

*For Mum and Dad*

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I

## First Dissection

I held a heart  
in seventh grade.  
Lump of meat,  
stopped clock,  
a slick weight  
in my nitrile gloves.  
Pig's heart,  
similar in size  
and weight  
to the ones inside  
the sixteen students  
bearing down hard  
with unstained scalpels.

After the first  
muscle cut,  
I found ventricles.  
A jagged halving,  
messier than the image  
on the worksheet,  
the diagram I smeared  
red to label *aorta*.  
Inert blood  
on a yellow pencil.

One boy wiped  
his hands on the girls'  
aprons, and was told  
to knock it off.  
The meat almost  
squeaked against  
my gloved fingers,  
the heart skidding  
from side to side  
in its metal tray  
as I tried to steady it.

*continued, no break*

If I pressed too hard,  
it was okay. Nothing  
would leak out, only  
the bruised smell  
of aldehydes  
and disinfectant.  
Still, I tried  
to be gentle  
with its muscles,  
narrow and stretched  
like cocked  
rubber bands.

There were empty  
spaces within  
the heart, places  
to fit my thumb.  
A valve flapped  
wet and the words  
told me to cut it  
open and study  
the little pathway,  
to feel the force  
of its openings  
and closings.  
The gate now  
swinging open,  
unlatched.

## Minerals Cracked Open and Gleaming

How is an eye like a rock?  
Both vaguely spheroid, both

cradled in empty spaces like  
a socket or a mountain cave.

They found that my optic nerves  
were swollen with crystal and salt,

protein and calcium deposits  
in the soft topography behind the eye.

These are called *drusen*,  
the German word for geodes.

An eye is a rock whose veins  
might be crammed with gems:

wish I had clear quartz  
or purple amethyst in mine,

wish I could pry them out,  
hold one in each palm,

and hand them over to be mined  
as easy as setting a geode

on velvet and plucking out  
the crystals with a jeweler's tools.

### **Domesticated Brown Rat**

His paws surprise me  
the most: human-like  
with knuckled pink fingers,  
warm when he grabs  
my thumb and brings  
its pale nail to his mouth.

He climbs in the trashcan,  
pulling out stale bread,  
dragging it out of sight  
behind my pillow, grinding  
his teeth. A thump  
from the closet means  
he's climbed up my dresses  
to reach the top shelf  
and knocked over a shoebox.

I doze and he hoists himself  
up to my shoulder, biting  
my eyebrows. His eyes close  
when I stroke his snout.  
I can hold all of him  
in one hand: quick little heart,  
chalk-white coat, veins  
branching in pink ears.



## **Light Therapy**

Do not stare directly into the little square  
of daylight captured in a box on your desk,  
but keep it in your periphery. It's fine

to close your eyes and let the light  
knock at your eyelids, stronger  
than the feeble sunset out the window.

Do not leave the light on for longer  
than ten minutes. In the same way  
too much ice cream hurts your head,

too much of this clear cold white  
will burn. Forget sunscreen, now.  
Forget creamsicles and snow cones.

Forget the humid mattress exhaling  
sweat and all the chilly libraries  
of summer. Forget iced coffee.

Light, like caffeine, is a chemical,  
to be consumed at the same time each day.  
The medicine illuminates your throat.

## **Crustacean Biology**

### I. The Swamplands of Cary

Mud chimneys on low-lying golf courses  
hide crawfish burrowed in the grass.  
Dad used to catch them there, and so do I.  
Plump little bodies, grayblue shells,  
a tangle of joints scrabbling in my hand.  
Nowhere near a creek, certainly no bayou:  
just a lawn sinking deeper into the earth.

### II. The Museum of Natural Sciences

A researcher lectured  
on symbiosis, standing

by two crayfish  
in a tank. There are

bad parasites, she said,  
like the tongue-eating louse,

but the crayfish is home  
to gentler worms:

That white spot  
between his eyes

is a generous little cleaner.  
Another worm negotiates

the mud in his gill chamber,  
allowing him more oxygen.

