
beer can's rusty
lip. I wipe away
it all, even the entrails
he burns
in the fire

pit, even their climb toward
the unreachable
heavens, curling
upward, whitening
to ash.

Ellipsis, Dash, Bullet Point

The Remington Arms Company is the oldest continuously operating manufacturer in North America and largest US producer of shotguns and rifles. On March 1, 1873 the company (at that time known as E. Remington and Sons) began production of its first typewriter.

My father owns a Remington .22.

typewriter. I order ribbons

Type: SNIDER, feel

powder, oil. In the hills,

my hands buzzing. I type

my father's face. He scratches

ALWAYS. Type: YOU

so uncertain. Where

thrum. What does silence

Split red seeds. Type: WHAT

back: blood-rush, leaf-rustle.

song of skunk cabbage.

and lean. Type: I'M TRYING

TO TELL YOU everything

like an echo. Self like

my father, load another.

NOT SORRY. Rabbit

I own an antique Remington #12

on eBay, type letters, poems.

the barrel's release. Gun-

opossum burrow underbrush,

again, then again and—

his graying beard. Type: YOU

NEVER take a path,

is it headed? Barrel-

get you? Leaf-silt, magnolia cone.

DID YOU MEAN? Leaning

Cowslip, scab apple. Night-

Scuffed and sour. Scuffed

the whole sky swallowed

keeps moving. Self

a stone. I reach for

Type: SORRY. Type:

slackening the dog's jaws.

My Father Buys Me a Semiautomatic Colt .22 Because I've Been Harassed on the Street By Strangers Who Called Me a Fag

The angel flickers atop
the artificial tree as he says
it's not like the one he had
in Vietnam, then tells
a story about water buffalo,
the way a man's head bled
into his lap. He explains
how gunpowder originated
in China and Turkey,
how it's made of sulphur
and potassium nitrate,
that what burns is the same
carbon that makes up
the human hand. He smiles
and I look at the barrel
to see my face, my father's
face, and the face of a boy
I kissed behind the Lion's
Club when I was fifteen.
His name was Leon and
my hand shook as I turned
from him, wondering
what I would say at school
and how I would say it and
whether I would look him
in the eye. I imagined
showering with him in gym
and the faces of the other
boys as I kept on past Pete's
Vinyl Siding, past grazing

horses and the Amish carts
on Route 9 where the dried-up
soybeans ended and
the raging river began.

Barbie Solves a Mystery

In Vietnam, my father carried a .223 caliber M-16, a semiautomatic/automatic with a selector switch, its lightweight stock, he likes to point out, made by Mattel, which was at the time also manufacturing Barbie dolls. Still, he admits it was a fine gun. Of the forty-four men in his original platoon, he was one of only a handful to survive. Later, when he caught me playing Barbies with my cousin April, he said: *boys don't play with dolls*. But April let me wear her Barbie bracelet, lounge on her Barbie sheets. We read: *Barbie's Hawaiian Holiday*, *Barbie Solves a Mystery*, the floor a tangle of pink. We played Barbie's tea party, Barbie's wedding, Barbie drives her car. We played and played until, bored, we painted Barbie with blue nail polish and cut off her hair. We tied her with string, hung her from the doorknob. Stuck with pins, her wrists cleaved off. One doll gone, there was always another. Barbie-hand grafted to the stove top. Barbie-breast scored with a nail file. Holding her legs, we pushed her mouth into a match flame, and the sparks lit up our faces.

Prayer for the Bear My Father Shot

It hunted squirrel,
climbed the vast walnut,

knew the silence
of the badger in the wood.

It tasted sour raspberries,
also their thorns.

Mornings it drank
from streams and nuzzled its young.

Forgive its trespasses.
When it came to the campsite,

tore open our cooler
and cracked the lantern top,

it knew not what it did.
Forgive how it bent the tent stakes,

how it howled, spit and crawled
on all fours. And, God,

forgive my father,
because his heart is old

but unfailing, and his vengeance
is just like yours.

