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### Sunbaby

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*University of Montana, Missoula*

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SUNBABY

By

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Bachelor of Art, University of Portland, Portland, OR, 2017

Thesis

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts  
in Creative Writing, Poetry

The University of Montana  
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*Sunbaby*

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Above all else, *Sunbaby* is a project concerned with that which is passed down from a mother to her daughters. Less interested in writing into the center of violent acts, this series of poems aims instead to consider all the things – both physical and psychological – that exist of the edges of violence. What happens to a body in the wake of violent acts? What informs the trauma of families? These are questions *Sunbaby* asks its reader to grapple with.

Set to background of the desert and mountain West, *Sunbaby* lingers on bodies (human and other) subjected to environmental trauma such as wildfire and flood long enough to see what might happen next.

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## Diana, Goddess of Crossroads and the Moon

You wrote me a poem  
about how water moved  
me around in your womb

how it carved pathways  
for me in the shell of you—

When I was there—tethered  
to you—we felt the earth buckle  
and heave

we felt your body wax into  
something different and whole—

gravitied by that wild  
moon of grief

When did you decide you would  
tell me a secret—

even if it hurt me?

Here, we watch a peregrine falcon  
fly low and fixed here,  
you tell me that if a man ever

presses his hands to your throat  
again you might just  
let him kill you.

**A poem**

*constructed from a letter sent to my mother from her mother, 1989*

I care about you and accept how you are feeling,  
but I do not believe you.

It may be important for you to know  
that various members of my mother's family have:  
PMS, narcolepsy, schizophrenia, manic depression, and migraine.

I am concerned that you might be schizophrenic.  
Mother's sister shot herself  
in the head and her daughter  
believes she was schizophrenic.

This daughter  
has a daughter  
who is schizophrenic.  
She cannot work and lives in a home with other  
schizophrenics.

I have migraine. Mother  
has some migraine symptoms and has  
had extensive psychotherapy for depression.  
Knowing all this,

I was terrified  
one of these conditions might be affecting you.  
Until I hear more from you about your experience,

I am holding myself open  
in regard to the sources of your unhappiness.

No one is calling you a liar.

## Spoons

At lunchtime, the children played spoons. Your sister, Lynn, had no patience for furtive attempts at collecting.

Instead, when she got four of a kind, Lynn would stand on the lunch table bench, lift her little fist above her head,

and bring it down on the center of the spoon spiral, launching the utensils high in the air, letting the other kids shriek

with pleasure and horror all at once. You would smile at her in wonder. You would think about how it was Lynn

how was always brave enough to steal the oranges from the neighbor's backyard tree, running down the block

with them tumbling out the sides of her cradled t-shirt. Lynn didn't even care if she got a spoon in the end. She just wanted

to plunge her hand into the center of it all—  
without fear, without punishment.



## Arts and Crafts

Bring the empty Juice Squeeze bottles  
to the blemished kitchen table the one  
pushed up tight into the windowed corner  
where the plums sit in the summer.

Pare the paper from the glass skin little  
fingernails soft like apple peels. Rub thumbs  
hard over patches of stubborn stick to pill  
up little balls of glue Ruby Grapefruit

Mountain Raspberry Black Cherry  
lay curled up and torn on the hard wood  
floor tempting cats and dust. We'll fill  
these bottles anew with warm tap water

and McCormick food dye sequins and glitter.  
We'll place them on the windowsills of this  
stilted creek home. Peer through the  
frosted pinks blues sparkle bits

to the iced and dusted pines outside. Shake  
the bottles up like snow globes every morning  
hands overlapping sistered and sure. Even  
on the days when you can't wake yourself

from your nightmares we'll wait for you  
at the kitchen counter.

## My Uncles Carried the Couch

when we moved a minute up the road. Dad thought  
the Scientologists were stealing the water

because the creek dried up in June—in April  
we waded in foamy pools. We floated plastic

toys all the way down. Emma got giardia  
but made her vomit sounds small for two weeks.

