

BETWEEN PULSE AND BREATH

by
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Program

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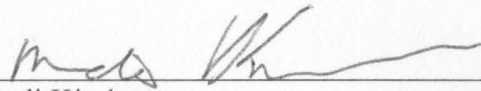
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Between Pulse and Breath

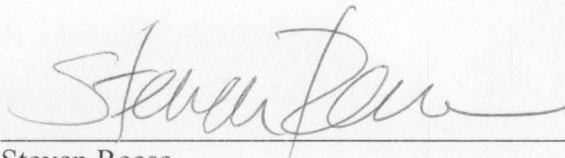
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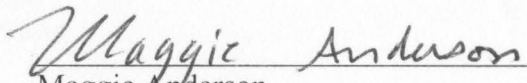
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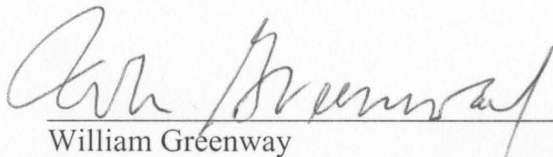
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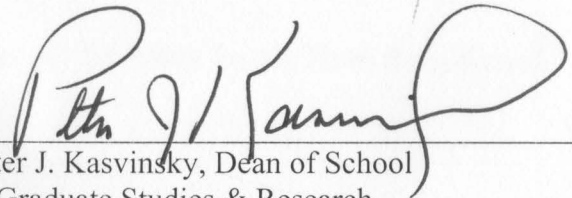

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Checking Your Pulse	1
First Time Listening to Opera	3
I also thank my friends. With special thanks to William Greenway, Kelly Bancroft and Steve Reese (my BFOC), Lindsay Bennett, and Alyson Eggleston.	7
So Very Certain	9
She Telly at Saint Anne's	11
If God is Magical	13
I love all of you.	13
How I'd Like to Think it All Works	17
We Want, We Want	19
Song of the Rest of Us	21

&

What I Like Best About the Imaginary	23
The Last Row	25
Rolling Downhill in a Tire	26
Making Snow Angels	28
Dear Loneliness	30
Dear Jealousy	32
Dear Happiness	34
Dear Desperation	36

&

In Medias Res	37
Spin the Bottle after All the Pretty People Have Been Kissed	39
Body Parts	41
Revision	43
In Praise of the Forehead Kiss	45
Love	47
And You'll Know I Love You by the Way I Kiss Your Eyelids	49
Struck by the Sudden Urge to Save Everyone	51

Contents

Checking Your Pulse	1
First Time Listening to Opera	3
How to Sing the Blues	5
Diminished Hell	7
So Very Catholic	9
Sin Tally at Saint Anne's	11
If Guilt is Magical	13
Against Reincarnation	15
How I'd Like to Thin it All Works	17
We Want, We Want	19
Song of the Rest of Us	21

&

What I Like Best About the Imaginary	23
The Last Row	25
Rolling Downhill in a Tire	26
Making Snow Angels	28
Dear Loneliness	30
Dear Jealousy	32
Dear Happiness	34
Dear Desperation	36

&

In Medias Res	37
Spin the Bottle after All the Pretty People Have Been Kissed	39
Body Parts	41
Revision	43
In Praise of the Forehead Kiss	45
Love	47
And You'll Know I Love You by the Way I Kiss Your Eyelids	49
Struck by the Sudden Urge to Save Everything	51

&

In this Light,	52
Your Last Words	54
In Praise of Dysfunctional Relationships	56
We are all Maniacs	57
Chatterton's Bad Day	59
The Painting Teacher	61
Who to Sing Praises to	63
The Paper Mill Town	64
Man Stops on Walk to Work	65
Dancing after Work	67
She's a Brick House	69
The Idea of Safety	71
A Breaking of Days	72
Remove Sunglasses	74
In Praise of Grand Gestures	75

&

Notes	77
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Acknowledgement is made to the publications in which the following poems first appeared:

Eclipse: "So Very Catholic"

Perigee: "Making Snow Angels"

The Penguin Review: "Checking Your Pulse," "In Praise of Grand Gestures," and "Revision"

Checking Your Pulse

Remember the night you said,
each heartbeat is the sound
of someone's luck running out,
a bad chorus of stutter-thumps
like tin cans tied to the back
of "just married" cars, or the vexing
bang of a blown-out tire on a freeway.

Remember my method—
how I'd name each missed tick.
That one was a first-love flutter.
The next one's more upbeat,
like calypso music, imagine
the smooth whirl of dresses
sweeping an island clean.

Then remember how quickly
your heart's pace would slow,
settle into something more bluesy,
a Muddy Water's gut-rumble
and more like yourself,
as if a pulse's tempo
is something we grow into in time.

Remember me, my ear pressed
to your chest, how you'd say
I looked like a beach child listening

for ocean in the big seashell of your torso.

How you'd say, we're all so

easily deceived by sound,

but still, you'd want me to stay

until you slept. So unwise,

I never knew what I heard

in you, but lucky

lucky we don't have to define

each strange cadence,

don't even have to know

what it is we're hearing at all,

to be able to listen.

First Time Listening to Opera

Which makes me wonder

if Maria Callas was ever so moved

And already I feel my white trash roots erasing,
lodging into the ground
deep as the stem of an unsightly flower.