On Elusive Spirit

for Selah

They gladly misapprehended spirit

and let it go.

Fever encapsulated in a bubble.

Long out of sight.

The spirit's

agile neck turned back

upon its

flight. What hue, what hue.

They

had confused

it with itself, air

with wind.

Was it violet? Rose? It was neither, was

not. Pinkish. Like flesh it was

laughter eternally out of

earshot.

On Stuttering

Words had mouths that did not want to leave the place that made them.

(Tongue interfering with tongue is exit.)

(Exile.)

What loves the tongue

captures it, sends it away.

A sort of a kiss

formed and reformed itself around this act. To attach lips so sturdily—
irretrievably—around the effort that they cannot return home to language.

To stay where the word is, identical with it, but torn by its pressure.

Ovid looking out over the Black Sea.

Inside him, the kiss falls down into the well of the mouth.

Then exile is the site of origin. A recursive kiss.

The deportee

feels the socket of the jaw dislocate—

the hesitation that suggests return.

Count Down

In the morning we were eight hygrometers, and in the evening we are seven cicadas. Even the slightest wind can turn our shells upside down, which are fixed in the pose of half-petition. When the next morning comes, we become six drops of opaque dew.

Our war has begun as a river has begun, and our spirit has been diluted as a river has been diluted by the endless rain. A river is the newest scar on the earth. The pinkness of salmon is the incurable pain of being. All the winter left us is a fatal dose of sperm.

We are the children lost in the museum filled with beheaded gods, the exit of which opens only when the balloon bombs set fire to the naive sky. The rain keeps making seasons irremediably seamless. When the spring comes, we become the origin of football.

Metamorphosis Error

One morning Greg found himself in a small bed when he woke from the dream in which he found himself transformed into a small bed under a monstrous vermin when he woke from the dream in which he found himself transformed into a monstrous vermin on a small bed when he woke from the dream in which he found himself transformed into Greg's girlfriend sleeping with Greg's father in a small bed when he woke from the dream in which he found himself transformed into a legless soldier dying in a small bed in a repatriation ship when he woke from the dream in which he found himself transformed into a diseased oyster drowning in a small bed. Greg got out of the bed and went to work. Everybody in the office except Greg was lying in the beds and laying oil-filled eggs one after another. That was why Greg had never been promoted.

Blocked throat hero—()

11.30am thanks for letting
my friend and i
order a #10 with a Coke and sit near
the bathroom
after months of searching and hundreds of applications

although it was mostly a ploy
to drool over you
My best friend ordered a smoothie
as you fumbled for 3 dollars
in rare coins and currency
checking out your phone

we were
sitting in silence
living off the government and school loans
dumbfounded by your energy

hoping for an encore
before the mosh pit started

vending machines at my work— (m4m)

this cloudy Monday evening
wearing mom jeans
filling a gas can
shoulder pulled out of socket by a boat
(long story lol)
it would be wonderful to hear your voice again

I'm the person that gave you a purple stuffed bunny at Easter and a set of wrenches
You're the one that taught me that cemeteries can be fun

since being in Paris this spring
there's nothing casual about life
flashback to an evening of Ballroom Dance
flashback to an occasion
eating eggs
throwing trash away
buying a lighter
a certain vibe in the room
(hence my being in the platonic section)

I noticed you dyed your hair
working the drive through window
across the street from Golden Lotus tattoos
always wearing a hat
loads of eye contact

I miss the way you would ask if everything was ok at our table
bursting back into my life
so different in person
 checking for gallstones
a couple times a month at your duplex
 that little piece of me
was too tung tied at how beautiful
your choice of morning beverage
 ended up being

kind and crystalline
with the rain in the background

Inevitable Guest

1

What kind patina
bathes the rock . . .

