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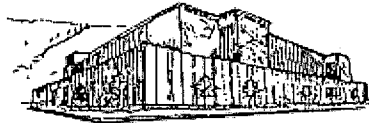
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8 motionless clouds

Poems

by

Sandra Isabel Simonds

B.A. University of California, Los Angeles, 2000

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

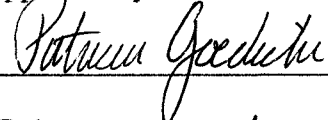
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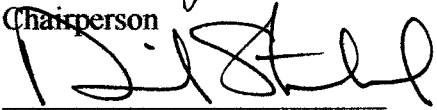
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Barrow Street: lettre

Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review: st. michael's maryland, [a comfort]

California Quarterly: young girl seated in graveyard, 1932

Colorado Review: Tomorrow's Bright Bracelets

canwehaveourballback? : dream cycle, traveler, [can no physician be found], [dawn over the next day], track and tunnel, asides (on love)

castagraf: darkens, [there is steam]

H2So4: [winter is on its way]

Lynx Eye: portrait in august

Monday Poetry Report: even the sweetgums, tomorrow's bright bracelets

Phoebe: traveler, track and tunnel

Poetry Motel: cathedral

Shampoo: part VII of wind for prayer

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Traveler,

open your eyes
of reed-
yellow countryside, your mouth
of clouds
is loss pure

*

less here?
silence is concentric
circles around
the ear like light to eye into
the empty-

*

handed I enter this wedding

with nothing save a ring

TRACK AND TUNNEL

wind for prayer

I

out of a sky of sinkholes and skin stretched over the eyelids only
clouds, love, and strange
shapes at best only the syrup
from the lilac tree that drips into my palms.
fuse together this string of months
and call them “summer” for I have mistaken wind
for prayer all day rearranging
my household furniture and on
a clothesline of speech the hush of a cotton dress
pinned
like a wrist behind the curvature
of waist. it’s true I *have* held something

back

II

inside the halo
around the throat
through the zeros
of the “it” and
“all of it” —silence,
pulse curving
through the body.
under these magenta
flowers and the August moon
my little lantern
of saltwater called “language.”
the days are naked now
and belief lit
only with the heartbeat
and held
on to
and held out from.

III

can we ever know
the difference between mouth and tongue? truth and the twist
of the wisteria vine? ear, myth,
mouth, tale, *please I cannot*
—of swift ideas counter-
current
of the switched
direction of a sad
story, echolalia and the colored tulips down the block
the elderly woman plants with her
foggy sheets of glass for eyes can we ever
“no” he says
its only normal to feel this way when things
are moved so.

IV

dawn—air drawn between the ribs
of the words and back
through the ear
sounds asunder and then tunneled
the miner’s lamp, arteries, channels, ore, jewels, cataract
of soot
that settles
on the quiet
infinities of speech

V

in winter, for example, the heart as a kind of tundra not one
sulking flower from the frozen soil
for example, the lungs as vagrants
transitory notes
from songs caught
in the clear
cold wind
into the instrument
of chimney top
gut-ish or adolescent
howl down the bricks
of the trachea

into the fireplace
green sparks
reflecting: eyelevel

VI

hearty smell of the riverbank
have the hunters gone? have the fishermen cast their lines?
have we lost all sense of time under the feathered calls
of the crows
that circle
clock-
wise round our appetites and we *have lost all sense of*
direction when the hills come up
for air
from ripples of earth: look at the water: slight convergence of light
and lament: *brighten our barren forms*

VII

remember that wine poured from the mouth
of a stone
lion
that our voices were abandoned
at a bus stop
in the hottest part of the city with one
bronze
coin between our lips (gold
fish-colored) to share or to give
away
and remember that summer came through the double
doors of our desires
and left us also
like the bodies we were— rough outlines
responsive only
to moist skin
suggestive of an odd cycle of hope
and discouragement a prayer for winter
and the wind
(operatic, if necessary)
a prayer for someone to save us from

VIII

first, they go through
fire then through
water the trees taking to flame
and the impulse
of flame against the half-
light of desire the wild scent of fire and the sound of cellophane
tightened around a bouquet of flowers
look over here now the limbs flame
and that wild scent of flesh, sound of thrilling
water against the mild bones the night when the wind
brought the sting of smoke how many wasps took
shelter in the house? acres and acres of forest rose
and fell as soft hair