Already this high culture calls to me;

falsetto dragged from their lungs
like corpses, or stretched like limbs heard
in ancient torture devices.

Has their big voices

How, I wonder, can such urgency
exist in the dark throat,
and spiral down
the huge corkscrew of esophagus?

The intensity, I confess, frightens me;

as if Pavorotti's big head
could flop vibratos strong enough
to swallow this daily drudgery;

which makes me wonder

if Puccini could contain himself,
even in the market aisles,
did he slip to his knees

in praise of the fresh produce?

Did he promise
undying love
for each and every endive?

How to Sing the Blues

Which makes me wonder
 if Maria Callas was ever so moved
 she burst into a human vat
 of emotional gunpowder,
 taking out the trash.

Makes me wonder,
 while my lips pulse to the aria
 in my small voice which wants to be heard
 no more, but certainly no less,
 than their big voices.

Next, feel that buzz-tickle in your throat,
 back region, soft as a sneeze, and sip it out,
 every howling sound you can muster.
 Be your nineteen year old baby child,
 long-legged and breeding,
 the hully who bloodied your skin in Junior high,
 the lunch lady who coughed in your car's potpourri.

Finally, that's right, I want you to pull them out,
 they're all inside you.
 I know, now shove them forward and use them,
 use them, every thought they've ever had
 and flung toward you—
 they're yours, now bring them up,

How to Sing the Blues

First, tap your foot—a little thoughtless—
how old bar men drizzle cigarette ash floor-bound
and lower your head because your heart's a dizzied top
since your baby left you, *because she's nineteen years old*
and got ways just like a baby child, and you're crying backyard
sprinkler tears deep as the Mississippi in a flood.

Now, grab right there—that tense stomach muscle
layered with time, and skin folding tighter than clasped hands.
Grab it quick and choke out any voice you can,
something raw like a newborn's world-entrance wail
and feel how it vibrates, rhythmic as car engines at red lights.

Next, feel that buzz-tickle in your throat,
back region, soft as a sneeze, and rip it out,
every howling sound you can muster
for your nineteen year old baby child,
long-legged and brooding,
the bully who bloodied your shins in junior high,
the lunch lady who coughed in your cold potatoes.

Finally, that's right, I want you to pull them out,
they're all inside you,
I know, now shove them forward and use them,
use them, every thought they've ever felt
and flung toward you—reckless,
they're yours, now bring them up,

bring them all up and sing them out—
each noise a note in the tune
that will force you to go on.

a friend says will be a lesser component
of the devil's domain; a scaled down
version of minute tortures
whose punishment will match
the exact proportion of our misdeeds.

No place for people who impale
their lovers with ice picks.
No place for those who keep corpses frozen
in their freezers for quick
preparation cannibalism.

Here you will find the lesser
among us—the office loudmouth
annoying the air like smoke rings,
lips angled in their proud "O" of sound.

Here you'll find those who secretly
desire their friends' misfortunes,
gossip dribbling down
their rungs—thirsty
lips like rabies.

Yes, this will be the place
where we'll raise our pointless
pitchforks, then slam them down
against the drubben
of all the blather which will accompany.

Diminished Hell, ~~for punishment—~~
~~to study and sing the miserable dirge~~
~~of our own trivialities~~

a friend says will be a lesser component
of the devil's domain; a scaled down
location of minute tortures
where punishment will match
the exact proportion of our misdeeds.

No place for people who impale
their lovers with ice picks.
No place for those who keep corpse-pieces
in their freezers for quick
preparation cannibalism.

Here you will find the lesser
among us—the office loudmouth
annoying the air like smoke rings,
lips angled in their proud “O” of sound.

Here you'll find those who secretly
desire their friends' misfortunes,
gossip dribbling down
their rumor- thirsty
lips like rabies.

Yes, this will be the place
where we'll raise our pointless
pitchforks, then slam them down
against the drumbeat
of all this blather which will accompany,

of course, our proper punishment—
to study and sing the miserable dirge
of our own trivialities
forever
and forever.

thinking about the body and blood of Christ,
only sharp redness
like fat grapes puckered
in "Billy by the proud sharpener's" lips,
you must be the most devoted singer here,
dead-center, among friends,
a black-haired bull's eye—
strands coiled and stitched
through April air, white veil
a little wind-blown
like dove wings swooping
from your cheekbones
flushed with secret love.
Come on, communion get,
everyone knows how you looked
at him, commanding—
a noticing that requires
a notice in return,
and everyone saw
your giant pupils— flying saucers
tossed toward the green in his eyes
that blinked and fell
to the floor, so clumsy
and tired, you wondered
if you had exhausted him with glances alone,
a magic spell, maybe.

So Very Catholic
after Milton Rogovin's, "Communion Girls."