If homes make men
then a home made
plainly—

Fences
free of mending
& a silver balloon

Sated, like salve

What hand gently
welcomes dirt—

The opened book
spilling its pages,

none chasing along

2

We too rode ideas
like travel—

Let's
deny crow's feet . . .

A newborn's silk
holding the door

Often I folded you
as well as dearth,

brooding telescopes
reversed—

Youth,
Tuesdays too blue,

one & one & three

3

Else a wound road
or else the canyon

How we watched
playtimes pass
in mirrors—

I saw
downspouts & rain

Doldrums growing
behind the slug . . .

What shaped simile
will offer shelter,

& what enclosures
withstand closure

A Broom's Blue Air

1

Our bellies groaned

Like firm brickwork
on nails we chewed
down & into bone

I was relief for that
teething

Surviving
only so long, so long

Instinct & glued air,
nay an experience
necessary—

Open
sesame, so said me . . .

2

See the white oceans
like holes in a sock

How might anyone
dumb—

Comfortably,
beyond quitting time,
coitus versus colitis

At the police lineup,
see my date of birth

Let's produce reason
to behold children—

Badge the new names
& wear them as skin

3

I pine for the old you

Mercury cupped long
past a palm

Never-
mind, erred test tube

I returned your books
by mail, I am waiting
while an open door

Clouds like someone
relearning the waltz

In old photographs we
ferry a flatness home

The Old Man's Name

1

I am listening, I was
trying to listen but—

Focus of a pinpoint
bleeding wide, white

I was embarrassment
& fell—

Though there
was no one there, no
audience past my chin

I was with for a while
another—

Lost her
blind, then blind spot,
the spot then pinpoint

I was trying to listen
& feel every accent

2

If we could, Dear,
how many children

No mush for brains,
no disease

All this
hurried, blue greed
passed down a peg

Or, do we yet prefer
parties—

Stairwells,
kissing in coatrooms

We are without yet
discover one another

3

Now we must brood
& wear ridicule

Like
our father before us—

A father leading him

We practice breath
& red fills our view

I am sorry like he was
& love my daughter
as he did—

What's
good in him I know

& practice & adore

Putney Swope

Turning rippings into art—

in the industrial park
all the whities gunning for me

life is good,

said it was a bitch
you lied to me

perilous sights,

eyes that sound like no

Don't take kindly—

rain cloud wasted on the flaccid

I feel like coming home again

to our bed
back where spines watch the sunset
and the mind spins to recline

When I was reincarnated,

they told me to watch my mouth

gave me eight-year-olds

to clean my handguns

blood, sweat, and diss tracks

guarding the anthrax factory

from bombs
no such thing as a role model

Poem for Summer

Mid-June in Los Angeles
and the clouds are on strike,
the sky like the iris of a Scandinavian child.
We're praying to the television light
and the goddess of lychee,
we're falling in love in elevators,
eating bone marrow in bars.
The Fuck Truck guy is back,
and he's raised his prices:
for seventy-five dollars
up to four people can fuck in his van.
For twenty bucks extra,
he'll even park it somewhere scenic,
for instance, in front of a golf course
or the lion den at the zoo.
For over a week,
no one has swallowed mouthwash,
none of us have been carried off
by a swarm of flies.
Every flower seems to be ejaculating pollen,
and I hear the junkies are trying
to convert their meth back to Sudafed.
What's with all these cherry pits
in the street,
and who keeps spray painting
love yourself on every bridge in the city?
My lips have been doing this thing
where they're no longer afterthoughts,
where they burn like Roman candles,
glow atomic tangerine.

There's something to it,
this spiked lemonade, these telescopes,
these outdoor movies summoning us
like laser beams from space,
like benevolent Martians
who just want to touch a human ankle,
who just want to peer into the cathedral
of the pale, inner ear.

Snag 1

If every streetlight were a sunset
this mouth garden might
begin to grow.

All these crops of names
that have been eating
anyone else's childhood.

I'm just so tired but
waiting for nightmares.
I've been on a barge

and even in bed I feel
the waves shushing me
and shushing me.