*continued, stanza break*

### III. The Kitchen

We didn't want to boil them alive  
so bought them frozen at the store.  
I shucked corn, chopped onions,  
steamed potatoes in the pot  
where their gray bodies turned red.

They cooled on unfurled newspaper,  
grease turning the comics  
transparent. Dad held one up  
to his face and said *Look at us,*  
*two crawdads,* waiting for a laugh,

then he peeled them for me,  
pinching their primordial tails  
to dip the meat in butter.

I cleaned the kitchen after,  
scrubbed the seasoning  
out of pots and pans,  
out of the oven-hot air,  
then took the bucket  
of skeletons to the porch  
and tipped it, a soft rustle  
hushing crickets in the grass.

## **Open Streets Festival**

In uniform gray spandex  
capped by a chrome helmet,  
the cyclist parts the sunny crowd,  
weaving around ten-year-olds  
with streamers and balloons  
on pastel handlebars.

Younger children on balance bikes  
glide chainless past their parents  
eating crepes, shielding their eyes.

My old blue Schwinn sprawls beside me  
in the grass, one pedal spinning  
a lazy circuit, still chasing the sole  
of my sneaker. Across the street  
a worker rides to work with no helmet  
and breezes through a stoplight.

## Virginia Knotweed

I used to tap  
the long, thin stalks  
to make the seeds  
burst and fly  
from the creek bank.

Knotweed grew  
everywhere,  
ground cover  
draped in a spray  
of pinprick flowers  
piercing the air  
in downy spikes.

*Jumpseed,*  
it's also called.  
I would jump  
from the touch  
of bristle-fringed  
leaves, shocked  
that I could spark  
the chaos of it,  
more anarchic  
than blowing  
a dandelion out  
like a candle.  
More like  
starting a fire.

Before long  
my grandma said  
*Don't touch  
the plants.  
They'll smother  
my tomatoes.*  
She seized

*continued, no break*

a fistful  
of errant stalks.  
I dawdled  
in the garden  
to watch her  
deadhead them,  
leaving behind  
only the leaves.

## Thrill Rides

In front of the Zipper,  
Top 40 hits throb  
from the speakers  
*loud enough to jar the stents  
from your father's heart.*  
My mother shuns it, wary.

It's true, rides have killed  
fairgoers. I came close  
inside a creaking capsule  
with a broken seatbelt  
on the Skydiver wheel,  
rotating like a circular saw,

shaking me and Rachel  
so hard we nearly lost  
consciousness afterwards  
lying panting on the grass,  
hands on pounding hearts,  
trying to focus on the fireworks

rolling in the candy-apple air.

## The Last Wolf of Navarra

The Biology building displays  
hundreds of glass eyes  
behind glass. *You'll never  
see another wolf in this region,*  
our professor host says. *Here  
is the only one left.* The red  
muzzle's grin is stiff with age,  
the ears crooked forward  
to approximate curiosity.

The first time I saw taxidermy,  
it was a friend's after-school hobby.  
She arranged three stuffed mice  
in a nest of moss and feathers  
as if sleeping. Other times,  
she bleached roadkill bones,  
like the fawn ribs I keep  
on my bookshelf to remember  
her. In Navarra, other things

remind me of the lonely wolf:  
the fog crawling on the hills  
like a living thing, rolling over  
acres of sheep; a dozen empty  
birdcages stacked in a window;  
the curving mouth of a yellow beach.  
And lounging in a deck chair  
in an open-air market, a mannequin  
torso, bone-white, tranquil in disuse.



## Shingles

In the car, my mother and I would play a game: start with a long word, like *shingle*, and shed one letter at a time to build new words. We tore down *shingles* to make *single*, *singe*, and *sing*, then finally *sin* and *in* and lone individual *I*. She had shingles once, and I assumed the virus turned her skin to a blistered etching: hard layers one over the other, chipped and peeling. What if she slipped a fingernail underneath to scratch, and cracked the surface, and made it fall away? What if she lost her shelter, her shell? In the end the virus trickled from her nerves to mine like rain down a sloping roof, remaking itself in me.