Because today you are not
thinking about the body and blood of Christ,
only plump redness
like fat grapes puckered
in "Billy by the pencil sharpener's" lips,
you must be the most doomed sinner here,
dead-center, among friends,
a black-haired bull's eye—
strands coiled and stitched
through April air, white veil
a little wind-blown
like dove wings swooping
from your cheekbones
flushed with secret love.
Come on, communion girl,
everyone knows how you looked
at him, commanding—
a noticing that requires
a notice in return,
and everyone saw
your giant pupils— flying saucers
tossed toward the green in his eyes
that blinked and fell
to the floor, so clumsy
and tired, you wondered
if you had exhausted him with glances alone,
a magic spell, maybe,

where something has to disappear;
 you wondered if God would forgive
 impure thoughts and lust
 heavy as bricks in your childhood heart,
 wondered the "Hail Mary" to "Our Father"
 ratio in this case, prayed and
 prayed, signs of the cross quick as clubhouse handshakes
 you'd invented, pray and
 pray, but today you are not thinking
 about the body and blood of Christ,
 only your own newness,
 fingers that touch,
 lips that taste and enjoy and enjoy
 the ripe sweetness of everything.

like the day you wanted nothing more
 than to push the cute blonde's nose
 into the flat-screened face
 of the unmistakably ugly.

Remember how you cheated, dumb eyes
 fixed to the math whiz in long division
 while all those reminders
 soared above the divisor line,
 not quite belonging, like souls bound for purgatory.

Each crime worse than the others,
 remember the covert kisses,
 adhesive gloves, and how they crawled
 in the brain's center where neurons walked
 like slugs to the jukebox of their lives.

Sin Tally at Saint Anne's

*Of course, it will be your choice
when the time comes to confess
these sin-screws grown so long*

It's your choice, though it's encouraged you record
each wrongdoing so you won't word-stumble
and trip down the trash chute
of your own humility *that's left of your worship*
in the priest's presence at confession.

and offer up to this world
So you become your best adversary;
each transgression an arrow *possible*
stabbed straight into your voodoo body,
each pang a remembrance,

like the day you wanted nothing more
than to push the cute blonde's nose
into the flat-screened faces
of the unmistakably ugly.

Remember how you cheated, dumb eyes
fixed to the math whiz in long division
while all those remainders
soared above the divisor line,
not quite belonging, like souls bound for purgatory.

Each crime worse than the others,
remember the covert kisses,
adulterous glances, and how they converged
in the brain's center where neurons waltzed
like slugs to the jukebox of their lovesickness.

Of course, it will be your choice
 when the time comes to confess;
 these sin-scravls grown so long
 you could wrap them around
 the fat globe in regret's tight stranglehold;

or you could muster what's left of your worship
 for all that's flawed and human,
 and offer up to this world
 the immense weight of your sin
 in the most ardent embrace possible.

that scrawl the white calligraphy of

*Dear loved one, this cannot
 continue—too strong emotionally,
 inappropriate, nothing can come of us.*

*Until someday I'll see you,
 your delicious steps like heart-clicks
 across a room where we'll be clandestine,
 anxious at the intensity of this feeling*

*that makes me wrap my eyes
 around the other-side-of-the-room-you,
 in the cruel truth of as long we can't
 be near, I'll always want you closer.*

*will always want this heart
 and flutter, to feel your pres-
 ence to fit my waist like a net*

If Guilt is Magical

“Guilt is Magical.”—James Dickey

If guilt is magical,
 then we must have the power
 to pound it from our piñata bodies
 with our own fistfuls of sin;

must have the authority
 to pull it from top hats with wands
 that scrawl the trite calligraphy of

*Dear loved one, this cannot
 continue—too taxing emotionally,
 inappropriate, nothing can come of us.*

Until someday I'll see you,
 your delicious steps like heart-clicks
 across a room where we'll be clandestine,
 amateurs at the intensity of this feeling

that makes me wrap my eyes
 around the other-side-of-the room-you,
 in the cruel truth *of as long we can't
 be near, I'll always want you closer,*

will always want this haste
 and fluster, to feel your arm
 tense to fit my waist like a net

where we want to be caught,

want this guilt to rest at the center
of ourselves, because we know
on the other side of this pang
of remorse, there's all the pleasure
in this life worth knowing.

Against Reincarnation

Because I don't want you to believe
in anything beyond this. Isn't the thought
of another vertigo-spin around the universe's
rinse cycle all too unbearably

Imagine the bore to return
a sleepy-eyed house cat, or snail
dragging apathy along the slime-curve
of its own existence.

What I want you to believe
is in fierce spontaneity,
how the endless energies of now could coax
the urge to tear a stranger's clothes
from his body in stairwells

where you could rub
searing like matchsticks,
limbs chafed into something
red enough to ignite; but you must first
fight the terror of firewalking.

Must first take each step forward
with a sure degree of swagger,
like the day you said I strode
like a gun-slinging cowboy,

winter boot-heels hammering
 asphalt as if to wake the world's
 last foot-fault lines
 in a modest earthquake of my own making.

Because I want you to believe enough
 to move with me, pace by forceful pace,
 firm enough to be heard in this life.

The furnaces in our bones warming,
 feet set to a chant's tempo.
 So let's take off our boots
 and walk these coals.

And vow these words with me.

This is all there is friend;

this is it.

No rematch.

How I'd Like to Think it All Works

may all lit wine-heavy goblets

drink us down here.

Glasses clash like the world's

Yearly, there is a Creator's Convention
where the Catholic God gets a little
gin-tipsy, slips to a genuflect,
knees cut through soot-colored cigar puffs;
he mocks the school girl clusters
below, crouched in bathroom stalls,
hands twined in prayers
to not be pregnant,

while Buddha strokes his globe-gut
that droops over the table
like an untouched side dish
and does his deep breathing, sporadically
choking on his own Om's.