There are patted things on
the ground that don't remind
anyone of an animal.

Snag 2

I don't live often
but when I do it's loudly
prolific in all these
useless ways.

How many times a
day doesn't matter,
I don't do a good job
at being alive.

A man with a baby
and a hammer—
I don't question
a lot of things.

Camp Competition

Camp rivals were boys against girls, except some of the girls gender-reassigned themselves and moved to the Boys camp, and after a quick while, the most popular boys gender-reassigned themselves and headed to the Girls camp. A third camp grew into power: the Punishment camp, boys and girls who carried Books from their boxes and knew the Rules. Late at night while we were singing around the campfire, they stalked down the hill from their cabin draped in sheets and holding their boxes, and circled us. When they spoke, they said things like, *Leviticus*, frizzy hair waving over hot faces scrunched. *Leviticus, Leviticus*.

The Girls and Boys camps united to take out the Punishment camp. If Punishment didn't have its books, Punishment campers wouldn't know what to do. The other campers snuck into the Punishment camp's cabins and took all the books from their boxes, replacing them with *The Joy of Cooking*, or *The Joy of Sex*, or *The Joy of Being Kind and Fair*, which they themselves had written on brown paper towels over many cups of rum-spiked hot cocoa.

The next morning, some of us found a group of campers in the kitchen making smoothies from fresh-picked berries and side-hugging. The other cabins had already been straightened, and when we entered the cabins we found naked children lying on their mattresses and with the utmost civility, introducing their clitorises and scrotums and penises to each other. Mine goes inside of yours, one camper would say. Shall we try it?

Everyone get dressed right now, I said. We split the teams up again, this time into Smiles, Officers, and Pulled Pork. The Officers could not defeat the Pulled Pork. The Pulled Pork could not defeat the Smiles. Camp ended in a draw.

I Wonder If They Know Laura Palmer

I mentioned *Twin Peaks* to a coworker and he thought I was talking about tits.

Laura you are beautiful and I think I am in love with you.

I wish my name was in the credits
flashing over your ice skater smile.

Laura Palmer, I want to take you to the dance.

Laura Palmer, let's go make love by the waterfall.

Laura Palmer, my dad is an attorney, too.

Laura Palmer, I mourn you like a canceled thriller/drama/comedy.

Laura Palmer, you gave me two seasons of healthy addiction.

Laura Palmer, you stole my time and I never even bought you dinner.

Laura Palmer, save some pages in your diary for me. I'll keep you in my dreams.

Laura Palmer, I won't take your cousin, I just want you.

Laura Palmer, I won't wait another 25 years. Come to me now.

Laura Palmer, what's it like to die?

Laura Palmer, one time I broke up with a girlfriend in a Montana motel room.

Laura Palmer, I couldn't make it in the Northwest with anything other than quick love and sex.

Laura Palmer, Netflix is online masturbation: often done alone and daily.

Laura Palmer, you died in 1990,
forgive me for bringing up things you don't know,
again.

Laura Palmer, the Internet is *Twin Peaks* without damn fine coffee.

Laura Palmer, who needs all that. Let's run away to France and pretend we grew up there.

Laura Palmer, we know so much about you through other people.

Laura Palmer, let's get to know each other.

Laura Palmer, admiration is for poets and dairy cows.

Laura Palmer, you turned out to be a cold storage building but I'd still like to warm you up.

Laura Palmer, I'm with you in Rockland.

Laura Palmer, I love a woman who looks like you. She might even be you.

Laura Palmer, I refuse to believe you're dead. You and Jack Nance are having breakfast
together at a greasy spoon off Route 2, blowing smoke rings, elbows on Formica.

Laura Palmer, I'd set electrical fires for you.

Laura Palmer, take my crimson heart. Everywhere I go the smell of evergreen follows me.

Laura Palmer, I have to go to bed. I'll see you in 2016.