The New House had too many rooms—  
the New House had a deck with railings. Bats

kept getting in and hamsters kept getting out  
of their cages—hiding in the hallway closet

to mate and nest. A headless mouse christened  
the spare bedroom and Emma hoarded costume

jewelry from the human dead. Maybe there was  
a man digging under the treehouse

because I could hear his shovel through the rain.

## Sunbaby

You put the desert in my bones  
long before you turned to me and said:

*My story is your story, too.*

A feminal invitation—a Sonoran impetus—  
the collective consciousness of heat.

Your chest is a layered galaxy of sunspots  
colored grape, cherry, electric blue. Abjection

is a molded orange—bloomed  
and split and inevitable.

On the long car rides home, I lean my head  
against the window

lean my head against my own reflection—  
against my sister's head.

You turn in your seat to look back at us.

**A poem**

*constructed from a letter sent to my mother from her mother, 1990*

One day, I want to make a bedroom  
into a shrine to you

I did my best—  
I helped you with scouting  
    with your Penny Saver route  
        made your clothes  
            helped you move from 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade

I went bat for you  
    with your dad

I have arranged my current life  
    so that I am available  
        should you call

I am crying right now

## Playing House in Oregon

Mom—

In the exhale of the violent maw  
I put on Lucinda Williams and I watched  
the space behind him

He placed a hand to my puffed up face  
and coaxed me into the umbra of the stove light  
to lick me muddy

I thought too much about you  
and what you would think of him and all this

I remember

a red balloon tied to the porch railing—  
    watching the rain from the couch in the garage—  
    the carpet on the stairs

the gamy stench of my sourdough starter—  
    laundry every day

When I finally came home to you  
I bought a dog and he was all mine

## White Noise

It's soon to be my second anniversary  
with my little white noise machine.

An app, really, downloaded to my phone. A prayer,  
a gesture to sooth the anxious

tilting of my heart. A nightly benediction  
downloaded the day he confessed.

First year free, fifty bucks for all years that follow.  
A year seems like plenty of time.

At night I cradled my phone against my rib cage,  
*AC Window Unit* tending

to the thoughts that picked at my sternum, the ones that  
pulsed like a bad wound burst open.

But my hissing totem couldn't save me, oh no,  
not from the wonderings and fear.

Immune to *Washing Machine* and *Sounds of Rain*, my  
heart needed murmured heat and lies

from an open mouth. So I returned to his bed  
and paid for that damned second year.

## Heatsick

She wanted to come in the open mouth of Yucca—  
she wanted Orion to watch her buckle then  
yelp on that dirty old saddle blanket her  
date had laid out in the silt

She wanted to be a naked glowing pale  
purple alien she wanted to be thin and frightening  
and fuckable

So she put on a real show—  
with that oily bratwurst  
he grilled on his little red camper stove—

she ignored the hotel-casino wrenching  
up and out of the desert floor  
huge and pink and steaming

And when he asked her  
about her biggest flaw  
she answered him:

*I was a violent child who lied.*

And she laughed with him when he thought that was funny—

Picture this:

You're on I15 heading away from Vegas and you stop at  
The World's Largest Chevron (96 pumps)

You pick up a tacky neon bag labeled Alien Jerky  
and it is full of nothing but a putrid puff of air

You keep driving toward a violent beam of light  
You keep driving toward a vast ocean of mirrors

## The Old Fire

Come upon a meeting of children under the bright hood  
of raining ash and they are all white. Two redheads, two blondes,

and finally, the one with the nose like Dad and his brothers.  
It's Halloween and the field mice have been drowning

in the jacuzzi but the children still want costumes  
to not be themselves moving muddy through the dusty eruption

of some giant, calcified gourd. Papa's house burns alive  
and his tears are one hundred boxes of oranges picked. The *cienero*'s

cries are silent. In the husked house was the mummified body of a cat  
mounted and framed hanging next to the photos of Cesar Chavez and the Rivera

prints and now they are all soot and soil and no one makes jokes  
about the blooming vitiligo on Papa's hands anymore.