## **Statue in Copenhagen Harbor**

In Danish *havfrue* does not mean *mermaid* but *half-woman*.  
It's better to be seafoam than to be half a woman.

The images on posters and bus ads create an illusion of size,  
heft. But she is only four feet tall, less than a woman,

slumped on the little rock, bronze arm curved over petite belly.  
Her head was stolen in 1964. With a new one, is she the same woman?

Twenty years later, her arm was sawn off, returned the next day.  
Hurt, whole, degraded, or grateful, she could be any woman

facing the sea, head turned from the crowd, spine curved,  
knees bent. But she is protected by patina, an immortal woman.

## **Knife and Cutting Board**

The field trip takes us to a historic mill  
in the forest, home to goats grazing  
in a pen and the family who runs  
the museum. In the center of the house  
grain spills from a carved wooden face,  
kitsch with a grinning mouthful.

For lunch we sit at long tables draped  
in checkered cloth. Each of us receives  
a knife and a plank of wood, then  
crusty bread with jam and cheese  
and slabs of meat: cold pink ham,  
bacon striped thick with fat.

Samir, next to me, eats nothing, observing  
Ramadan. His board is clean, and he drums  
his fingers on it, laughing when  
the young daughter asks why he's not  
hungry. The rest of us have never fasted.  
Our hosts implore him to take bread home.

I keep drinking apple wine, aware  
of the smooth glass against my lips  
and the wooden bench at my back.  
Hazy, warm, I could almost sleep here.  
With one hand pressed to the meat,  
I saw into it as gently as possible.

## **Bellstruck**

Spirals of wooden stairs  
coil to the barred chambers  
in the steeple's belfry

where six bells wait,  
antique, green-tinted metal  
and the hint of a curve

cohering in the gloom.  
Through clerestory windows,  
the sky drones white

and poplar pollen drifts  
in puffy cloud-clumps  
down to the streets.

An alarm in the belfry  
warns that it flashes red  
just before the bells ring.

Why not sit and wait  
for them to strike, a private  
revelry quaking my bones,

ringing me like a saint—  
that, or striking me  
utterly deaf by noon?

II

### **Bitter Matte**

When I was five  
I ate a tube of lipstick  
and smeared the gemlike  
gloss of it across my teeth.  
A year later, at the mall,  
my mother took a photo of me  
gazing at the Lancôme display,  
reading the coy names  
of the latest colors—*blush*,  
*pout*, *siren*, *wine*—and frowning  
at words that failed to capture  
the gradient beauty of those  
plush buttons arrayed in rows  
on the mirrored counter  
reflecting my mouth,  
unpainted, voracious.

## **Dormant Icons**

Lillian's green filigree  
opera glasses, a locket,  
and three compacts,  
all monogrammed LAM,  
one of them still filled  
with pink powder  
and a thumb-sized puff.

Her husband's steel marbles  
in a velvet bag, clattering  
against the silver pocket watch  
hooked to its chain.

A yellow felt pennant: *I WAS  
AT THE 1939 WORLD'S FAIR*,  
pinned to Marilyn's coat  
when she was in junior high.

Lillian's slim leather wallet,  
too small for modern plastic.  
Marilyn's nubby orange purse,  
still filled with legal tender.

All their jewelry, tangled  
in a gallon-size Ziploc--  
my mother went through it  
pearl by pearl by pearl.

She told me about some earrings  
over the phone, and confessed  
she didn't know why she was crying  
until she heard my voice,

then saved a necklace on my dresser  
for the next time I come home.

## **The Most Popular Hike in Norway**

Sunlight bleeds through the curtains  
and seethes into my burned skin.

I had filled my water bottle in a glacial lake.  
In the highest places I crossed fields of snow,  
solo, and the ice snuck into my boots,  
numbing both feet, but at the summit  
I stood one kilometer closer to the sun.

