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How Much
& How Often

by
Rachel Hammond (Richardson)

B.A. Smith College, Northampton, MA 2012

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master of Fine Arts
University of Montana, Missoula, MT 2016

Chair
Greg Pape

Second Reader
Joanna Klink

Third Reader
Doug Emlen

*There was a need
so deep in our bodies we could not even weep.*

Joanna Klink, "Terrebonne Bay"

How Much
& How Often

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POEM

I no longer romanticize the weather.
If you come in now to have me dry you
I'll dry you out.

There's something clicking
in the pines that isn't rain.

60 DAYS

Whatever it is you thought you saw, things change. Your life changes. I am not a bet, a swell, a panic.

To say that I am in mourning is an absurdity. I have never known the kind of death that death is.

The bird is what it is and will remain so. There is nothing to love but the word for it.

Remind yourself that the machine spin of a beetle on its back is not frantic, it is functioning.

I have lost my ability to ridicule. I saw a couple holding hands and thought: How kind of them.

HOW MUCH & HOW OFTEN

I set my teeth against the window to tell the story.
Like the land myth, spoke the animal. Spoke the spider:
Grief. Most of them began to talk to God. He dies
or he does not die. Either way, the weather.

His past became isolated and auratic, praised away as needed
from disease. He told us, That which is of comfort you cannot
know. He proved it in the purblind manner in which he scattered
cups on the windowsill, by the asperity of plants clean in kitchen
drawers. It should all be something, they said. They said the body
eventually returns, and the thing does not exist without the means
to destroy it.

*Throw your keys under the bed and in the morning
get 'em, and while you're down there, talk to God.*

It was the shock of seeing someone, v. the shock of seeing
someone you don't recognize. The eye became the light that passes
through it.

Twist, fantasy.

That morning I had washed my hair with soap.

AUBADE

You left. The stars recovered
themselves.

Light forded our blue curtain
like a bream.

THE SEA

The sand bends and finishes.
The sea, the spareness of your body

where nothing was missing.
Its cosset greens lather up my wrist.
I crush white shell beneath my feet.

The sun spots the cowl grief, shoots straight to me
through a bowl of pine branches in Virginia.
I can almost hear you, which is to say,

I can hear you. Your cock in my mouth, I have felt
the crips of your pulse and learned them myself

by heart. I close my eyes to the pines and snake
it alone to the water, our would-be arbitrator.

Something is shouldering the sea up to the air.

DAY POEM

If I leave now the stretch of webbing
in the hall will float behind me like the braid
of a great ghost, a ghost the size of the house or of
the sky against the house, the point of its eye one good
wet star. If I left I could reach the bench of rock
that presses out of the field like a rib into a lung,
would watch you twist there on the earth
as if you have always.

Without me the field is a waste. Tell me I could snap
its leaves like water, winter moving in on a ladder
of light. If I leave I would be the cool swatch
of spring, spider zipping through the spine
of a day of the field, would be the clot
of the spider moving through it.
I would need the air to goad me into form,
would shake the breath of a field of the sea
to foam, be the one to pick which stones to bury.

You have always moved with the pace of
memory. I see birds flash above you like a hammer
quickly brandished. I might be the threat
of bloom in the windows of the deserted house.
I could be a disturbance in the field. Would be a field,
far wider.

IN ALL HONESTY

The trap of thirst is its mimicry. What I desire
when I desire smacks of excess, which when
in the mouth is the mouth.

Your house carves the highway from the dark,
whispers out the dark of the highway, high brick
house, a bite of stars

in the dark around it, the sky a thirst or a mouth or a lake
or a sky, any way into which some ponderosa
glance and beg.

Fog over the yard pronged by the light of a neighboring
bar, tamarack seeds blown low to the fences,
flat exhausted blooms

rigged to a grave. This house we say waits
because of the one who waits inside it, like I say love letters
because I love your letters.