The children go back to school and are told to make art with  
charcoal and water, and a man named Hope is charged with arson.

At Christmas, tamale-making is a learned memory, a validation  
that maybe that corpsed cat is still somehow there, baked into the land.



## After a Hard Fall

There's a train and maybe a bulldozer  
at the bottom of the lake and I know  
because everyone knows.

Shunted muck  
piles up at the very center—  
the very center of the swimming area—

we can stand with water at our ankles  
and scope the kelp for all the bodies  
that are supposed to be there. I know

because everyone knows.

Dad's out of town and the bath water  
sits still and cold while Mom and Emma and me  
crouch in the windowless hallway—

pine trees rinsed in red and blue  
because a motorcycle man who no one knows scuttles up  
the creek bed with a gun.

Dad's out of town and we come up on boys  
riding bikes at sundown. We think one wears a red sweatshirt  
until we see the bone glow blue in the dusky ether.

Everyone says he doesn't have a home—  
that he lives in the forest.

There's always a draught and there's always  
a dog and no one ever teaches us how  
to tell whether a hole in a tree

is from a woodpecker or a bark beetle—

Big pieces of granite just sit all around  
the neighborhood—just sit there like they've fallen  
from somewhere vast but cheap.

At dusk we watch that infinite circle  
the tops of the pines make  
where the bats skirt the edges like feathers in a whirlpool.

When I go to college  
I just tell everyone I'm from the mountains—  
mountains with a soft "t"—

and the first boy I sleep with there doesn't get it  
because his mom took him to  
Tahiti after his dad slept with the secretary

and he was good at soccer but not as good  
as the other boys and that really stuck with him.

## **Skinny Ghazal**

I liked being skinny.

When I went back to work that one regular said, “You look so skinny.

Have you been running?” Looked me up and down. No, just not eating,  
I almost said. Men treat you differently when you’re skinny.

They don’t care about your anxiety and how it doesn’t let you eat.  
They like the way your hips and collarbones look when you’re skinny.

Men like how vulnerable it makes you look when you’re  
anemic and depressed and abused and skinny.

But I liked it, too. I liked looking as fragile as I felt. I liked  
stepping on the scale every day so it could tell me I was skinnier

than the week before. I liked being able to tell people, “I wasn’t  
even trying to lose weight. I didn’t need to be any skinnier.”

As if my lack of choice in the whole thing somehow made me superior.  
It is a luxury to not have to consider yourself when you are skinny.

When I gained the weight back, I had to think about my body again.  
I had to be Kate again. I had to be more than skinny.

## Lure

When you swim in the lake at night  
your body is lambent light under water—

your nipples shy from the rest of you. Your  
shape starts to pucker then swell.

The boys are camping out in the creek where  
the tourist died last summer jumping

from high. The girls drive out to see  
what sticks. You want to see what you can

moor yourself to.

You tread in the margin between water and dock—  
reach your arms up to grip wooden beams.

On your way out—on your slip down a mountain  
road, you float six inches off the pavement—

you shrink and get big—

Around a bend a brown bear anchors herself  
in your path—naked and staring.

## When Spring Comes in January

There are pine needles grafted to the hardwood floor  
and they stick to the bottom of her bare feet. A nearly-dead

cat roams the thawing house—a talisman reminding her  
to take her birth control at the same time every day and this, too,

feels important. She wakes on these mornings with a song  
stuck in her head—a blonde memory plumb

against her sternum. She is envious of small dogs  
and babies and wonders if oak trees are deciduous.

She feared him into existence while she counted  
her tips. She loved him from the bathroom floor.

Something sour buzzes all the way down.