IX

when dark rain softens the soil and the birds
sit on their thin blue eggs to wait out the thick storm so soft
the light and the dissolve of light
so soft the detachment of petals
from their flowers and soft the sky
of sinkholes in the squint
of light on the horizon's stretched skin

X

this is the hour of the open
mouth when we become the flood, procession of crazed
liquid the pilgrimage of cells
inside blood, the skin is a parchment
in tatters we pass
lepers, beggars and kiss their missing
hands
green coins flood the forests
like leaves, the city
inferno, skin, water, course
in strings of veins the forked
paths of pure thought
the passage, place

of calling, one look at—

and it doesn't mean we will pass

without knowing something

more and it doesn't mean we will pass

the place. no overlooking now.

no overlook

only clouds, love, and strange.

asides (on love)

sun hot through the word 'alone'
and the feeling is too much
of something much too weak. the days
pass like a lot of chatter. (no longer will I) attempt to envision your
approach. invasion
of a bland neutrality *do not let this*
happen invasion in every cell
not the blasé demeanor of a storefront mannequin no, more
the numbness of birthstars

find myself hollow (in other words) nothing
to be reckoned with privately, there is space for you
though you would oppose (the space I set) aside
nothing, know then,
I won't let you riot inside
my flesh. something—(unsure)—hurled against the window
pane well pray then
or curse

of geese, I thought, and ice
and the winter sun of noontime
and a ten year old child taking a long nap
while snow piled outside her eyelids
and longish quilts of sleet and the points of icicles, I thought
of you too far away
to understand each other anymore
I thought of geese and ice
and chimneys full of smoke—the way you cleared
your throat before you said my middle name

nonetheless, a frigid bird I could not
bury with my own two
hands. nonetheless, the afterthoughts
of inaction placated only by stern
time. nonetheless, life went on
interrupted only by night
terrors and other rude
awakenings. nonetheless,
the moments repelled one another

or attracted (who's
to say) nonetheless, I spoke
though words were unfriendly
and words were my only friends

or a handkerchief of ether or good instructions
on how to destroy something
precious maybe I'm forgetting how to live without
thinking too much
maybe I won't always be so *out*
of my element
love lasts but an hour and rides on the wave of her own
clichés and when the tide
recedes she is
her own shoreline
did I ever say

death? did I ever say perseverance?
or mention that some days
took every ounce of strength
not to give myself
over
to life's mis-
placed stars did I ever
tell you that when you left
the irresistible urge
to demonstrate just how frail the
body is
but what you did not know
I had been through
you didn't know that
strength is
so strange
as if the soul were
a houseplant
you took for dead
but then you watered it
(as an afterthought)
and watched
the leaves go
green and unfold

Cathedral

The wind's corrupted claims
blows cracked
leaves across the quartz
plaza into the pointed
corners of the interior
life. If the situation is dire,
I'm hanging onto some exquisite
pleasure and if
the situation is not dire I'm hanging
on. Perhaps,
desire is filling
the cheek cells with blood or
perhaps desire is the precision
of skin soaking up
the liquid, the light
laughter of the afternoon
city. I measure the wing-
span of my exile, tighten
the leather straps of my worn
sandals, enter the cool
exhale of the moist hymn.

[then the burning]

then the burning
water, the water on
 fire through the forest's soft glands
 fire tucked in the dark tissues of the season
 it's the drench
 of words in a mouth of gasoline and then waving the melted
letters in the brute
wind of a blue
 speech so as to quicken the flame what's extinguishable? *not fire*

rid the word of the word
and the tongue-
colored stain becomes

 this fury
 of equations, this infernal math— cellular,
 chaotic, skinned, faithless
 as an apparition of carbon paper
 follow

the fire with your ear and then you will see—
 the city's open
 air market of makeshift booths where passages of red silk
unroll towards the fragmented stars that bear
 the pressure of human use

 utensils, heir-
looms broken off from their silver
 ancestry burning

the patina of language— the smokes thick and from all

directions— impermanence,
 a longing as erotic as a provisional

truth on the tip
 of the tongue and still the casual agonies gather like sand
 in your shoes after a long day by the seashore
when you've forgotten yourself in the saltwater,
 the lapping waves.