So any way the name we call we call hostage. There is so much
work we do to resist allotment.
We fail contact

so many times and the incremental, overnight work
of a joy related to fraud related to the feeding
of the thing like a dog.

Behind the house the river winces when you enter,
hollow like the abandoned wings
of a hospital.

LAND, WITH OIL

To tell you anything, I would have to tell you everything.

The river, huddled in the palm of frozen sand.
The car's silk coil on the side of the road.

It was winter, something without precedent
like a dog.

*

You have been my stupefaction. You have considered living
as many possible savageries interrupted by contingency

what has no use of mystery which capital does not require.

For my part, I have always believed digression is most reflective of dream
and so I became obdurate in my deflections.

I wrote a poem to the field that could find you.

*

That winter you blanched at bringing hard oil to a littoral sphere.
That is, you wouldn't drive us to the water.

There are stars that say: Pull back my hair.
There have been men who haven't listened.

I scraped my hands on winter's bulk but wouldn't leave you.

*

I have heard the sub-beat of the field whose growth the snow obscures.
It occurred as a kind of unburning, the rare body only blind statistic can uncover.
The thrust stage of winter presented me my hands.

*

About the earth you believed it burred its own white dress
and bore the snagging.

The only winters you remembered were severe.
It is all that you remembered about them.

*

Still you wore winter delicately, like a shroud. After dark
you would gather back the morning

like a spider that grabs at its limbs.

We died for as long as we lived.

You must see that this has always been a place of inversion.

They dug bitterroot, they camped elsewhere.
And we still do.

So the flares do not repudiate the fact of the country

they plot God around Dakota like a constellation
or autopsy.

*

The ten words with the most meanings: Run, take, break, turn, set, go, play, cut, up, hand.

This doesn't have to be about life

it is about living.

When I think about it, there's only one thing
I need to know twice.

ON YOUR WAY FROM NEVADA

If I were a sound I would be
a prairie. I knew you were coming.

A charge in the meek rolling hills,
the way here.

LAPSE

It is still my face in front of yours, even if one of
a field. Burn the windows loose so you can leave
them, leave the light long-bowed and lean, levered
by the petal of some idiot cloud. The river snarls
in its berm behind you. I raise what I've bore and
I cultivate and carry the dignity of drink in coming
back here. Why do men not reek of blood? Christ-
bruised, bent, you split a wide bone to the sea and
shook out the abyssal waves of your hair that had
I touched would have been like something I once
felt being named. Instead of thinking of you,
I thought of everyone.

DEAD SPIDER

Things I have heard love called: a bell, a jot of blood, before.

The boy in the book is the boy
as he was when I knew him.

Take the books. I hate the books.
Absence is too much credit.

The truth is I never much noticed until I saw the body
drowned beside me, the bent twirl of it in my glass, while the streetlight
shadows waved up on the shore of my neck, my cheek, the body's many limbs
expanding at the will of the wind that was the water of the glass.

I am sick of being convinced of a line
between consent and coercion.

I am not a little ocean. I must stop waving
at everything I see.

THE SEA-BIRDS

He stops at the park to piss on the grass: Here is
where we were then.

The prayed-for hyssop, the prayed-for scalping
of a womb: This is what we were then.

He tracks by her ticking the blur of morning and
of evening and night, creeps the slats and screws
and goes on loving, still leaves her like showers
leave water on the shore, stamps it for the grief
that brought birds from the water.

This is the grief that brought birds from the water.

90 DAYS

I move grass-bit hands over the body of somebody who is not listening to me. Say it is me, and this gesture is litany. But it isn't true that I've never tried to pray.

Oh, you good one, guyed on the arch of sober time that is wedded to itself, stitched and bleached as bone. I threw the buck, I drew in corners, I am remembering that I used to hear it, snow, time, snow, emblem, ghost. I wait for something to reveal itself. I spend whole days walking, moving toward the shame of having spent a day walking.

But even as I am telling it, I'll be a freshet, what begins as a whisper and ends whistling out the earth. This is time.

And who could hurt it? Who?