## The Uncanny

In the winter of 2001 two sisters sit in the bathtub and take turns drawing letters on each other's backs—

B.A.B.Y.

In December of 2019 the False Memory Syndrome Foundation (FMSF) officially dissolves.

Someone says that memory exists in the body. Is a living thing. Is a little animal tended to or not.

The concept of the uncanny is inextricably linked with the concept of abjection. When we can no longer

discern what is real and what is not, horror takes hold.

In the summer of 1975 a girl goes to the beach with her family. Later, she will tell her own daughters that

it was there, in the shade of a fan palm, that she achieved complete invisibility. See through.

I remember thinking: people drown in puddles people drown in still creeks six inches deep.

In November of 1993 a woman writes a letter to her estranged daughter. It reads:

Someone says that memories can get locked up in the mind's safe. Untouched, unvisited. Kept from the

oiliness of nostalgia, there is no decay.

I read a letter in which the grief of a mother—in the furrowed wake of estrangement from her youngest

daughter—is described as a *psychic scream*.

The Great Unconformity refers to a geological phenomenon found in the Grand Canyon in which two different types of sediment—often separated by great gaps in time—collide. They do not mix. They simply exist on top of one another, nearly the same, but not.

Freud says that the uncanny is the return of something that was once familiar, now changed—a new, dangerous knowing. Like darkness. Or a father.

In the summer of 1975 a preacher and his wife wait in Phoenix for God to rapture them clean.

The FMSF was founded in 1992 by Pamela and Peter Freyd after their daughter, Jennifer, accused Peter of repeatedly sexually assaulting her as a child.

A mother is a shadow that precedes her greatest fears. There is a dark umbra in which a daughter may  
exist, in comfort or dread.

I remember thinking: for every good thing that happens, one bad thing must happen, too.

Peter said that if he had been molesting his daughter, the dog would have barked. The dog would have warned someone.

In the summer of 2001 two sisters come to the conclusion that, by pressing their foreheads together, they  
can read each other's minds.

You make chocolate cakes for us with rainbow sprinkles at random. Call them *unbirthday cakes*. Almost  
like a birthday cake. But not.

You write letters that are never sent.

In November of 1993 a baby girl is born with a howl.

**A poem**

*constructed from a letter sent to my mother from her mother, 1990*

You  
are a beautiful being—

My entire body aches  
for the pain you are feeling. But I do not believe—

I do not believe your father ever molested you.

Your rage—

Your goal  
seems to be retribution.

Yours  
has been the fatal blow.

You  
wanted to punish him.

Diane, the thing that makes this tragedy so cruel  
is that we love you so much—

whatever may have happened to you that you find ugly  
is totally washed away in our minds. You have only  
to wash it away for yourself.

God as my witness.



## To Be Made and Unmade

In Ireland the sea is everywhere  
and a girl is leaning that way a boy says she's  
the best he ever had

she should laugh,      hope it's true.

There, she's picking up the loose change  
that is all over the floor—it  
                                 belongs to her.

The mid-morning sun let's all the little  
harps sing. He might help her scavenge.

                                 There, she has disappeared  
                                 into the couch cushions.

Her mother's mother said once—

*it happens*  
                                 *to all of us*  
                                 *eventually.*      There

is a car ride to an unhome that  
someday she will grow out of.

## Jefferson Lines Bus Stop, Missoula

A man waits at the bus stop late at night.  
I see him through my windshield while I  
wait to kiss your shadow back to Bozeman.  
He has one eye that's patched, one eye that seethes  
at us as he yells to the ether that  
*the bus is twenty minutes late! Strangers  
keep starting rumors that I gave them AIDS!  
It's not my fault that Uncle Charlie tried  
to sleep with me when I was twenty-two!!*

I lay my head across the seats to close  
in on your denimed thigh. All I see now  
is blued-out blacked-out bowled-out pine-lined sky.  
We wait and wait and touch and wait and wait.  
*Are you two waiting for the bus?* yelled through  
the window and the whirring white-noise heat.  
*Uh-huh* I say. *He's going to Bozeman.*  
Quick gesture to your large and male form.  
*Do you think the bus is cancelled?* He yells.  
No way of knowing.