Even the Sweetgums

She slept through the storm and everything
was muddy and slick when she woke.

Even the train tracks sparkled.
Even the sweetgums on their branches.

A white sky replaced a black sky replaced the clear.
You can't trust anything, can you?

That's what the small birds think when they find
their nests ransacked by bigger birds.

When the train roared into town the sparrows panicked
from their trees. When she arrived home

Jack, her neighbor's goat was chewing on leaves.
His wet fur smelled like dishrags.

Ode on Joy's Erratic Pulse

in an instant: High Jinks! my own future: AWOL I knew its
goodness: Spree
made me sad walking
back home from (*where?*
was it now?) the store? class ? before me it: Lark! left before I could ask
questions and for so long expecting
what was before my eyes to worsen
and eventually slip
into the black/ white static of thought so it made sense
but (counter-
intuitively) that (Shake Your Tinfoil) interior

and now I have made new enemies Cut Loose from old friends
Pipe Dreams
because my understanding of *touch*
me now was based solely on a strong
sense of False
Hope
so if the territory of joy is lined with ["I've suffered, but"]
then
listen, love,
to *these* tides taking *this* day out into an eternity
of
these
Eye
for
an
Eye
questions encrusted in green salt as (one
moment becomes the squawk
of the gull (the sand
on skin
the purest (thought
giving you,
but what I mean to say (here is *our*
our place. here. *this* niche of earth *these* sycamores that sway
to the warm sounds of autumn

DARKENS

lettre

dear so and so,

today I write the word “nothing” at a noontime café
over a square piece of cake and the word floats off
my stationary, hovers (eye-
level)
like a small ghost
unable to blend in with the bubbles
of soap, the clanking
sounds of the sleepy dishwasher, the touch of flour
on the baker’s nose

dear “I think very much of you” hanging
in the background (the unassuming
shadow) of a cold fruit ready to be picked
and though I extend my hand I cannot...
see past (the gesture) becomes so complicated as though trying
to figure out
an extraordinary machine
and I give up or into my eyes

follow the whine
of the snow
colored dog
pacing outside the café
anxious for his owner
to emerge
with a bone-shaped treat

dear me,
admit the trouble:
that my mouth
around any word is like the hand curved around
an ounce of sand,
that “things” are much
more troublesome than we allow that if the poem should fall
to the wayside
like a polyester
slip it will only uncover the body’s
fearful hollows

there are lovers at the next

table that cannot stop looking (at
each other)

 what do they mean?
do they say “you, you are *not* a thing” or do they say
“you, you are *my* thing” they are
 gorgeous, ready for “anything”
and I look at myself
as though I were an eighteenth century museum
 portrait that winks at you
 as you walk by
but ignores you completely
 when you stare at it

dear today I write you “nothing
much” to say but the “much” is frozen solid
 perhaps (I) should tell you
the story of my mother
stranding me between
 two languages without
so much as a word
 of advice

but that story, you know it already? would not explain: in january I will be
in france again and things will
 fall back into that language of errors my mother’s language (my)
wondering

if I will
“get by” (that’s not true) wondering *how* I will get
wanting so badly these words to coalesce
 and if we come
across expression’s utter inability to...
 yet observations can be made:
 the man opens

[For it is the North Country]

For it is the North Country
and it is always falling
back on the snow-
drift or a shift
of will and even the halls
of the boarded homes are branching
behind the boards
like switch-
backs that are veins.

When she breathes it's hard
against the lowlight of his chest
and if she believes the heartbeat
is just another type of sleep
as seen from the other
side of the urging
on of dim days then *of course*
it's hard not to feel
tacked to the end of your own

life but it's also a seaside town
of reeds on air
and at the end of the avenue
an ocean of paper
lanterns, the hysterics
of moment gathering up
the light with wet palms raised
above the head.