Cold Smoke

I sleep in a cramped bedroom
with my lover and two dogs,
no room for dreaming
unless I open a window,
drift on out into the deep night
on a wisp of cold smoke
that settles over my dark house.
At dawn, blue hyacinthine light
rises from the cut field—
a misty net I fall into.

Omen

Taupe clouds thin on the horizon
like slender ink on lined paper,
but the truth is,
I am an old woman now
who twirls her hair in dappled light
while blue shoes light up the doorway.

End Credits

Wide-shot: woman walking alongside busy road. It's Nomi, in black cowboy hat, tight jeans, tiger top. Iconic Las Vegas hotels and casinos in distance. She's hitching, ready to gamble her life away (again). A blue Ford pickup truck slows, pulls over. The familiar "Howdy Pard!" Slipping sunglasses on, she goes incognito to confront her highway

robber from months earlier. A seemingly prosaic scene: A highway out West, a sluttily dressed young woman with thumb out, but Nomi transforms the vignette, exudes trenchant impressions with sunglasses (dark, bejeweled, cat-eye chic), cheeks sucked in, modern Vegas attitude (youth and beauty, street smarts and "heat"). *When truck stops, emote mystery* (she mentally notes, not wanting to gamble

screwing up this last scene). Driver "Jeff" asks if she gambled. She nods. "Whadya win?" We get a glimpse of the highway stretched out ahead; she leans forward in cab of truck, pushes a button on radio, changes the station. (Nomi's coolness is signified by her choice—an apparent Vegas hit—"New Skin" by Siouxsie and the Banshees.) Her sunglasses

reflect Jeff's visage for a sec; then all's revealed: She peels sunglasses from her face and answers Jeff's question about her gambling spoils, like Oedipus uncovering the Sphinx of Las Vegas's most infamous riddle: "Me." With his eyes off the highway, Jeff takes a good look: "Oh fuck—it's you!" Nomi whips out her switchblade, causing Jeff to lose control of truck—

they careen off the road (the actors' stunt doubles inside the truck's cab slam to the right, then left). Empowered, sans sunglasses,

emboldened by blade and months of sparring, Nomi makes her demand: “I want my fucking suitcase back!” Jeff’s gamble clearly a loss, he concedes as they fly down the highway—a promise to return the goods if she chills out. Outside of Vegas,

a billboard comes into (floating) camera’s view: A Vegas hotel show, not to be missed by tourists or truckers: *Nomi Malone in Goddess*. A lone green highway sign (*Los Angeles 280*) points to the land of sunglasses, swimming pools (and sequels?). An aspiring lead actress gambles everything on this role of a lifetime: A character named “Nomi”—

Nomi, she who will inspire legions of young wannabees, Las Vegas dancers (*and* homosexuals), willing to gamble all, hop into pickup trucks in dark sunglasses, and ride 131 minutes on Verhoeven’s legendary highway.

The Dream Begins, Turns Over, and Goes Flat

The dream begins, turns over, and goes flat.

It's dug this ground before: cliffs, skin, crashes,
tests. It knows better than a dog where it's
going, what it needs. It's finished with ashes
and fabrications; it strips itself down
to a shadow, lies naked beneath neon.
Dizzy with tears of victims, the dream drowns
its ghosts and seeks a different season
in the year of the buried hammer. Soft
tongue, lick my wounds once more. Carry me frail
down into. Yes and yes again. Now lift
the scar that pins you to your past, exhale
its history and hang it from the rafters,
leaving the dream to dream stranger chapters.

Are You Having a Good Time?

Are you having a good time? Are you
storm-struck or sun-ridden? A floral
or a dapple, a painting or a stain. Do
you err on the side of blunder or brutal

belief? Are you bored? Blanched? Are you broken?
Are you the tunnel at the end of the light?
Can I hold your coat or take your shoes? Can
I ask you about your pants? Do you bite?

Would you prefer to die in crossfire or
suicide? Do you take lemon in your tea?
While screwing would you opt for carpeted floor
or marble countertop? Do you like my knees?