THIS IS HOW YOU GO ON FOREVER

Whether I betray myself is my own business.
You say, *I am two, a twin*. Well, I could have
been. Call grief another epistolary piece for
your mirror. Who practices survival? I hear
the sondage like a pamphlet now of stars
folding and unfolding, consciousness
lapping itself into sleep. It's alright. I have
always been right. I have always been calved
by noise.

SWEET CRUDE

You bore it coarsely, the distraught soliloquy of your coming,
in the escape of your slenderness, like the one I'd read
before about the grass.

To not speak of God is a first pass. To not speak of God
is to put too fine a point on it. I talked of your body as if
it were a gallery, I moved on it in a glance like bad weather
over snow. You talked of war, of whaling, and the mounting
of a sheerleg. About God I did a lot just to prove it wouldn't
work.

In oil, all this runs together. We will read modes
of production out of our own small distances.
We will count among our melancholias the temporality
upon which love depends, like a weed ticking its agitation
up a wall and tearing its slow violence through the brick face.

I think of your coming, and I think of the field, and the flare
which is only the product's obsolescence, not transport, not
transcendence. We are trying harder to forget than we are
to discriminate. When asked I'm afraid I will say one day:
I do not think the worse of you. I do not think of you.

AUBADE

Most of the damage was done by the truth
created to receive the lie:

At least one person had to really love you.

MYSTIC, CONNECTICUT

A spit of birds over the brick by the water
and the heart weighs so heavy I am hanged.

Your words sounded as echoes of my own,
colored and weighted obsidian. I could hear
the liquid consonant of earth drip away
with each *can't*, the sound itself the sound
of rain on tin, begging a second syllable
and no one remorseless in keeping it. I saw
its battered vowel and from the growing
distance the sea in coursing, rachitic detail,
our lives pulling from it, leaving a bruised
tongue of salt.

Massed in a yellow fog above the grains
of dry ocean, all the sails over the fence
in the yard. And breakfasts in the big kitchen.
The waste of what we bought and never finished,
said and never used. Spring, and fall and winter
beside her, thin as enchantment but gripped
with the changing trees on the road
to Stonington.

This has been a war you did not imagine,
fought with weapons you could never engineer.
The stress of a syllable is only potential, and you
did not cause the world to blacken.

That color was mine, as the world is, as the coast
is a leaf framed under glass before it had dried,
now obscured by the beads of its life.

I can blink and see the coast again and again
as something familiar, but only familiar, weakly
hugging ashen shoulders, hips, of salt.
On a line, on a border, and on.

YOU ARE YOUR HOUSE

It is morning, I love you, it is morning again. The summer ends and I find
I am tired of the dead. The bridge freezes before the road, frost heaves the rock.
The heat fails and we spend nights on the floor listening to mice on the covered
beams above. We smell their death. She'd dressed the furniture in white sheets.
You make some breakfast early in spring. You swim and freak the birds.
I wonder why I live in a city when everything gets so green here. Sometimes
I hope my distrust of us is just innocence like that, forgetting that spring comes
everywhere, and every year the same.

The light seems dry at parties, where I listen in the turning of your arm for
the things I have said so many times to you. I am ready to be convinced of all
kinds of things by my body, though I know not every dying thing is a moth.
I am not that young anymore. I tell my friends that having an affair is like getting
language in every sentence, though more like it's to speak so well of feeling and
feel so poorly knowing nothing. I don't say that I still draw the proof of my own
body from the dark hair on your arms. But you walk from room to room, you
take your shirt off at night. My little life is everywhere for her to sweep.

In summer the small gleam off the Spanish tiles brings ghosts to bat at your
screen door. One day in August they will stop coming. And you will paint
her walls, you will put flowers in a vase, wash the dishes I use, insist. I yell
your name until I hear her.

SPRING POEM

I think of the warning
that's structured in revival.

There is a pause

then the quick spiral jerking
of the dog.

Another Northern cardinal.