The Goldsmith Says

Desire and her disheveled
life and her constant
demands. She got so drunk
he had to carry her over
his shoulder under the cold
shower of snow. Each day
she dipped her gloom
in amber and held it up
to the sun. The goldsmith says
everyone needs
a beautiful pendant
with a bee trapped inside.
That night they could hear the waves
crash from their second
story apartment complex
though they lived a quarter
mile from the sea. She collected
herself enough to say *desire*
and he replied everyone
needs a beautiful amber
pendant to hang
your life from your neck.

noon and

1.

noon and my cheeks are stained with sunlight & bloodlight
i've been trying to keep up with the tractor
collecting red-meat collecting
coins in the cups of my eyelids

so strum my loosest ribs
and this song will lodge in your tense throat
as your tonsils sway and
start the descent
into your stained mouth

and i kept batting my
lashes and i kept spitting marbles
and rust across a pond of longbones
until i fell face first through a twitching muscular you

2.

must recall i was inside
and what of the fangs plunged in the thighs of darkness?
and what of my lover pulling limbs out of a hat?

and a flock of stone birds shatter the sky
betrayer betrayer fucking betrayer
as the better man took my wife from behind
i watched from a bent tree limb bending
her i don't know what it is about her
don't know what it is about her that
shook song
shook that song like a tablecloth of crumbs

for the year that we slept on the floorboards by the furnace, light collecting
where our bodies met

dark life dark life dark

clothesline: dripping bra and what of this flashflood
of blood-ripe flowers

chest of water chest of slosh

of the leopard at your hips
as you swagger
off desire ripping
the legs off
desire ripping
this path down your throat

notes for a passing season

(for Josephine Simonds and in memory of Jerome Simonds)

my purse contains six rolls of undeveloped film: ghost
towns, blue rails, main streets, junk sales, the
mighty columbia,
a fox.

this morning as an airplane's tranquil shadow descends
slowly through the sky's soft irises
the lawnmower doesn't disturb my
(sense of calm) because I'm thinking about where
I've been as opposed to where I'm going
movement of mind

*

like warm water
the shadows of my grandmother's hammock criss-
cross pattern all over the mowed lawn
eleven years old and needed four crimson
stitches on my calloused heel—
the Chesapeake's black mud
hiding broken pieces of pottery, empty crab claws, the jagged lips of tin
cans and smaller stories: backwoods and dumb and drunk every year a
truck would drive

straight into the water
two by two
the men drowned
underneath the calm
bodies of jellyfishes
movement like warm
shadows we were
taught to throw salt
over our shoulders
and wear orange life
jackets when we took
the canoe out on the water
and the life jackets
were old and smelled
like opening a sea
chest of mothballs

*

watch my grandmother
as she tends to her garden. wondering why
beets grow down and tomatoes
grow up.
eleven years old and asked my grandmother
if she was afraid
to die. *no, Sandra, she said, I am not
afraid to die.*

*

this afternoon an airplane's rippled shadow passes
slowly across the sky's only cloud
(the rolls are finally developed) and there is a picture
of me with my arms around a mule
and there is a picture of a little red fox.
I look a little younger (already) looking
back on that small forceful space
the size of a shutter or pupil
filling with so many images
the only word is 'life' but even
that small word would
burst the eye
the way a pregnancy
is painful with color

*

evening fell
suddenly on the Chesapeake
like anguish.

the way anguish falls from the throat
to the belly. the humid stars chimed
like copper bells.

there was something that I knew—
something simultaneously heavy and light

like the smell of rotting wood.

did my grandmother lie to me

in the garden between the translucent lettuce and drooping
eggplants
or was she unusually
brave
or was I unusually
weak? and it felt
something like the pain of the bones
as they widen and lengthen
under young skin.

*

evening—
the hour of the jackrabbits
bouncing around the mossy
headstones. there were stones I *had* to read (again and
again) intrigued
by them— the girls that died young

of cholera of scarlet fever of yellow fever of a simple flu one cough and
you were, you really *were*
I could only hypothesize the causes
kindled
the imagination,
darkened the soil, the sky,
forked the thoughts
speculation
as a kind of answer or wish:

if we were going somewhere
then there would be ghosts and stars
if they were going somewhere.