Lunch was ham on rye with watermelon  
and cucumbers. I sat on a rock to eat,  
and watched hikers pass over the ridge:  
a procession of nimble, tanned blondes,  
grandparents and five-year-old children,  
a stern man yanking his dog by the collar.

On the ridge, where the sloping rock spine  
suddenly became vertical, I was a giant  
sending my arms ahead of me, trusting my legs  
would follow. The long green lake below  
kept the memory of glaciers, trailing  
the slow wake of a ferry as small as a pebble.

When I collapsed in our cabin that afternoon,  
burnt and aching, ready to shower, Jon asked  
if I could hand him his boots. No, I said,  
I can't even bend at the knee. Get them yourself.  
I could barely untie my own frozen laces.  
He'd bailed on the hike because of a bloody nose  
and left me only one of his trekking poles.

I leaned it against the luggage, dreading  
the cold room waiting for us in Oslo,  
wanting to be alone again, solitary  
as the ridge I had to trust like my own spine.



## Doing Hair

Today Marge's grown son comes by  
for his every-six-weeks haircut,  
the lowered slope of his shoulders  
leaning against the leather back  
of a salon chair in the bathroom  
where her cosmetology license  
is framed on the wall.

Marge's own granddaughter  
snubs her for a salon stylist.  
In the sixties she did hair  
for brunettes who went blonde,  
but none the other way around.

How long has it been since the girl  
climbed up into the big chair  
and stuck her fair head under  
the hooded bubble of the dryer?

Marge drapes a black cape  
over her son like a shadow  
grown heavy, brings the scissors  
up to his thin, fine hair.

Her platinum bob shines in the mirror,  
curled soft below the ears with a wisp  
of sideswept bangs: classic pageboy.  
Back in her salon days, she used to do  
beehives and bouffants and perms,

used to let the boys keep  
their hair long even if  
it made their mothers sigh.  
None of them had more hair  
than her own son: the thick  
brown mop-top fell in his eyes,

*continued, no break*

wet with sweat on Sundays  
when he mowed the lawn.

Marge puts the scissors aside now  
as she makes a last pass  
of the electric razor up his neck  
and combs back his soft hair,  
gray now, grayer with each visit.

## **Iron and Steel**

Once, in a restaurant—it was late  
and we were the only customers,  
conscious of the waitstaff watching us  
behind the bar—my friends saw  
a single ice skate on the floor, stained  
red on boot and blade. Whose?

No one noticed our discovery,  
and we paid for our lumpy pizzas  
and walked out. Music spilled  
into the street from a club, and  
we swing-danced on the sidewalk,  
already forgetting the question.

## **Electrocardiogram**

a translation of Blanca Castellón

After many blissful years  
together, yesterday

for the first time  
my heart wrote me

a long love letter  
on a narrow page

like a month's worth  
of supermarket receipts,

thanking me in its precise  
language of wavy lines

for the full life it had enjoyed  
in its warm home. Steadily

it affirmed its strength,  
assured me it was proud

to share the intense emotions  
I'd procured over time.

It had infused them  
with only the best blood

and had no complaint of me,  
only of the wounds dealt

by those who left this world  
without saying goodbye,

who turned their backs on  
our gray century, from the wet

*continued, stanza break*

scar of global poverty.  
It signed off with a plea:

*keep loving, and tell  
your husband not to suffocate*

*his heart with the smoke  
of his idle cigar.*

## Roses

On Valentine's Day my roommate took herself on a date  
to the tattoo parlor, where they outlined a rose

on the left thigh. I saw her that night, walking  
down the sidewalk with the new clean lines exposed

to the cold, the fresh tattoo slick and shining  
in its thin layer of plastic. Saw her left black stocking

rolled down to the knee, the asymmetry daring  
men on the street to stare. And up close, I saw

a faint afterimage of blood pressed into her skin,  
tinting each blue-veined petal red. This bouquet

she bought for herself. She was heading home  
to take another aspirin and warm up. I wanted

to be alone too, not standing on the street  
with my date's cold fingers locked around mine,

hunting for a restaurant with an open table for two,  
remembering the fresh roses on my nightstand.