The new brutality of season darts
across your lawn, its contours
pierce the costs bared
at my roadside, codified by body
after body after you.

I look up from the eyes
of a gutter wife.

I think of spring, of
the failure admitted in burial.

HULL

A private autumn in the room the street surrender to.
My breath in recline, your heart the sound of animals
running on an upper floor, my upturned palm a white
flag. To a narrow breeze so steady under the doorway
you hold out your hand, call it stone, call it you and me
but not us.

An hour, we finally sleep, and in sleep cross a dawn
reflecting the smoke from that summer's forest fires.
We wake, a moth pressed by the weather takes its
country weight to our window, where the slow nodding
of wings makes us tell each other that such a thing could
not be anything like grateful. Lit, maybe, but not
gleaming.

BY A LENGTH

Behind the bar, my exlover and his regular girl
pray over a lock in the race. On the overhead,
the spasm of a hundred and fifty thousand.

He offers me another drink in articulation
of his mistrust, a kind of cautious substance
in my slow erasure. Everything becoming overbright.

The old men order by small gestures that untuck
the white rag from my exlover's pocket. It flits
to the wet of each glass, hits his shoulder, flips back.

In that flourish, the fertility of all open
spaces spoiled with the dullness of conviction.
In that move it is more or less admitted
that this is all something of a joke.

He refuses my gaze. He says it was set
at the top of the stretch. The crowd rises.

In order to be forgiven, I assume the attitude of a racetrack foil.
Fault is the red beam in the winner's eye. What you test by blinking.

WIFE

The years that pass you will be born of my
pursuit, now that summer has turned to a
procession of waving branches, some
calling, some with answers. You come like
a myth. It doesn't matter to me. Tell me. She
spends nights rearranging the kitchen. First
glasses on the bottom shelf. Later, plates.

POEM TO MONISM

Wherever I bend

I have broken whatever body

I have made

and if I hadn't been there I wouldn't know where I was
going now your quick

drummed me up to your neck to feel it there
my fingers
flowered up your thighs the fur line
I chanced to touch the genius whoever

will acts as replicant and I'll be revenant
on every page: blood stretched up the back of your veins
I am drawing

them into my fear up on my hip here this

is the tragedy of very small difference if

I hadn't been there I wouldn't

know where I have been

HOW TO BE LOVED

There is your father, who died from a gun he shot in the garage that sat just back from the road we grew up on. Rot moves in waves off the headstone, a swarm like a low shore I raise to overlook myself. I remember touching your hair before I knew how much I meant it. Life dips its tongues in the bloom.

I think of the knit steel that enclosed your porch and the day a butterfly wove itself in, and I don't know whether a butterfly is more its wings or the part between but I know we couldn't divide the two rivers of our town. And there are the crossed rivers and the lake, the winter we dug our skates into the ice to touch a fish there, and how we never reached it, my dog and your dog, tennis sets, haircuts, coupons, leather seats, your sister sewing a button on, your brother's swollen eye, the orb we used to blow the flies from, the light breaking in the bath, how you always got the lead in the school play and how you cried on stage and have cried a lot since, the boys shaking their grins off at the fences. And you, foolish painter, me, foolish foolish, he, 56, you, 20, he, 56, you, 23. The raggish petals off a kid's cigarillo. How on weekends we picked cold cherries and red-bellied plums and felt the color whistle down our chins, to be young is the glass thinking it is the flower and the dirt, your mother rushing us off from the tracks but not before you caught your finger on a nail and I wonder if you were able to walk there after, alone at night, jumping crickets and the solidago, when you were older, if you feel older now.

I told you once I wouldn't die of old age before a broken heart. And I think you've been living in Boston but I don't know that you are, and it's best that way because if I saw you now you would swear you thought you had loved him enough, and I know I would tell you that he never wanted to be useful in that sort of way.

FRIEND

In my hunger I am dedicated,
but amateur, a mime.

I know a dog who lost two legs and half a jaw

which the owners got back from the vet and buried in the park.