Young Girl Seated in Graveyard, 1932

The stone was held high, like a head
and the white weeds—
stubborn knots contorting the square
frame of the shed towards diamond-
shaped. The trees took

to the flame, midway between dry
lightning (the sound of mashing gravel)
and dry clouds. Out of nowhere, a gothic
heat whistled through the fields
of soybeans. The lesson was plain

and simple: that grief could rust the pedals
of your new bicycle, that it proceeds like a red
throb through the lungs, the pulmonary
hours, the star-shaped valves
marbleizing the days so you couldn't tell

which one was which
and it was awful because soil
gathered in unknown tissues and wouldn't
leave wouldn't *ever*
leave like the sun tarnishing
under heavy clouds.

darkens

and what could I do there
within /without the faint world will lighten will
shed its lightened world and then the grass
will not be grass will be not
grass again these hours slipping cells
weird cells slipping
 hours I tell you this place
 is where I learned

*

 about time
or at least unlocked the arc
of thought the cement poured
on the rhetoric hardened
 ideas flexed,

*

 fixed like backbone
you say “nothing in
 particular” and it’s
true that it’s nothing
 in particular that makes me think
of those who were missing
the letters of their names

*

like teeth
and as I walked
out into the steel
dawn—snow light,
dark, packed tightly into
the vacancy of the coiled
winter sidewalks no bridge
flickered *home* it was my first day

*

of freedom

so I watched the trail
of the jet's tail end fall seated opposite
the ocean and desire came slowly
and steadily down
like a drizzle
on the lyrics
then veering off
you say "nothing"

*

you say *happens*
or happens to be about anything
because you use your intelligence
of language as a trap-
door out
of your own" and I say "that's true
but I can never find
the stone to push so that the door

*

will open
out of my mouth"
that long sentence soaking
up the sounds of the birds
pulling away this bridge, this sky with their sharp flights

November Grass and Snow

First, you wonder why there are no people
in the streets and then you resign
yourself to watching an empty birdfeeder
sway in the evening light,

you resign yourself to listening. You say
I never wanted to write anything down but then
you wrote something down and the rest
of the story gathers like little clumps
of November grass and snow.

And there were winters as black and dangerous
as patches of ice over asphalt. But all that is gone now:

Three deer are in the neighbor's yard.
One has knocked over the barbecue
grill with her auburn body.
They are eating from the bare tree.
They must be content.

Saint Michael's, Maryland

The season has already gone to frost.
She's jugged gallons of broth. She's jarred
jam. Shadows cramped then
pumped to the other side
seem to say, *The heart is not heart-*
shaped. The ice around what has been preserved
sits tight in the ice box, in the shed.

I go out to get a leg of lamb and open
the faint scent of rusted shovels.
The ice-warped, wood dock juts out to the Chesapeake.
The hammock froze in the up—
swing. Well
water. Grandmother,
there's a place where I've ripped out everything.
It tastes awful. It tastes like rotten eggs.

notes for the insomniac

& even that dried-up shamrock in my sock drawer
is not enough to hold
 back that backward thinking—*luck, bad luck*—
but never really saying
 it was all pretense
 it was all a way to tighten the threads
of this world I stay awake staring
 down the blizzard-blue junipers, recounting
past lives— their long lists of desires
 that seem like margins thrown
together & what
 of these humble sparrows now?
 I've spent all night trying to scotch tape their feathers
back to their bodies but it isn't working isn't working &
to think that people will do anything to have a piece
of flesh stuck inside them but
 that doesn't change the anything that people will do to have
love, I am in cahoots with my pretence
 lately, though she hasn't held up to her end
of the bargain
 her little cache of terms (eggs) hidden inside a dream (nest)
I can't open for the life of me (chest) never can guess what she's thinking
 & so it is that I am a mere secretary jotting
down her long-winded deposition: strings of grammar & oh her charms
 & when I say "disabuse me of" she rolls her eyes
 & to tell you she shall not *sleep* is to say she shall not *wake*

Dark Song

I went into night empty-handed
without dawn or day
to watch the sea
roll in its blue salt

I was urgent but unafraid

I went into day without light—the pupil's
day—of mad weather
and low shell sounds, of boats

built to split
in two there was nowhere
but depth
so I kept on
kept downward
a beacon

flashed like a fragment
of a broken star
I did not see it. I do not see
anything

but liquid
in the eye
but confusion
in those inward hands
I used to swim
back to myself

sea-black as limbs
and tangled as the eye
tangled with colored light

caught like this I went into the chest
without so much as a word
of advice

where jewels might once have been found:
errors in my ears

errors *for* ears

the sense of sound: ornate, spiraled,
descending: why

should the heart
drown in its own
water? and the skin of that water
peeling back
as night peels back
as we peel back

everything, every
thing.