Six clumsy flowers, their heads knocking  
together in the vase, their prickly stems

ready to draw blood, their buds pliant.

## **Borrowed**

At work Rachel is a brisk flash of black,  
turning on her heel to deliver another tray  
of Bloody Marys. She forgot to bring  
a change of clothes, so I give her a shirt  
of mine. In her closet hang my blue camisole,  
my softest gray sweater, and a raincoat.

I wear Rachel's Bright Eyes tee, plus  
her bra and a pair of glittery green heels  
that hurt her feet. I wish they lent me  
a stubborn grace, too. Instead I stumble  
down the sidewalk just behind her.

Back home we make instant mashed potatoes  
and later, because that left us hungry,  
fried rice with chicken. She pours peach tea  
into a cup of vodka, sweetly cauterizing.  
Tonight we're going to walk hand in hand  
to a bar that won't study her fake I.D.  
and we'll slouch back to her bedroom,

and I'll fall asleep on Rachel's thrifted futon  
still wearing a borrowed skirt.

## **Magpie Funeral**

The walls of the citadel grow  
clusters of birds like flowers

sprouting from stone. Below  
the aqueduct, a rustle

of blue-black feathers falls  
on the grass of the fortress.

The magpies give a harsh  
rattling call and shriek down,

moving their black beaks  
over the one who was killed.

Around them, kids play soccer  
on lush fields, and dogs romp

without leashes. Pamplona  
circles the star fort. Distant

from its defensive geometry,  
the O has fallen from HOSTAL

fixed on the side of an inn.  
Birds nest in the remaining letters,

in the crook of L's arm, in  
the gentle undercurve of S.

The lost vowel leaves a ghost  
of itself on the wall, untouched

by weather. Down in the fortress  
a stray tabby circles the magpies,

making them scatter and rise.



## **Aubade**

I rise in a fugue, blinking in dim light  
at the voyeuristic crutches standing guard  
against the wall, and swallow oxycodone  
with a sigh that wakes her. She tells me

I still have a great pair of gams, even  
the one with a glorious bruise swelling  
to embrace my broken ankle and stroke  
a swath past my knee, almost to the thigh.

Soon I'll leave for the doctor's. Until then,  
trying not to jostle the three pillows elevating  
my leg, she leans down for a cautious kiss,  
another ache sunk in the marrow.

## **Asphalt Cartography**

For days I'm a camera  
mapping local parking lots,  
translating their landscapes  
into two dimensions. Each space  
is a circle on the map, merging  
in a blocky pointillism.

In my mind every car is a dot,  
including my beige Civic  
nestled against the curb.  
I must measure everything  
in automobile-lengths, like when  
learning to drive, resting

my foot for the first time  
on the clutch in the parking lot  
of an abandoned strip mall,  
circling the carless spaces,  
the neat field of white lines  
marking nothing for no one.

## Night Climb in Freiburg

The arch over the rail station  
bridge is just wide enough  
to climb, so we do, first  
upright and then at a slow  
meticulous crawl.

It's a long slick parabola  
in misting rain. Halfway  
to the top, my hands slip,  
and I try to shuffle back,  
bumping into Caroline.  
No choice but to keep going  
up, my glasses water-blurred.

At the top I'm afraid to spin  
around and dangle my legs  
over the edge like everyone else.  
It's too late for the trains to run.  
If I fell, I fear I'd land on top  
of a sudden locomotive,  
whistling shrill and carrying me  
away from this foreign station.

Crouched at the apex,  
I have to slink to my belly  
to finally crawl down  
the other side, clinging  
to the wet bridge that pops  
the buttons off my cardigan.

The night bus ride home  
is damp and peaceful.  
Like the others, I throw  
my head back and laugh  
at my rain-soaked clothes.