The man looks at us with an angry frown  
before returning to his lonesome rant.  
We wait a little more until the clean  
tick of goodbye has lost its urgent taste.  
*Let's go back to my house and sleep this off.*  
As we pull out of the terminal lot  
the man gestures midnight with his sad song.

## For Years I Dreamt of Death by Lava

Ash is falling flaked eggshell  
settling and nesting into itself—  
meeting and wedding with mud.

Becomes smoke in the sheets smoke  
in the carpet smoke in the gentle  
flesh folds of the throat.

That one Halloween we spent  
at my cousin's watching my  
grandparents' house burn on TV—

At Christmas the black and naked  
mountainsides could do nothing  
when the rain came—slipping

right through the fingers of  
calcined junipers.

Black bears and coyotes loitered  
by the back door. I knew about a family

who washed away completely.

## A Burning

Rickie Lee Fowler is sentenced to death  
just as the dogwood starts to dig in—

I don't think much about justice  
but consider what it means  
to bear witness  
to a mountain grown back  
from scratch.

Five men died of heart attacks  
as they watched this mountain burn—

and who else to blame but our flame-hungry  
little wretch?

Our Rickie.

In the courtroom he was sodomizer and fiend—  
he was abused little boy.  
Wouldn't we all like to scream

*I was a child once, too.*

Every October—when the smell of wildfire  
steals into fabric and pore—

I think of manzanita and nettles.

I think of the charred hollow  
of a felled ponderosa.

I consider dying  
just to

come back new.

*here comes a cunt carrying a torch*

I.

my aunt told my mom about Joey  
the dog-faced boy. he'd made his  
way from a Russian freakshow to  
right there—the orange groves behind  
that wicked Phoenix church—and he  
was waiting for her—tucked into the  
root nest of a Valencia.

II.

me and the Chupacabra  
were born together  
in the summer of 1995—  
steaming  
and screaming  
and whipped  
into hard  
peaks on the  
blood  
of goats.

III.

all the men I've ever met  
are more afraid of dying  
than of living.

IV.

*Chupar* –to suck  
*Cabra* – goat

V.

Borges' Library of Babel grinds on for the infinite  
and the keepers sink their bodies  
into endlessness beneath the stacks

and Bukowski wants love but only  
if it's spoken with a filthy tongue

and I will hide with and from  
all the little dog boys

## **You Shouldn't Go Barefoot on the Hillside**

After a strong wind  
there is always litter

in the creek in the vinca  
pushed up against the edges

of the dirt driveway. After  
a strong wind the bears

and the raccoons  
and the coyotes

will always come to collect.  
The mountain will

swell round  
and fecund only

after fire a handful  
of kids will always move

down the hill.

I fall headfirst  
onto a splintered rock

when a branch slips  
through my fingers.

Emma erupts a logged  
hive.

There are bee carcasses  
scattered on the carpet

our feet are made for.

## Lovers at the Bottom of a Pool in Paradise

*In October of 2017, Jan and John Pascoe survived the Paradise wildfire  
by submerging themselves in their neighbor's pool for six hours.*

I'm interested in their bodies  
in the way we are all interested in bodies—  
the violent undoing of them

and what happens to them  
when consumed by water and fire  
all at once.

Will heat and chlorine leech a body  
into a pursed rind?

Will the lovers boil alive like toads?

I imagine them standing on the edge  
of a broken shell—  
Jan counting into the great umbra.

Who, then, urges their bodies  
into the babble? Who takes the first step

into that wet vacancy? Bodies become  
feral when terrorized.

They take turns wafting to the surface—  
lips milking black air.