[To Push the Sailboats As Far Away]

To push the sailboats as far away along the horizontal limit of lip
as a kind of sympathetic gesture to breath. *If, if, to, toward.* As a piece of seashore

sequestered by the pupil

and given the color of all traps beneath

the brow. Given the color of a mouth emerging from warm, summery
waves, to come as close to the veins of these autumn leaves and cell,

by rethinking cell

piece the tree from soil to branch, finch, city flown—
over like telephone wires *cris, cris*

when you say might _____ might
me through the pupil, the days dialing others, then shove out another
side, reshaping into an emergency

vehicle *zero zero zero*

over the surface of snow, skin, ripplebalance
to the edge, like this small town shoved against the mountain—

was the tumbling thick, through the yellow speckled iris

at last, or the out of season picnic basket

woven by the clouds
you exhale as if taking in
the world and just to let,
let out, through the surface, through
skin—gloom of two weeks

deprived of sun. As if you could put your ear to soil and hear a heartbeat,

but it's all saddened now— as in migration, flown—
as in feathers or snow.

Now the skyscraper. Now the puny flower. Now the river
of headlights. A spring snow goes like milk into night.

DREAM CYCLE

caught off
guard by the seashore
of your eyes and they were saying
I didn't mean it but they meant it all the same

pulled from the covers
of black dreams
or the cover
of dreams that blacken who I think I am
lone scream at an acquaintance wanted to hurt her
feelings wanted to cut
the break lines clean on the vehicle
I know not what
sinks me
downward through
the cold climate of my sleep
in this place I do things differently

my eyes detonate
the organized life
my mouth
is a jackpot
of crimes
I commit
for free

requiem,
drown me
in the greenery of the afterlife,

the un-bashful
interludes of cruel sex

arched
stone
of your emergency
soul detaching itself from your body
into color

went through
to find you
the delicate

lengthy passages of
on the stomach
like prying apart white light

dream, send word
that I've called
for it is springtime and I am wary
of new air

your body is a delicacy waved
in front of my needy mouth you exist only insofar as you've been carved
from the strange
announcements
that roll
off my tongue

Lone
Wolf, I feed you on the nothing of my warped language, and still
you grow
hungry

mine is the refinement of a winter snow
mine is the afterglow of earth after rain

most unnatural

patterns of light:

pentacles upon pentacles of sun

god-given right

to your silence right to position yourself

beside me and breath down my night-

shirt right to show

signs I cannot

understand undertaking your gross neglect

couldn't bare to be in the same room as—

couldn't bare to lay my eyes upon your—

beholden to the sky's foul mouth, the hours pass

in the pure

threshold

of your unease I enter sleep anonymous

and exit with an air of fame

was an amateur of the darkness thrust
upon me
was not *terribly* afraid curious, I didn't think much
in the forward direction

was comparable
to the carcasses of months piling onto one another
of your claw-foot-tub
of your hardwood floors

dissuasion lodges itself
into my throat

now my own heartbeat
confuses me
dire need of the confectioner's talents
dire need of confession

but you are not any sort of faith

somewhere between daylight
and drifting, there were underwater songs
there was a mirror placed before your profile
and you didn't find
what you needed as if coming to a house after a long weekend
and sensing objects slightly
altered the dreams escalate
into the heightened
waves
of higher pitch the genius
of the ego is that it can be put through
any test
and still retain the most notable aspects of its personality
but the genius of sleep
is in its stripping
the sex embedded
in its moist skin
the things you didn't even know
you didn't want

tense cannot live life in the present
 conjugate experience
dream cycle, translate your meaning (into french)

 watched the moon arouse the fields
 watched the trees handwrite the roads into unspoken
truths:
 alouette, alouette,

what is amounting
is nothing
less than a disaster between thrilling flesh

watched the underbellies of stars the sense of words:
a backbone pressing through warm skin

 watched the lilacs lose everything they had
 and still not give up

BUT MORNING COMES INTERMITTENTLY

[with nothing save a ring]

with nothing save a ring

*

of light and the crisp
moon, movement of tongue, stretch
of letters all the way towards the softening

*

sun gives me glimpse of the emptying
out : *and it's spring again, a spring of tender*
shoots from the rust-
red earth
through this landscape
that flickers (a little)
when the sun catches

*

leaves
your open mouth
shakes like candlelight
with wax, wick, breath, smoke, the gold