## Miserere

The chapel expands with smoke  
and the boy next to me leans forward,

shaggy head bowed, fidgeting  
and twitching his hands, distant

as the voices rising from the chancel.  
In the church choir I used to send

*kyries* up to vaulted ceilings, numbed  
by anodyne Latin, reluctant to praise

a remote god in English, or ask him  
for anything at all. I feel that way again,

like I am the melody rising in the nave,  
or the hot smoke spilling from charcoal

swung from a censer. Afterwards  
we walk into the clear cold night,

my heels staccato on the flagstones,  
hands hidden in my coat pockets

so I won't touch him again.

## **Jewelweed**

is named for its waxy leaves.  
During storms, they repel raindrops,  
saving them like cabochon glass.

The flowers are their own gems,  
orange teardrops like citrine, red-flecked,  
lustrous as fire opal.

Their stalks surrender  
at a gentle tug. Wading into the bed  
leaves me with spiders

on my legs: it's rained so much  
this summer, I wonder how many  
have drowned on the leaves,

overwhelmed by the water,  
sealed and hoarded like the spark  
of a diamond's flaw.

III

## **Chrysalis**

I left you one night to find  
a new traffic light hanging  
over the crossing, swinging  
and draped in a black sheet.

The crunch of ice and snow  
underfoot forced my gaze  
down to every cautious step,  
the first on the sidewalk.

No one witnessed my fall,  
though I sensed the three eyes  
of the traffic light behind me,  
shrouded as if cocooned.

## **What Went Bad in Our Kitchen**

A carton of blackberries, half full,  
left out on the counter, now fuzzy  
with beaded gems of mold, studded  
with fine hairs, opaque and wet.  
Half a watermelon, picked up  
at a roadside stand and turning black  
in the bottom drawer. A bottle of wine  
uncorked beside the fridge,  
glass abdomen reflecting  
the sheen of grease on a gray  
chicken biscuit. Two peaches,  
banana-cradled, soft with rot  
in a fruit bowl. Months-old milk,  
year-old mayonnaise. Stagnant water  
in your aluminum thermos uncapped  
by the sink where you left it. Something  
long forgotten in the microwave.  
Something in the oven too.



## **Milkweed**

One day I found a paper nest  
in the magnolia, an oblong lump  
teeming with bald-faced hornets.

When they crawled out to seek  
milkweed, they bloomed white  
in the radial globes of flowers,

stark against purple and red.  
I waited until late summer  
to destroy the nest, and did it

quietly, with three pre-dawn  
sprays of poison. The colony  
had already disintegrated,

the queen outlived. They  
will return in spring, and build  
another nest in another tree,

above the milkweed still  
sending out its woolly silk  
of seeds, filling with sugar.

## College Graduation Party, May 1998

Susan's friends placed a call  
to *Hot Raleigh Strippers* in secret,  
knowing there were children

in the family room with crayons  
and coloring books, young enough  
for our flailing limbs to threaten

the drinks perched on sofa arms.  
Two sharp knocks at the door  
and her mom and dad goad Susan

to *answer it, already*, as she crosses  
the room, nearly trips over her sister  
sprawled on the shag carpet.

The man standing on the porch  
is a cop, but he sends his hat sailing  
across the room into her mother's lap,

and everyone cheers when he rips off  
his vest for Susan, blushing, silent,  
back in her stiff chair in the corner.

He is made of glitter and sweat.  
From his stereo the Backstreet Boys  
croon *Get yourself a bad boy*

and all the lights are off now except for  
a disco ball lobbing red and blue light  
onto the stiff spikes of his gelled hair.

The whole room shakes and throbs  
with the snap of his hips in Susan's face  
and her father's wild laughter.

*continued, stanza break*

Later, I wave goodbye to her, silent  
still, hands folded tight. My parents shut  
the door, muffling the shrieks to a murmur

like the low thump of a migraine.