Some days I'll go there and he'll roll beside me, saying little,
pushing to where he floats like a poet over his bones.

He is moved to hear the old clicking walk and the old speech,

and when we talk about weight,
we consider it not as grounding

but as burial.

APOGEE

When I asked about your father
you said he taught you how to roll cigarettes,
taught you how to play spades. That he waited for
us while he lived.

We are brilliant continuing variations, more than
variations on a single continuing brilliance.
So he made you the ground to circle, so you made me
a diarist. Things are more or less important.
It isn't really serious what you believe.

I do, I know you wanted everything too much.

I know it's been hard to get through thirty years
without looking at the sun.

POTTER'S FIELD

You got it wrong: the ossuary is a box in the chest.
Slack hunger hovers like dull cotton over me,
leaning over the wood as the inmates shrug the
infants away from the rest. Maps to find the dead
are the sundering itself, when you cannot access
the path to body as harbinger of body, not as ours
a wilding, but tiny chalkmarks unmarked. You
can go once and with one down the empty grass
of potter's field. I will stay sitting here. I'm next
to paper bags. I'm blinking and blinking,
swallowing.

AUBADE

The year is a chain. Spring
as good a time as any to rage.

ROOSEVELT, UTAH

There was little change worth mentioning.

Just trouble. Paraffin would come up and blind
off the shakers, flooding
everything over into the catch.

Trouble that year, all over. Boys like you
from Casper, Fort Duchesne, McGregor,
Zahl. Boys all. The flood showed
up in cracks in the counter days
after you'd ragged it down. Checked the gables
for dead birds. Shook my ankles mudded
in the sheets. You said Don't worry. It's harder
to breathe in the wildlands near Casper.

May as well be water, you said.
In Roosevelt a lady at the Chevron told you
Life is an awesome country. Move
through it awkwardly, with devotion.
She was sorry to hear about the rigger
but it isn't a crime to go missing.
You told her you'd looked in the brush
for a spot of bone. She said It's hard
when you want to find it.

In Wyoming I'll take a rag
to the back of the house you were born in,
having already lost the advantage in leaving
things out. The day, a day again.

The past, endlessly.

LIVING DECENTLY

It would be perfect, should I do nothing
about it. I was embarrassed to be the one
dying, you were embarrassed to be the one
that would make it, said what is not love
defines it, like skin in the way and then not.
Like you're there long enough to need it.
All things held close, and discretely.

These years are pattering, thrusting at the graces
of 24, alive, and a woman all at once,
in rooms just collections of light.

So I speak of myself and of nothing
else.

So soon you might depend on someone
else to be young.

WILLISTON, NORTH DAKOTA

You came back from the field to say:
the children are having a fabulous time.
The accent you're hearing is deference,
not the forefront of any movement, not
a vanguard of memory. No sea but what is
vexed by your body.

A person falls a trillion times to the world
as standing reserve.

But you didn't come here for narrative. You are
extreme because of your restrictions.

Like the world, frankly.

You are really in America, and all
you can do is be lost here, gnawing
on the grass beneath the ground. Stray,
intoxicant. Sorry for the hard mad hatred.

What would it mean to tolerate? I attempt
a synthesis of irony
& kindness.

It isn't hard to remember one meant well.
I still love you. But I'd rather be the one left
over.

OUST

Have you done everything you were supposed to do.
Lined your prose by a vague light, let your branch
feet scallop wise on my hips, moved your own.
Do you still shudder the gloss around your object.
What I hold and have around me. What was that
my doing. White wall, blue shade, castle sands,
the sea again, you. Said I have to like things and they
have to be useful. Tire in a field. Barrow hound.
Be quiet. First month after you I am passed by dogs,
trees, bridges. I still take the coin down the back
of my throat. I let my body down the Pine Barrens.
The soil there is rich for its keeping.