*

is gone the gold
horizon melts hills, soil and everything beneath

*

distilled skin these long

waterways we slipped with the hours of light left
and there were boats there that beat the waves like wooden hearts

[Winter is on its way]

Winter is on its way. There is a troubling. Like
leaves in wind. Like leaves anywhere.
The heart slams shut. Against weight. I thought
you would drive me home forever. I thought you would drive
me. I've packed my bags
forever. The dumbest dreams panic before
they die. Troubling leaves in wind. The sky
absolutely white. To prove I love
you would drive me home forever. The heart slams
open. Weight against the sky absolutely white.
Troubling leaves wind. Against this weight
the dumb dreams panic. This weight against
the heart slams shut. I'm going to make
you a cake. I'm going to make you a.
Winter is on to prove I love you
like leaves anywhere. I'm going to make you a cake.
I'm going to make the open
heart slam open. I've packed my bags.
Winter is on its way. There is a troubling like.

Portrait in August

Summer came like a genius,
unexpected, and without
rain. Her painting was short-
hand for a life gone
south, a life folding
back on itself,
oscillating like corkscrews
of heat between tall
buildings. Days, she worked
up her operatic answers
in a solitude, posing
in front of the antique
phonograph. Evenings,
the sky opened like a picnic
basket revealing the checkered
stars. The late hours were
reserved for the gathering
of friends with wine
and lamb on her balcony
underneath the smoke
rising like spiral
stairs from the charred
bell peppers. She told me
you needn't feel
obligated to carry any
idea to its logical
conclusion or give
form to the fragile emotion
of the hours cooling
off. When everyone left
she said I'll paint
your face to preserve yourself
from yourself and she painted
my face and I knew
it was me.

Pacific Yew

Some think of graves but I don't. I think
of Oregon showers and papery scales.

Some think that they are going to live through every storm but I
don't, I know that there are whitish

bands beneath the needles. Lift one up.

(Only the red juicy cups around the seeds are edible).

Look at the moist soil around the stream you once crossed but
will not cross again. If I ask you to do me a favor

in the fall, surely you will take care of it by spring?

Some think of graves but I don't. I think of the debt
in my torso that won't let me sleep through the night.

[There is steam]

There is steam. There is fire.
Some shout, *All*
aboard but I call it
the push through
days. Not the forest. Not
the speed. Yes, the way to recall
forest and speed like silver and gold
coins. The chug
a lug. We buy and sell
and buy. We
bury. And in between—the trap of hold
my hand, the trap of must
breathe of no choice only to
clutch, but I do not want to but I do
anyway. No real
reason. None unreal either.
The tunnel's weird
and stunning. At times
the beautiful shoved right through
your pupil. Only
nothing seems to
catch. Only leaves.
Leaves sped up or left
behind like green pennies.
On the way to the eye is an accident
on the way to the mind. Here
we go, the flowers burn
and bloom.

Tomorrow's Bright Bracelets

Winter lungs are white trees.

Winter lungs are bare white trees.

There are no ornaments because this isn't Christmas.

Put a silver ribbon in your hair.

Put on all of your bright bracelets and walk out into the feathered snow.

My eyes are pale like a crust of ice over a long river.

What would the gift-givers say if they saw us now?

What will they tell the world?

[a comfort]

a comfort—like a small crack in the earth. I know I am
the slip. I know I am lost
time. Meanwhile, a familiar
face. Meanwhile, the taste of sage on air, the taste of early

hour fog as it rolls. If I am at the edge
of the ocean, my tennis shoes squeak as they

fill, and I have been attentive to this tide. Like the last

moment that went further, further toward the ships until
the horizon wouldn't let her go

back. Not the lungs filled with salt. Nor the earliest days
searching for sand dollars. The days

collapse toward this moment caught in sun,

the star I held up to the sky with my chilled
hands. Just to look. Or, just to take it home. No, just to hang

on to those things that move you—because you've moved
them. This is not a story. This is no poem.