Baptist God fans himself slap-happy,
shouts *Mercy* and faints on the upbeat
of his shrill Hallelujahs. He lands
face first in a full gravy boat,
the only seas he can part by himself.

Protestant God upturns
his big nose to the banter,
sits impeccably postured, uptight,
and swigs mega-dose potions for his
peptic ulcer, red as hellfire or first loves.

Still, yearly, at convention's end,
 they all lift wine-heavy goblets,
 drink to us down here.
 Glasses clash like the world's
 smallest earthquake—
 fault lines scattered enough
 to wobble our knees,
 but never so jarring our lives topple,
 entirely.

We Want, We Want,
and the promise that it will always be this way—

always the impossible

Soon as we're breathing,
our baby arms flung sideways
like shooting stars nobody's wished on,
or shipwreck victims, hands raised
up for planes too distant.

We want, we want to be seen,
known by the intricate shift in our voices,
each child's whine a pitch above or
below another's on the grand scale of wanting,
each throat-rattle distinct enough to detect our condition,

which is fickle as a teenage girl
or a faulty compass pressed
to the palm of a sailor's hands, useless.
Because no one can say where anyone's headed,
except toward more wanting,

wanting someone to note
the wide-mouthed oval of hunger,
the face, and its grimaced frown,
wanting someone to know we've fallen
so in love with our screams we mistake them for songs,

and we conduct in chaos,
each finger-flick like the birth of planet
we have no maps for. It's all pandemonium here,

and we're fools to everything but desire,
and the promise that it will always be this way—

always the impossible
terrain between wanting
someone to silence our crying and wanting
someone to pledge endlessly
to listen to it.

Song of the Rest of Us

the just-bitter-enough taste of us,
might swallow us up in the weaving place
between pulse and breath.

who are not large,
and who do not contain multitudes,
but morsels, word-snippets;
easy *hellos* strain
the narrow brain span
because we know so little.

Because we can barely rally
the calf muscle courage`
to trudge the day's steep profile.
Because there is no delight
in the rush of streets, only people-scatter
to nameless noplaces.

So we spit in the peace-loving
face of human connection.
Because it's easier than admitting
we'd give a limb for someone to wake
next to us, forever; and
without end is what we want,
but do not believe in.

So we roll our tongues around
these habitual exchanges of
have a good day and *be careful*,
but we know there is no safety,
so much can happen in the vast
expanse from here to there,

and these freeways might like
the just-bitter-enough taste of us,
might swallow us up in the wavering place
between pulse and breath.

&

What I Like Best About the Imaginary

is how it chain-links to the living and like handholding.

How we twine together,

a package of human surprises

full of who will say what next

about the feeling we'll call "love,"

and fear we'll name "fear."



The children we won't have

but will name, boy and girl on set-saws

that nod like heads saying yes,

but meaning to say no.

What I like best in watching you sleep

is dreaming your long arms

looped to the universe

of myself in rustling covers.

And your heart's pace which becomes

my night's ritualized music— impossibility

of forever humanized with the now

of my lips on your thighs.

And that's what I like best,

how this primal joining of bodies

couldn't be disguised as any word

other than a blessing.

What I Like Best About the Imaginary

is how it chain-links to the living real like handholding.

How we twine together,
a package of human surprises
full of who will say what next
about the feeling we'll call "love,"
and fear we'll name "future."

The children we won't have
but will name, boy and girl on see-saws
that nod like heads saying yes,
but meaning to say no.

What I like best in watching you sleep
is dreaming your long arms
looped to the universe
of myself in rustling covers.

And your heart's pace which becomes
my night's ritualized music— impossibility
of forever harmonized with the now
of my lips on your thighs.

And that's what I like best,
how this primal joining of bodies
couldn't be disguised as any word
other than a blessing;

not for what we won't have,
but the baby-seconds we will,
when your eyelids oppose
the stubborn flutter of mine.

And I promise you are my melody.
And I'd tune my faulty voice
to your song if only I had the enduring
soprano and drawn breath—

it's a gift, really,
to hold on— to carry a note
on the hot breath of sentiments
which I swear are real as anything
we'll ever know.

And all this brightness will force
my eyes into a narrowed vision,
as if to see them more clearly,
then to see, finally,
that I'm so far away,
too far away,
and I'll always live
on the other side of town.

The Last Row

With this distance,
it's easy to see who's in love,
their heads tilted in triangles
to form something like rooftops
families will someday live
under, where children will
spin laughter like exclamation points
at the end of the long sentence of days.
And backyard gardens will spread
into sunlight, jump-roping into suburbs
and streetlamp neighborhoods
tipsy on the electricity of togetherness.
And all this brightness will force
my eyes into a narrowed vision,
as if to see them more clearly,
then to see, finally,
that I'm so far away,
too far away,
and I'll always live
on the other side of town.

Rolling Downhill in a Tire

No, this tight grip
and descending was about

That summer was our last
as amateur contortionists,
so small we'd curl our whole bodies
into smiles to fit tires
like loops in cursive forgeries.

We named them wheel races,
while idiot friends bicep-flexed
in a sun that taunted us
down the hillside;
a pesky sibling turned toward the light.

That summer was the last
we were small enough to unburden thought's
cruel rationality. No concern for
stolen tires, or ant life pummeled
in sloping red trails.

No concern for chlorophyll
sucked from the grass
gone brown
and rotting
in all our uprooting.