The night does not cut the time between this and that
anymore. I know the sun is nocturnal. Loud in bed,
in bed I apologize. To everywhere I cannot be.
Nothing bears me as your body. Did. Doesn't
hear me but the window, where the washed stares
of everyone who knew. Tight crumbs of bracing
shaked out at my perimeter bely. What chances
of warmth. What constitutes. Face me. I see
a dream but meet myself when I grab at its wings.
The night has poured out of me as if there was an
out of me. Wet sheets, bad wall, wash water,
alligator. Now the window's bright rejoinder,
unwelcome beckoning. Go on. Leave here. The hour,
the louring heart.

RAPIDS

I used to say part of me drowned in the Hudson
until you told me you watched a man jump into
the Clark Fork, swam in after his body and could
not find it. You didn't know the name to call
out for so, delirious, you called out at the rapids,
which all have their own names, you said.

This is not a continuous parting. It is a silence
that is more than a refusal to answer. While you
spoke I mostly heard the road. The wet streets were
spackled by gas lamps and shadows, the windowbox
daffodils spread white wings. Not beautiful things.
Falling apart beautifully.

AND WHAT ELSE

As the moon ordains the dark, the spiders praise the window
by dying there. If the pond were a spider the field could bleat,
would burst to a mass of time timed out by the tapestry scenes
of its sighs, its bank of arched choirs the sky embossed on the earth,
while spiders sail in on a chord of rain. These, then, now, this now,
this, the vital loss and vital losses for which I am patient, mostly.
I spend the day watching the dead, watching the winter adorn them
with dew, the moon spit light through their drawn bodies frozen there
on the winter side of the window, their bodies sere and pale and full
of moon, the night serried from the kindling of a day that was split
and split through sights of what I had thought that day to love.
Sardonic, rueful, ramified as day, I should live so. Should waltz
the air like the one live one as she threads her line into my line of sight,
now stilly turning from me toward the pond frayed by the moon.
The pond toward which she moves is a thousand disarrayed moments
of thrust and net, mesh and thrust as the light cornered through
the small satchel of a spider's body. Death could have been a bird,
but is left as moon. I cannot help that she still turns.

Just enough to have it be and claim it wasn't.

REBUILDING THE MORGAN

Mystic, Connecticut, winter, the Morgan
lashed to her own siding, her back in the bay
she doesn't remember. The builders have become
weak, and are caught in their sleeves, drafted and
silent. Their voices are hooded and rasping, their lives
carbon brought to current to drag off and on through
portents that will wind and gape, eddies that bring us
around to ourselves, the water that stalks and drains
itself relentless.

There are bloodless injuries here. What remains
uncatalogued around Stonington Harbor Light,
where the Fresnal stands sentry, calling nothing
forward to the shore, pushing nothing back, or past
this coast. How am I supposed to picture it? How
many years naming each hour, finding a way without
sense, the dates outdated that might help a letter circle
toward a husband, eight years on average, the men
knowing the gifts they crafted might be the only things
that returned home. The gaff rigs, catboats and
schooners, they are not sailed by men whose pleasure
in existing is the pressing from existence's end. Those
were the whalers, the tall-ship sailors. I think I knew
my life then.

It may be then, that we are after their morning.
The quiet hours when misery shifted off, when the roll
of the ship rolled closed, day moved cautious into
them. No alien creatures filled black water with light.
No other ship to rest or wink on the horizon, no longer
slot or point for parting but vast bridges. Damp
brightness. Wall. Look down at the sea to see only
sun, like Endymion searching the earth for the moon.
Worldly things slowly remembered, their colors
altering with approach, Maine islands floating off
the back of the ship blended into air again.

And now, this year, the men push her out at dawn,
drag off the ropes by that dry sound, their hands pull
her back, brush her thick walls. Applause. Her miles
just a reason to be here.

NAVY YARDS

You bore me as a witness on High Street, where they were talking of pulling up the Belgian blocks. When you wondered aloud what they might have found beneath them I told you, as I have often told you, there was really nothing there before.