## Coppice

We grew up in the forest so I erupted  
into womanhood staring at the pines –

where better to rest eyes as body curved  
into sixteen, into sexed and gluttoned?

Home alone at last  
two phantom boys

ran laps on my porch

whispering incantations  
through my open

window, disappearing into the space  
between trees –

they came night after night, quilting in me  
the fear of being discovered.

One morning I woke and found open  
cans of tuna perched in the wheel wells of my car.

Mom recited the meaning  
of a black bear latched

to the ponderosa out back –  
black dog barking upward, pieces of garbage

peppering the driveway.

Shame is best kept in the understory –  
used condoms thumbed

back into the box, buried

in silted granite –  
mouth open wide

on the dusky trailhead, breathing out

the detritus of our forest, splayed open,

reeking of smoke and tin.

My body still knows to quill at the sound  
of running on broken wood.

## Suckle

On the same day Dad settled a dead cat  
into the stretch of a black trash bag,

we shoved our hands to the throat  
of a ladybug nest and dreaded

at the putrid egg yolk blood beneath  
our fingernails. Ladybugs

are really just beetles and dogwood  
made my sister's eyes puff and drip

like split citrus. Chewing vinca leaves  
is bitter bonding over tongue –

makes you weep the too big loss  
of kid stuff. Purple flowers we thought

were honeysuckle – we still suck –  
and urged the sweet nectar drip and drip.

## **I am Convinced I Will Die a Violent Death**

### I.

My grandmother changed her mother's diapers  
and I thought that would happen to all of us—  
to my sister and me. When my great-grandmother  
started babbling and sobbing like a baby

we escaped to the dining hall where—along  
one endless wall—there was a cage of tiny  
singing birds. I hoped they might sing into  
the cob of the night.

### II.

My great-grandmother's third husband  
shot himself in the head  
in their bedroom  
while she was at church—  
she cleaned up his mess  
and slept in that bedroom  
for the next 30 years. Until everyone agreed  
she had rot in her brain.

### III.

Jerome, Arizona

is a town built into the side of a rust-colored  
mountain.

A town of ledges—  
homes gutted out like hollow  
gourds. My mom and I  
were there just long enough  
to feel afraid.

We come home with jewelry—broken and whole—  
to birds and dust and we wonder together about  
phantoms and the sinews of memory.

IV.

In my dreams there is a forest—and that forest  
is in Phoenix. Dozens of old women  
wander around and they've all been raped and  
they're all schizophrenic and I know them—  
My mother's mother told her about them  
in a letter—

V.

My sister and I learned to shave  
perched on the edge of the bathtub  
in our swimsuits—

Mom showed us first—how to be gentle  
over our little girl knees and ankles. Peach fuzz  
and Barbasol made the water thick and foggy.

Nobody bled and we were all hairless  
and beautiful. And maybe there was something  
for all of us to be afraid of—  
but I didn't think it then.

## Apartment Sonnet

When winter came it came in the shape  
of a wet dog—helped me peel the sorrow  
from my face—from the glutted floor  
mats of my California car.

I can't cover the windows so peckish  
phantoms see my skin from the street—  
dead grass, Pepsi can planter at the chain link.  
A small like burnt silt honeyed to carpet.

I can make flowered tea into the late afternoon—  
I can whisper to the wicked genius. Shucked  
candle wax does not make a home.

I can cloak the couch in too many blankets—  
I can lock the door all night long. The stone  
fruit in the fridge is mine to eat.

## Car Camping Outside Livingston, MT

We lay there rigid and calculating  
how best to siphon heat

from the dog's febrile little body.  
My feet have been sacrificed

to a frenzied cold.      Hours

earlier we'd played cribbage  
and drank beers and faced West

into a coiled pool of fruit sap settling      tethers

between earth and elsewhere pulling  
inward becoming taught. I wished I hadn't

said that thing about you  
not being so affectionate lately

because the silence unmoored me.  
Now I have to pee.