Not lamenting the hurt
we'd caused, or danger
in these downward spirals
of ourselves.

No, this tight grip
 and descending was about
 some soul-muscle inside ourselves,
 granting us permission
 to go, going, despite it all,
 sweet inertia,
 getting us there.

Making Snow Angels

always traveling, flat-topped—
a spark of warmth in each of us,
even here in all this darkness.

Friend, there's so much to hope for
in these last days of December,
ungloved hands chapped the color
of dried blood or dying roses
in Midwestern wind that's spun
like chimney smoke, tying knots
around Ohio's perpetual gray.
What else, friend, can we hope for,
but to plant our bodies,
small and firm on this hillside—
this endless expanse of white
trailed by more white.
Ice to our backs, feet upturned
and pointed skyward—
these graceless stems
that won't grow in winter,
but we can try.
Flap our arms quicker
than the flawed motion
of startled birds or first-time
swimmers who know the risks
and toss themselves,
headfirst, water-bound, anyway.
There is something to be said for abandon,
and in all this thrashing
we must generate just a little heat.
And what else can we hope for,

but to make our bodies into vessels,
 always traveling, fire-filled—
 a spark of warmth in each of us,
 even here in all this blankness,
 all this cold.

Dear Loneliness,

But they can't resist the spin

and you know it.

You know it as well as your own footsteps

You are a child's game, you know the one
where kids clasp hands—

tomboy and brush-burned girls

spin and spin in churning circles

until they land, grass-stained,

bony ribs heaved in summer's quick time.

You know the game

because you're the force

that forces the hands to disconnect,

like a swift wind

or a wicked kick of gravity.

You watch them play,

dizzied, arms extended

wide as a yawn.

You watch them—

listen for that final knuckle crack

and twist of limbs while they orbit,

clumsy as a new planet,

and vain enough to believe

they are the only world there is,

but you know better.

You know the disconnect will come,

predictable as a sun-slashed

horizon at day's end.

You know the game

and you know they like it,

that rush and thud of bodies

scattered directionless.

But they can't resist the spin
and you know it.

You know it as well as your own footsteps
pounding out the distance,
pounding out the distance,
to your cadenced drumbeat,
and you know
you are what keeps them apart.

And those arched windows that curve
just enough, as if to flout smug smiles,
as if to whisper a crooked-eyed secret
that everyone knows but me.

And that firm rectangle for a door,
strong as thick-muscled men
who know what type of people
to let in and out, and in,
calm as an exhalation at day's end.

You are my neighbor's house
that I want to burn down,
all day min pouring the thick slouch of gasoline
catches my matchbook and thumb-trower,
finger to match, finger to match.

It should be that easy to flame
the air, hot as my face
when I think of you.

Dear Jealousy,

You are my neighbor's house
that I want to burn down,
something about shingle-gleam in sunlight
like just-bought diamonds, burns my eyes,
and makes me think of fire.

And those arched windows that curve
just enough, as if to flaunt smug smiles,
as if to whisper a crooked-eyed secret
that everyone knows but me.

And that firm rectangle for a door,
strong as thick-muscled men
who know what type of people
to let in and out, and in,
calm as an exhalation at day's end.

You are my neighbor's house
that I want to burn down,
all day rain pouring the thick stench of gasoline
catches my matchbook and thumb-tremor,
finger to match, finger to match.

It should be that easy to flame
the air, hot as my face
when I think of you.

Should be that easy
to tame the neon flares of fire,
but of course, I can't stop;
Of course, I burn down the whole neighborhood.

We know you're in here,
in this hide-and-seek world
of moving crates
where boxes demand stacks
filled boxes like troubling music code.
Oh, we really hope to meet you
soon, just a chime-scratch second
and we'll find the lost
a place for everything.
We'll stack those huge books
by know-it-all authors
we secretly hate.
We'll stock and load the place
with food and furniture
that glints so radiant our eyes
sizzle with possibility to simply look.
And we do, for you, happiness,
beneath every table,
mahogany chair waiting
for someone to sit while we search,
insistent scavengers that we are.
We search until we ache
with the weight of luggage
lifted and for which we've looked,
looked for some forgotten
strength inside ourselves
like the force of those men

Dear Happiness,

up and down the stairs,
steady as a foot tap
while we tidy and clean

We know you're in here,
in this hide-and-seek collage
of moving clutter
where boxes dot and slash
tiled floors like troubling morse code.

Oh, we really hope to meet you
soon, just a chin-scratch second
and we'll find the lost
a place for everything.

We'll stack those huge books
by know-it-all authors
we secretly hate.

We'll stock and load the place
with food and furniture
that glints so radiant our eyes
sizzle with possibility to simply look.

And we do, for you, happiness,
beneath every table,
mahogany chair waiting
for someone to sit while we search,
insistent scavengers that we are.

We search until we ache
with the weight of luggage
lifted and for which we've looked,
looked for some fierceness,
strength inside ourselves
like the force of those men

who haul boxes,
up and down the stairs,
steady as a foot tap
while we tidy and clean
and tighten our fingers
around the contents of everything.
Those men, they find you,
mid-stairs and panting.
And they know enough to know
sometimes it's best to let things sit,
those restless souvenirs,
let them sit,
let them rest,
wherever it is that they fall.