### **Werewolf, Age Thirteen**

At dawn, when she returns to herself  
with dirt in her mouth and blood under  
the French manicure, she will bend  
aching knees for the long walk home.

Her mother will be waiting at the door  
with a ham sandwich and a glass  
of milk, ready to mend the sweater,  
wash muddy jeans, and arrange

the sneakers in a neat line. The girl  
will stay home sick from school,  
curled in bed, and the hands folded  
under her neck will remember

the throat they wrapped around last night,  
that conscious and sleepless anatomy.

## **After the Centralia Mine Fire**

Kids were forbidden  
to venture into the hills  
punctured by sinkholes  
swollen with heat  
and carbon monoxide.

The soft earth disguised  
its softness under moss  
and leaf debris, under  
clumps of maidenhair fern,  
under the bloom of spicebush  
and wild geranium, hiding  
the traps of its tunnels.

Pierced with mines built  
over mines, the gutted hills  
filled their hollows with fire  
and longed to suffocate.

My father played in the yard  
or in the squat stone houses  
of his dour aunts and uncles.  
In their dark parlors he lost  
toy cars to the cellar grates.

The heat that rose up  
smelled like wood smoke,  
but bitter, and it infused  
his clothes deep as the dust  
that bloomed from the coal,  
the grime that sharpened  
the stale air of the cellar  
and blackened the skins  
of carrots and potatoes.

## **You Say Yes, I Say No**

I was thirteen and nothing was harder than singing. The morning of our May ceremony, Tara and I wore white dresses and played “Hello Goodbye” on stage. To be precise, she played guitar and I sang. To be precise, I sang badly, my voice too shy to hold onto the right note. *That was so emotional*, Matt said afterwards. *Your voice cracked*. Yes, only because it did not belong to me and would not submit to my control, like a Frisbee rolling down the road before falling into a storm drain. Soon I said goodbye to singing altogether, to acoustic guitars, to microphones on stage, to the dress that shone like a beacon in the dark for an audience obliged to be polite.

## **Ruminant**

How can a cow ignore the flies  
licking her flank? Hazy black mob  
shifting in the heat, cut in half  
by flicks of her tail then coming together  
again. More hum than murmur.

She doesn't care about them,  
a black patch on her hide same as dirt.  
Her long piebald tongue rolls out  
to hold a clump of sod, shakes  
the dirt off before pulling roots  
into a fly-heavy mouth. Her black  
eyes are luminous, thoughtful.

In the low afternoon light, a swarm  
of bees lingers at the edge of the field  
where we stand, seeking a new hive.  
The sky darkens with their weight  
like an itch settling under the skin.

Will it leave us alone, this single body  
teeming with mouths and stingers?  
The swarm collapses over the horizon,  
anxiety bearable for being just out of sight.  
I close my eyes and a black vibrato  
mass of wings twists in the darkness.

### **Small Library Elegy**

The last box in the attic held  
Marilyn's books. To haul it  
down the clanking ladder  
was to carry her weight,

the titles that might have been  
on the bedside bookshelf  
or stacked on the end table

or—the lone cookbook—  
propped up in the kitchen,  
so she could flip through it  
while stirring Fordhooks  
at the stove. A bookmark  
rose from a casserole recipe,  
waiting for a church luncheon.

*A Prayer Guide for Lent*  
lay creased in the box,  
with other brochures  
on how to pray for children,  
and for one's husband,  
and for acts of mercy.

I'm sure she curled up  
with Nora Roberts  
in her green armchair,  
and sat at the old rolltop  
with Nicholas Sparks,  
and took her coffee  
outside with Don Rickles  
on the rose garden porch,

and I know her fingers  
worried the pages  
of the last book in the pile,

*continued, no break*



the heavy *Encyclopedia  
of Symptoms*: a complete  
guide to Chest Pain, Chills,  
and Nicotine Withdrawal,  
maladies receding farther  
each day from the soft  
paperweight of her hands.