The bird or the tree—which one gets to live?
This poem is burning—which word do you save?

[There's no list,]

There's no list,
laundry on the line.

Just this.
... that ok?

Lo-fi

Don't need the top button
or any buttons because maybe
somebody sucked on one once;
one of those times.

Fact:
Buttons are suckable and stupid.

Controversy I won't shy from;
facts I'm not afraid of;
words I live by;
the platform I stand on;
the ideas I stand for

because I know how to fight
because I fight sometimes
because "sometimes" is a
great way to say "never."

Call It a Love Note If You Want.

Not wrong:
note by me
and I love you.

from TriStar Pictures

lead in (a pause) in sound I'm rolling *dancing in*
the dark mechanical analog sound storage start
at the periphery and end near the center
depending upon time capacity and revolutions per
minute

(a crystal moon)

within the carbon black

lost in the circling grooves trapped in walls of sound
spinning *there aren't any turns or corners or anything this just*
goes on and on—there aren't any turns or openings or anything
it just goes on and on—there isn't an opening—that's just
wall there isn't a way through we're playing the same song
the same part *to start all over again—back to the*
beginning—which way—I have to get to the castle at the
center—

within your heart time depends
on speed and spacing *spin (((((evenings))))))*
between the stars

as the world—

as the world—

as the world—

as the world—

falls

I Could Win You a Pink Hummer

Under the chlorine garden waterfall in a shopping mall
where mechanical birds chirp and children parade
their mothers' purses for loose fountains. The knockout
lemonade brain-squeeze stand shut down last week, and please,
let me elbow and knee-punch through kiosk war zones, let me oh
let me hang glide into Abercrombie model razor abs. A sound
like plastic alligators hammer-smashed in the distance tokens out
a million red tickets confetti-style. It's about time to powerwalk
the cafeteria mile while crushing cold Orange Julius Caesars
and puffing blue e-cig halo rings. There can never be enough
running shoes and referee girls and nipple-less mannequin heroes
to root for or against depending on how much Hatorade
I've had for breakfast lunch dinner lifting weights. I love cell phone
cases. They teach me how to reach endlessly into my pockets
as if a whole beach were hourglassing through a denim hole and goddamn
I want to wear knockoff sunglasses on my chest. Headphones
for my kneecaps & Bluetooth thighbones. There's a small part
of Southern California missing inside me and if you find it please
spraytan it orange. If only someone would invent a feeling
for Spencer's gag gifts. Some new Gak-shaped heart to throb
and melt with. I'm telling you now I can't stop dreaming
about neon cheese and these diamond-salt pretzels. I wake up
in the middle of the night and wish this waterfall, this marble

fountain—I wish, I really do—would explode with nickels.

I think if I had it all I would take off my shirt and do the backstroke
with unblinking eyes while early Pearl Jam plays just for me.

The Flying Lady

A digression for the wedding on this night boat,
the skyline ahead stares back blankly, the clank
of anchors records itself against the green sewer
to duck under. A man lived four years under this
bridge with a television, a stove, a down comforter,
& two dogs, suspended above water that freezes into
grease every winter. Imagine dying in an upward
motion, looking down at it all night, the anti-
maelstrom, the absence of cataclysm abroad,
the revelations of the flesh in a cold season.
If you only watch the bridge collapse, you don't
see much. Under the body, testing for leverage,
what is not neck is tail, what is tooth is soft and supple.

For Us

Brush dipped, you touched the tip
to the paper—it might have been the smooth
of my stomach, and I did—I led you

to the bed. You were natural, opening
like a flower, your penis, freesia,
the light scent. You didn't need to be taught.

In dreams, I show paintings to the boys
from elementary school—Eric Weber, Andy Birch.
The sky is purple. They are all still here. For us,

it was easy as a river's twisting. My hunger—
red tongues, orange flames, a flicker
of blue. You wore yourself lightly,

dirty jeans, button fly, work shirt.