Dear Desperation,

You are the beauty in it,
my neighbor's fights,
tonal shifts from tenor
to boiled tea kettle soprano.
You are their words, ceaseless and
cruel, but you are the beauty in it.
How their pitches grow hoarse
from the inside out,
their vocal chords plucked
like angry guitar strings
broken from the intensity of performance.
Dinner plates tossed toward walls
where they splatter into pieces so small
they hardly exist, unless you mid-day squint
just right, watch the sun shuffle,
plunging its clumsy ballerinas of light, so lucid.
But it's easy to see
that you are the beauty in it.
You are the force
that loosens threadbare
into nothing;
his arm on her shoulder,
gripped so strong
you can't tell them apart,
but weak enough
to push them into any arms
willing to hold them.

In Media Res

Because beginnings promise to be unbearable—
think phonic ties, a hole in my stomach
where words should be,
or the flooded blood
and bone-twist of a difficult birth—
I'm dragging the middle toward you.



Doctor, chips just-fertilized egg,
I'm finished starting—
run me into this world mid-life and mid-air
sign me up for an unpaid mortgage
and on to everything;

because I want anonymous,
continuously—some of this
but I'd really like to know you better locally
because I want the way your eye blinks
in pentameter,

I want sing-song and chant,
I love coffee,
I love tea,
I love the boys and they love me

It's all heart-sputter and sweat in beer, head,
because I want history stripped naked
pages torn until all that's left is now.

In Medias Res

*living and living
and living.*

Because beginnings promise to be unbearable—
think phonic tics, a hole in my mouth
where words should be,
or the flooded blood
and bone-twist of a difficult birth—
I'm dragging the middle toward you.

*Doctor, chirps just-fertilized egg,
I'm finished starting—
toss me into this world mid-life and sullen
sign me up for an unpaid mortgage,
and an ex-everything*

because I want anonymous,
continuously—none of this
but I'd really like to know you better banality
because I want the way your eye blinks
in pentameter,

I want sing-song and chant:
*I love coffee,
I love tea,
I love the boys and they love me.*

It's all heart-sputter and sweat in here, honey,
because I want history stripped naked,
pages torn until all that's left is now.

Because I want
living and living
and living,
all the while,
without ever having
to be born.

Spin the Bottle after All the Pretty People Have Been Kissed

like a limp we all bear.

What's left here are the pockmarked
and awkward and their banana peel world—
they're not ashamed to slip
face-first and parade cartwheels
to celebrate anything, even uncaredful
lapses in language, the dull
this is my name and *this is where*
I'm from spoken while
weight shifts foot to foot
like dancing where the tempo's lost
to the fear of crushing a partner's toes.
What's left here is a lip twitch
and catch— stalled engines
stuck on the upward
turn toward smile, dumb chins that
jut to form directionless
handlebars of a first-time cyclist,
but they're not afraid to fall.
Look how their mouths circle
into a fresh pucker,
how bellies puzzle together and rub,
an ugly oneness
and they're not afraid
to expose their skin and gristle,
hideous shell of the self.
Not frightened because they already

see the wounded everywhere,
dragging their own unique hurts
like a limp we all bear.

are so baffling, that knot-tight
and indecipherable. Imagine a life God
how did he do that,
pretzel-twisted man
sporting his fist for a necktie,

teeth dangling like diamonds,
or a comedian's wit-quick neurons
slashed around up there,
shameless to drink people dancing.

Picture the exact fusion
of bone into joint—
a meeting place skeleton
that houses all parts without question.

Yes, even the brain lung
and liver knocking back
quick shots of glucose.

The mental struggle when we try on
sentences, string them up
the length of the brain
like laundry or half-ft Christmas lights.

It's baffling,
these concealed processes

Body Parts

are so baffling, tied knot-tight
 and indecipherable. Imagine a *My God*,
how did he do that,
 pretzel-twisted man
 sporting his feet for a necklace,

toes dangling like diamonds,
 or a comedian's wit-quick neurons
 sloshed around up there,
 shameless as drunk people dancing.

Picture the exact fusion
 of bone into joint—
 a meeting place skeleton
 that houses all parts without question.

Yes, even the bum lung
 and liver knocking back
 quick shots of glucose.

The mental struggle when we try on
 sentences, string them up
 the length of the brain
 like laundry or half-lit Christmas lights.

It's baffling,
 these concealed processes

drain the mind's well dry,
nevermind the heart's inner-workings,

chambers coiled together
to force a tick inside,
and then outside ourselves.

See, I'm threading together

Each heart about the size of a fist,
punching its bold way into being alive.

Let's make a verbal equivalent
of the written re-do: romance language
rooted in Can't Complete Sentences,
or Words Take Sunday Drive
off Cliff, Go Belly-up in River.

Here's hell & No,
here's howdy—hollo in cowboy hat,
Here's hey there—hello
in short skirt and attitude,
that could reconfigure your Encephalon.

Here's how are you,
but that's too bland,
starched carbohydrate of greetings.
Here's come here—finger beckoned
with dash of cayenne pepper and heat.

Here's I'm entirely inadequate,
Going to grunt my way through this
Our eyes meet—Me catwoman.

Revision

You should invent a language
 for this vocal unraveling.
 See, I'm threading together
 dialogue with the world's dullest needle
 and one stab-happy hand that can't sew.

Let's make a verbal equivalent
 of the written re-do: romance language
 rooted in Can't Complete Sentences,
 or Words Take Sunday Drive
 off Cliff, Go Belly-up in River.