## **Sighting**

Today a team of researchers  
was surprised by a sperm whale  
circling their sub, its cautious face  
caught angling toward the camera.

First the head visible through  
the cloudy window, then body  
and body and body and finally  
the triangular lobes of the tail  
passing the boat, again and again,  
as the whale inspected the vessel.

If only they still walked on land.  
To lie in a garden and see, among  
sycamore branches, a massive eye.  
To sit rolling in an office chair  
and drop a stack of papers  
at the sound of whalesong

and the sight of the smallest part  
of something big peering inside.

## Alternative Energy in Southern Germany

### I. Schönau

Nuclear disaster irradiated  
the mushrooms, and pigs  
who scavenged in the forest:  
everything was toxic, even  
the hazel trees. The mayor

pointed to the river  
where they were going  
to build the reactor.  
The town fought it,  
she said, led by a famous  
chocolatier, horrified  
by the threat posed  
to hazelnut candy bars.

Nuclear power vanished  
from the valley. Now  
all sweets are benign.

The mayor explained  
that there's a German word  
for the feeling of a stone  
falling from your heart.

### II. Emmendingen

Hiding from freezing rain,  
our class huddled in the warmth  
of the biogas tanks  
at the Schneider farm.

*continued, stanza break*

They used to raise livestock,  
but now Rico the Schnauzer  
is the biggest animal there.

Crowding the empty pastures,  
the plump round tanks seem  
like sleeping beasts, rumbling  
and clanking, bulky as sows.

The daughters and sons  
have forsaken the family business,  
unwilling to breed meat or fuel.  
Their mother hands us umbrellas  
and gives us cherry schnapps  
from the cellar distillery  
to keep us warm.

### III. Wildpoldsried

The church roofs are studded  
with solar panels, and long rows  
of photovoltaics rise  
from lavish fields.

Sheep graze between  
the sharp blue chips  
as if they're just another crop  
turning sunlight into sugar.

Over the hill, behind a line  
of fluorescent pink rhododendrons,  
turbines rise from the fog, mist  
beading on their white steel stalks.

## Two Oaks

The post oak still dominates  
my parents' house, shadowing  
the yard, but I can already see  
its stump. They keep the tree  
for me, and I'm not the one  
who has to rake its nubby leaves  
out of the nandina beds.

I know it will come down  
one day, though I'd still see  
its phantom branches framing  
the gables, the way I see  
the white bench circling its trunk  
though five years have passed  
since that seat rotted away.

Last summer, a storm felled  
the arboretum's swamp white oak.  
The sky forgot its branches  
but the fallen trunk endured,  
carved by somebody's chainsaw  
into a loveseat. I sat there  
with a date one night and told him  
I'd seen the calamity firsthand.

## **The North Carolina Watermelon Queen**

Harvest goddess  
of rind and sweetness,  
herald of August  
leading Murfreesboro  
in a parade down  
Main Street, she waves

from a float decked  
in green and pink.  
Draped in a satin sash,  
she shades her face  
with a black-seeded  
parasol, squinting

under a pale sky  
looming like the awnings  
at the farmers' market.  
Watermelons pile up  
at her royal feet,  
a sweet unstable heap.

She holds thick slabs  
of fruit, rind striped  
and sun-bleached, juice  
dripping into her palm,  
then hands her bounty  
down to hungry kids.

After the festival,  
she blesses every plate  
in every restaurant,  
her portrait beaming  
from the shining backs  
of the napkin dispensers.

## **Hall of Taxidermy**

The giraffe's neck rises  
through the stairwell,  
casting a long shadow

on the wall's tidy array  
of antlers and horns.

It's more imposing than lion  
or rhinoceros because  
I have to tilt my head  
back to meet its eyes,

or else climb to the top  
of the stairs and look down  
on the black lashes  
curving over glass,

the ears that must feel  
like velvet, the hide  
slick and dust-free.

Some janitor must come  
once in a while, wet  
a rag with furniture polish,  
and make this stuff shine.