I shift my stiff body forward  
released from a suffocation

of duvet and sleep smells      toward the car door  
rocking with the weather.

Dropping down onto the wet earth  
is like being born

into a static chasm      sharp soil  
polyps tattooing the bottom of my bare feet.

The space between  
body and sod all choked up.

The plain is dusted blue black and grey  
Southward mountains are blackhole

shadow beacons      backlit slices  
cut from felted clouds. Crouched down

naked from waist to ankles I look out  
into the pall of dead grass    endless

and unburdened  
by trees, rocks, anything. The wind burrows

down my eardrums waking me  
from the belly outward.    I wonder

if you ever thinks about  
when we lived in that big Portland house

together    the one with two beds—  
we followed each other

back and forth all night long. I wonder  
what you think about.

You are  
a product of light    that is a product of darkness.  
I stand up    redress    lean against the solitary metal beast.



## Livingston, Early Autumn

(2021)

1

Maybe you were right—it's a cow or a coyote or the wind or a man shoveling  
mad in the graveyard down the road. Guided by a gilded moon.

2

What would grandma say if she knew I was here? Fighting over Lee and the  
teenagers and the bowling alley with you?

3

Fuck me into static. Into this phantom limb of love.

4

Things left behind:

a cracked leather belt  
sunscreen used only once  
the dog's collar  
half a quilt

5

Mom says

relationships can be really hard in the beginning  
and still work out in the end.

This is not beginning  
not end.

9.30

The restaurant owner gave us Underbergs wrapped in beige paper  
and we tasted licorice on each other's tongues all the way home.

10.1

I want and I want and I want.

10.2

There is a thin but solid line across the Western part of this state—  
skirting the bank of train tracks, lighting the snowed and steaming pines  
at night—from you to me.

10.3

When will the well dry up? When will I learn to care for things?

## Jeremy

Today I play with my best friend's baby.  
He curves over into himself  
like a bellied shell and rolls  
his rosed toes into his hands. He cries

when left alone and I  
smell myself on his hot panicked  
breath. My best friend—minted, now,  
in something like provision—

holds him nestled on that new  
skin of hers. Her makeup from the day before  
flakes onto his paltry tuft of black hair.  
I watch her and think

about the time that boy from camp called  
to ask her for a blowjob. And how we laughed  
at him because he was ridiculous and so  
far away.

My best friend—  
the girl I wanted and wanted to be most  
of all—has been baked into a new kind  
of animal.

The synapses of all her movements, now, are  
foreign and fraught and choked with worry.  
We look at each other and both know  
what a relief it is

to be here—together—after all this time.

**A poem**

*constructed from a letter sent to my mother from her mother, 1992*

We did try to meet your needs, Diane. Your father  
and I had very exciting, orgasmic oral sex.

I suspect that if you saw something  
it could have been an assault on your psyche.  
Possibly as powerful

as if a rape had actually happened to you.

During your teen years you were  
an enigma, eschewing any effort I made  
to help you attend to your beauty.

Did you feel I was trying to make you into a whore?

As a natural part of human development, girls  
have times when they fall in love  
with their dads.

We wanted you to be happy and well!!! We  
are so proud of you!

You felt you were under water. I am here for you  
because you are my child, the one I have loved

the most. Love, Mom

## Something Almost Like an Ending

My sister and I  
fishtailed out from under ourselves—  
through Idaho then Utah—  
to come home and walk with you.

With the fire last year came a gutting—  
a landscape lustrated then cooled. A riverbed  
of oak trees now hardened into a huge,  
blackened heel crack.  
With the flood this year came an heirloom  
basin marbled from shore to shore.

As we walk through the canyon—you  
and me and Emma—we tend to look  
up.

At the top of the ridge—so black it nearly  
smolders—stands a doe and her fawn. Just  
silhouettes against a dusky heatwave, against  
whatever might come next. Pieces of charcoal tumble  
all the way down as she shifts her body

across the horizon.