Love is revenge on seasons. And I am the one who had to bury the mine past winter's fiat, what says over again that we might bloom. Bloom. A reflection like a fold in the earth, or the leaving behind of things that is not as blunt as forgetting, or year after year after the night you loved her more than me.

Poems are ordinary uses for extraordinary things. When I dream I dream it the same, but with your mouth open at the backs of my knees.

PYRRHIC RUN

Everything about you is still young. Compared to the field, young.

I know what I've done. I know
everything.

To speak, a backwards way of disabusing words
of their clarity except in what intends confusion.

East your body and it will be body.

The water
made water, in a poem about glass.

You've asked me do I think about.
Mostly. Most of the time.

*

Offered to you, the socialism of capital, in social trust, sociability, a hand, a growing
consciousness. (An idea can save your life, but not really.)

How it looks now: Two-tracks, dirt roads, the shelterbelts dividing the land into squares.
The overlay of the drill, the wheat that becomes flare.

It is always a taking-from, to bring home.

*

Half-rope the animals and help us finish, help us more.

Loving, I loved.

I hated it. You were offered a job selling mud. I made North transparent.
Chrome into color, I do it all the time.

High-gravity solids, centrifuge. The accretion of history, landscape
and reason.

This was barely, if ever, conceived.

*

Miscarriage, uncarried, unkissed, passed over.

This car is movement camouflaged

as movement, the reflection that insists
on replacing its image. And to matter
in that very same way, we try hard
to love the world.

*

Sheet up the earth. Close the lakes of its eyes.

A woman with children, off-road.

In the car, water. In her hands, a map.

AUBADE

I was contrite but not repentant
like war reimagined by spring.

I grew tired of conflating a fist
of stars with noise.

POEM FOR THOMAS DERRICK

If it is bird, it is a question of *bird*. Bird her. Make of her.
Marry her. The spell of the scientific is in its being outside
grievability, the hollow surf of oil only something to regret
when you lose traction. So love makes of language the same
quick innovation capital can. We repeat fables until they bend
us to them, the pretty binds of the purgatorial eliding the hiss
of steam off parked cars with the pale that lets a ruby beat
above us. This is the work, to abide by a social becoming,
to pretend what we have and stand nobly the working-
wise aesthetic.

I have been guilty of being deceived. Of a winter risen
in slaughter I have been not so sure. Who is the guest,
who is the affect and who the injurer? The politics of putting
things together is always skewed in the vector of longing.
How *quickly* can choose to mean, not so very. How *warm* is
always, more than. This knowledge is not useful, except in
that it feels good to know. My sweat hangs off the bulk of
bird and it is not pattern, not defect. It is the difference
in the end between what is tasted on the tongue and what
the tongue is. If it is life, so be it. And if there is bird: Bird.

CRUDE

To not have chosen not to be there can't be counted
as desertion, so I will call you another kind of witness.
To my own unspectacular time, which poetry also minds
and courts, and which is still life. And otiose, my patched
breath below you, what you believed in hugely when you
lived decently. When you told about the one open winter
of your childhood and recalled its referent, its myth, or
its vagary, and I thought: if I kill you I'll know where
you are.

HOUSE SHAPE

And because I have asked I have been given
the opportunity to be refused. There is a whole
well of light leaning with you out the door,
lambent, ecstatic, blinking in the sight of itself.

While I write you do laundry until 2.
I wonder is dead on the page.

I am waiting already for you to come
collect your records and the silverware, as we
both will have waited for years for conversations to end,
letters to be found, bells to dampen into disrepair.

What is it that we will have almost understood?

Tonight in the garden the flowers
fling sable ribbons to lick out little suns
from the dark. Separate boundless sorting
vast internal lives, rippled planets blossoming
tips of fingers that reach for the bones
that do not fit me.

I go inside. Death will choose to keep working.

And I will tell you, I will say it is not what I expected
to happen. I am not surprised that I couldn't
be better. I understand I am the one who left you
when I let you go.

I had to.
It was late. The rain.