To Write My Autobiography

I could start with happiness and work backwards
toward a peach tree and three hundred small fruits.

I could inscribe the streetlight's halo, touching
the petals of the magnolia, us kids playing statues,

flung, frozen in place. To write my autobiography
I will introduce you to my sisters.

Marilyn, who calls herself Marz, likes exclamations:
"Lordy!" She was flighty, absent-minded, stood on her head.

My sister Ann, who couldn't stop laughing when, in Mexico,
talking to the shoeshine man, I was so proud of myself

when I produced the word *zapato*. She knows how to curse
in several languages. This story doesn't seem to have a plot,

though I've introduced two characters, at least one setting
and a first-person narrator. My life doesn't move forward

like a woman riding a train. It gives me pleasure
to throw the vegetable peels and apple cores in the compost.

The story is imbued with a rich, organic smell.

No plot, but a record played over and over

on the wheeling turntable. “Lord almighty!” says one sister,

“Holy cow!” The other sister laughs. Between the tracks,

there is silence. The needle’s scratch on the plastic disc.

If I play it enough, I’ll hear something in the space

at the end of the record, where the needle scoots and returns,

skids and returns. I might catch a sound, a word,

a whisper of a sister who didn’t live.

Patience

I'm bleeding and everybody at the park
is pregnant. Everybody at the party is
pregnant. The surly barista. The dog

waddling toward the corner, the teenagers
shouting on the train: Pregnant. I'm naming
all the phases of the moon: Great soup

ladle. Snipped fingernail sliver. Salt
on half the fat rim of the glass. Blank face
of an erased clock, no hands. All the abortions

I never had hang off my hips like a belt
of spent ammunition. In Texas, park rangers
are killing wild burros so that rich men

can sport hunt bighorn sheep. I sign
the electronic petition. I sit and wait
for the cotton between my legs

to fill and be replaced. To be told
one looks great for one's age
is a complicated compliment. It's hard

to know quite how to take it. I've been
my age my entire life
and like the moon I can name

the phases: Spelling bee champion pre-
adolescent. Relentlessly intoxicated
college student. Pissed off

at the world's vast injustices in a non-
specific but deeply adamant manner twenty-
something. Bald-headed combat

boot-shod baby dyke who sometimes
still kissed boys in bar bathroom
stalls, I could go

on. The number of days
a girl can get knocked up
each month is astonishingly

minute. The young have great aim,
and fearsome luck. I am not
young. I don't know the difference

between a wild burro
and a domesticated one, don't know
how to shoot anything deadlier

than a BB gun. The moon is dented
like a target can. We're five days short
of the hunter's moon. If I made you this month

you'd be born under the moon called thunder.
It's 80 degrees today even though
it's October. Strange things are happening

in the trees. A marathon has shut down miles
of city streets. Now when I run
it is only ever toward you, toward

your hypothetical body, your almost
face. Face I've waited this whole
wasted lifetime to see.

Supplication with Grimy Windowpane

I don't know what I'm supposed to do about the dead.
I sweep and sweep. The taxes are put away, and the hats
stacked brim to brim. The pink rubber ball on the radiator

just sits there. I'm alive, I'm sorry, I'm not sorry.
In the bath, my body is massive: thighs, big toes, every
pointy hair. We're out of wine. I remember when the water

was a sanctuary. Come closer now. This is the part
where I tell you what's behind the glass to which
I've pressed my entire body, pink from the bath,

this is the part where you tell me how many
of your teeth are dead, where you left the cowboy
hat you snatched from the head of your sister's

lost doll. It's too quiet now. Give me something
I can chew on, long into the evening. An architecture
for this salt house. This bony, birdless pen.



Columbia
COLLEGE CHICAGO

COVER ART:

Friends to keep you warm, #29

Izziyana Suhaimi, 2011

Embroidery and pen on paper, 30 x 40 cm