This is the ocean at low
tide rolling-up like a scroll toward the chipped horizon.

ends & beginnings

terminus— precondition to all thought
precondition to the alternatives we do not know how
to look
at these chalk cliffs pressing their hands into their faces
and if we could peel them off would there be a story
to end
all stories underneath?
your rose colored bathing suit
sags as you kneel down before ocean water
as though water were unbound

mouth—private space of speech
hold tight these words
that opt
not to remain
still like the seasons
imagine me opening
my own poem to let you
in like a mouth—the swollen fruit
weighing down the rough
branch of the tree
mouth—the right to remain
silent, the right
to counsel, to question

terminus—
end point
of loss or point of no
and yes
tear the apple
from the eye
do not separate desire from desire's
[rough intent] we are immortal *or we are nothing?*

speak again (now within /
the flesh) do not lie to me terminus
— heroine of history
shed your exteriors
tell me what
you think of me tell me why

we were stranded here, in the form of limb, eye, lip
terminus—I want
to see
you naked before me do not tighten
your adam's apple eve
of the eye
eve of undressing

went forth in the foul
weather
into the lone
descriptors
left without a plot
to touch or hang on to
the stranded hero
make do
contrive a knot
that will hold the sky
and sea together
your ship is a collection
of splintered anecdotes
that lasts from the tip
of the lung
to the shore of tongue
into atoms of air
sing me a song

sing me a song that goes

like *this* terminus—point of no
return yet
returning anyway
into the dingy apartment where our child was born
the water that came
from the faucet
always like gray milk
always the same lime colored dust collecting
on the plastic curtains and the question was how
would we keep
our bodies
warm through the winter?
when the creaking of the floor furnace kept me awake
was it midnight? I left your side to watch
the slow trains haul their heavy cargo over the prairie's gold

horizon
from the mouth—secrets
encrypting

face to face
with the terminus
—final song

o sing out
of the mouth
unarmed
spare me the day
that only makes me long for more days
they say some do not sleep for fear they will not wake
and I am one of those

song,
guide me through all the days
of my life and never leave my side
and you, love, you also said that you were terrified
a spirit
cramped inside such small
quarters and I said yes, yes, we are all
fearful of the largeness
that we keep
orphans who need pity
hold up earth's drooped
wings with you fortress of words
and never stop holding
and when I have left you know
that there was love enough
but merely not time enough for
swiftly goes the center of all things
swiftly goes
our little world
its center breaking like a wave onto the shore
of voice and swiftly goes that voice

[Can no physician be found]

Can no physician be found
amongst the charred hearts
and lungs, the cobblestones,
peddlers clothed in thin sackcloth,
bowls of soured wine,
tarnished cups, the numerous
sands of the seas
that thrill and quiver?
And as she read to the people
that dwelt by the great salt
waters, he said cut
out their names with the scribe's
knife. And the only source
of light was from the wounds
of the carved letters that looked
like the branches of the olive
trees that threaded through
their towns. We shall follow
the path of our oaths that curl
like the lips of our land.
Whose name means *all is well*
when all is not well? Then,
there was the moon—
that silver breastplate
smelted to their hearts.

[dawn over the next day]

dawn over the next
day in a short-of-breath cell
tower. dawn on plasma, dawn
on steel, o radiance.
dawn the poor
meadow of collapsed
flight and the body in waves
of wildflowers and the body
on the edge of the leafy
forest creeping up to
the seaside pouring
through the forest.
she says gravity can pull
and taketh
away. all this from my tower
swaying back
and forth like a pendulum
of homesickness from whence
I came but recall no
crime in the dawn
filled cracks of cement
the shape of lightning.
nothing but salt
left on the insect's
black shell and inside its
shell a futuristic
architecture of pure
feel that we needed thousands
of buckets to remove the world
from the world
and paint the walls
with the milk of the stars.

that couldn't be filled by these words:

“how disgraceful”
cannot face myself for fear that I will turn into
what I've become
and you knew that it would be a long time before

you could write these things down but morning
comes intermittently and we cannot hold one another without
thinking

*

conclusions— all different colors,
all brilliant, all well-
thought-out like the center
that kept moving away
from our disoriented voices
and you felt that what was happening wouldn't last long
because nothing in your life ever lasted too long
everything like poor predictions but we were mistaken about
of bad weather
and it's all the better if we don't exactly know one another

*

so I must say un-
voice me. peel
the song away from heart
and my lungs. there is nothing I can do
to hold
myself back. now
more than ever .
o un-voice me.

do not say a thing.
Is this knowing,
or is this knowledge?
knowing, and its wingspan is vast because it is
the only place the body wants
to go, because you are
the only home. the only body between
what I know, wish for, and what I have found.