Here's *hello*. No,
 here's *howdy*—hello in cowboy hat.
 Here's *hey there*—hello
 in short skirt and stilettos
 that could reconfigure your kneecaps.

Here's *how are you*,
 but that's too bland,
 starched carbohydrate of greetings.
 Here's *come here*—finger motioned
 with dash of cayenne pepper and heat.

Here's *I'm entirely inadequate*.
 Going to grunt my way through this.
 Our eyes meet—*Me cavewoman*.

Look for the knuckle-to-ribcage motion;
I'll be the girl with the shrillest yodel.

Here's *see you*—slipping voice-first
down the quicksand pit of inept exchanges.
You should invent a language for this.
Cross it out “x” by “x” like heavy markings
stitched down an intolerable calendar of days.

Cross it out.
Make my words make me pleasing.
Just work within the limits of
you are good and
I would say hello again.

And we become fearless,
never knowing where the lips may land
their tiny plane cranks of all things tactile,
millimeters of your eyelids getting up close.

And today I am learning on your doorstep
how your whole body
slants into a question mark
to kiss the space between brows.

Before I leave, and see how
the sky's a purple bruise,
an exact blend of morning and vanishing dusk.

In Praise of the Forehead Kiss

Because today I am learning how to be
all at once entirely content,

Because today I am learning
to revisit the type of kiss
we shared as kids, timid, half-thinking
our latest love would hurl a brick at our heads,

or spit the thick venom
of self doubt into our dumb eyeballs
if we aimed for anything beyond
this bull's eye, forehead center.

Because later, we unravel the mystery
of how the tongue travels
its endless barstool swivel
in someone's backseat.

And we become fearless,
never knowing where the lips may land
their tiny plane crashes of all things tactile,
millimeters of your eyelids grazing mine.

And today I am learning on your doorstep
how your whole body
slants into a question mark
to kiss the space between brows.

Before I leave, and see how
the sky's a purple bruise,
an exact blend of morning and vanishing dusk.

Love

Because today I am learning how to be
 all at once entirely content,
 and entirely, for now,
 ready to start in the middle again.

Lucky I have a friend whose face is like love: blushed
 burgundy freckles sewn through soft light
 when he white-knuckle props fingers to chin, thinking
 the unveiling of a sculpture—
 and therefore, love is a creation.

Does love have an end, a beginning? Find out and trace,
 travel those laugh lines like forested breadcrumbs
 strewn beneath oaks, leafless and wild
 to find yourself, in some sense, home.

Love—the botched obscenity of a first-time artist.

Love—the idea that presents itself mid-scene and startled.

Love—a musician's first thing like stunted planets at the birth of the universe.

Or, because Ginsberg said *the weight of the world is love*,

I force myself to carry everything.

Love—the teenage boy—bra strap fumbling—hand heavy with first-time flesh.

Love—those swollen bellied expectant mothers, remember their gloom—tiny worlds
 children live in.

But then Lennon said (rocky, as usual) that *love is the answer*,
 and so, I question everything.

Love—the first familiar sight—slender row houses—after hours of night driving,
 nowhere.

Love—those full-throated gasps after sex,
 long enough to take every day with you.

And we're lucky, in all its intricate complexities, argued,

Love
under the influence of Thomas Lux's "Time."

Lucky I have a friend whose face is like love: blushed
 burgundy freckles sewn through soft light
 when he white-knuckle props fingers to chin, thinking,
 the unveiling of a sculpture—
 and therefore, love is a creation.

Does love have an end, a beginning? Find out and trace,
 travel those laugh lines like forested breadcrumbs
 strewn beneath oaks, leafless and wild
 to find yourself, in some sense, home.

Love—the botched chiaroscuro of a first-time artist.

Love—the idea that presents itself mid-sentence and startled.

Love—a musician's fists flung like stunned planets at the birth of the universe.

Or, because Ginsberg said *the weight of the world is love*,

I force myself to carry everything.

Love—the teenage boy—bra strap fumbling—hands heavy with first time flesh.

Love—those swollen bellied expectant mothers, rounder than globes—tiny worlds
 children live in.

But then Lennon said (cocky, as usual) that *love is the answer*,
 and so, I question everything.

Love—the first familiar sight—slender row houses—after hours of night driving,
 nowhere.

Love—those full-throated gasps at the end,
 long enough to take every day with you.

And we're lucky, in all its intricate complexities, argued,

only to be constructed again and again. *Way I Kiss Your Eyelids*

Lucky we don't have to understand to feel,

radiant and fiery blaze on our faces,

skin on skin,

these scars and wrinkles are roadmaps,

and love is where we are going. *we are*

*Baby, I'll steal the sun from the sky for you
resonate through night time radio broadcasts*

while we pretend to dance, ridiculously,

a parody of the parody

that dancing already is

when the music's bravado

takes over the night

and you take over me,

the moon-sunged sky of yourself

groping me with your glances

that hinge & bit past normal.

And I promise to promise

something equally absurd

in the tradition of love song proclamations.

See how stupid I am, Love.

the secret of the universe is in your eyes and

I'll build a spaceship, colonize Mars with you

and me--both twisted like licorice

thick, white flesh-blazing and cursing

the red planet simultaneously

in chaotic-tearing cartwheels.

Love, I'll pledge this to you

while I stomp your feet

again and again-- hasty stampede until

I'm blurred from the weight of words

And You'll Know I Love You By The Way I Kiss Your Eyelids

Love, all the love songs I hear
 are big and dumb and clunky as we are.
Baby, I'll steal the sun from the sky for you
 resounds through night time radio broadcasts
 while we pretend to dance, ridiculously,
 a parody of the parody
 that dancing already is
 when the music's bravado
 takes over the night
 and you take over me,
 the moon-scraped sky of yourself
 groping me with your glances
 that hinge a bit past cordial.
 And I promise to promise
 something equally absurd
 in the tradition of love song proclamations.
See how stupid I am, Love,
the secret of the universe is in your eyes and
I'll build a spaceship, colonize Mars with you
and me—bodies twisted like licorice,
thick, white flesh blessing and cursing
the red planet simultaneously
in clothes-tearing cartwheels.
 Love, I'll pledge this to you
 while I stomp your feet
 again and again— hasty stampede until
 I'm blistered from the weight of words

I mean to say but can't dredge out,
not when I'm this weak for you,
clumsy and whittled down to the core,
the rawest pieces of myself
that I can't create language for,
and don't have to.

When I stoop
weary as the longest day in summer
and tilt my head to kiss, I'll miss
your mouth entirely—a few inches off—
but this is the way
it will always be with us,
impatient distance.

My lips meet your eyes,
hoping somehow you'll know my aim,
hoping somehow you'll like it.

into all the
tiny ants. You feel, you feel
so much you'd offer
CPR to a cockroach
if you could.

You'd get right down there,
your chin, a huge nutcracker
sliding its shell in two,
breaking all that's authentic
with your huge, useless jaws.

Struck by the Sudden Urge to Save Everything

And there you go again,
filling Olympic-sized swimming pools
with gruel-thick soup for the weary.

You bench press old women who grapple
with walkers, and carry them to the anywhere-but-here
they'd rather be, while gray hair
whirls like paintings of urban snowstorms.

And there you go again,
you nose-dive to your knees,
breathe your thick wind
into all the fading molecules,
tiny ants. You feel, you feel
so much you'd offer
CPR to a cockroach
if you could.

You'd get right down there,
your chin, a huge nutcracker
slicing its shell in two,
breaking all that's authentic
with your huge, useless love.

In this light, after Quincy Kilmer's "The Kiss"

we are yellow and brimming over
with the idea of ourselves, almost brightly,

mocked by a robust night, copper-colored,
its flicker and wink to black like a knowing eye.



Look how we've risen from lilac vapors
tying purple knots to my knees in bursts

where my dream is spun into circles—
diligent wheels of endurance to reach you, love,

where I've grown from wheat-stained seeds,
lifted my face skyward like countless stars

from a universe I wouldn't expect you to understand,
not with my face, tilted, then drawn straight,

a horizon on my self-made planet
where light stitches its fine thread

and suffers to cloud over a kiss
that could strangle the air from everything.

In this light, we are yellow, fixed into a shape
thrown in the face of all this blackness.

In this light, love,

In this Light,

after Gustav Klimt's "The Kiss."

we are yellow and brimming over
with the idea of ourselves, almost haughty,

mocked by a robust night, copper-cruled,
its flicker and wink to black like a knowing eye.

Look how we've risen from lilac vapors
tying purple knots to my knees in bursts

where my dress is spun into circles—
diligent wheels of endurance to reach you, love,

where I've grown from wheat-stained stems,
lifted myself skyward like countless suns

from a universe I wouldn't expect you to understand,
not with my face, tilted, then drawn straight,

a horizon on my self-made planet
where light stitches its fine thread

and stiffens to cloud over a kiss
that could strangle the air from everything.

In this light, we are yellow, flexed into a bicep
thrown in the face of all this blankness.

In this light, love,

where I am too fearful to pull away,
and you, love, are too frightened to let me go.

will not be what you think they will be.

No time, when sea alerts to skin,

a spiral staircase of tide

that goose pimples pink flesh.

No time to mutter

vague pleas to Gods

who aren't listening,

or curse your broken

hands fixed on the mast

that promises to plummet,

a sensitive blade shaded

the color of sickly flesh.

No contemplating the supple

curve of a lover's hip

in clouds looming sea-board.

No time to recall fondness

when ocean presses against you

like an unwanted kiss.

No time but to bawl,

an assembly line of water

replaced by more water, a quickness

that permits no finality, only

movement. Currents' free rotation

and gravity swivel in daylight

with your last words are not

words at all, only an

open-mouthed gape stretched

Your Last Words

on William Turner's "The Shipwreck."

No time, just hard-edged
syllables and warm breath,

will not be what you think they will be.

No time, when sea climbs to skin,

a spiral staircase of tide

that goose pimples pink flesh.

No time to mutter

vague pleas to Gods

who aren't listening,

or curse your broken

hands fixed on the mast

that promises to plummet,

a massive blade shaded

the color of sickly flesh.

No contemplating the supple

curve of a lover's hip

in clouds looming sea-bound.

No time to recall fondness

when ocean presses against you

like an unwanted kiss.

No time but to bail,

an assembly line of water

replaced by more water, a quickness

that permits no finality, only

movement. Currents' fine rotation

and gravity swivel in moonlight

until your last words are not

words at all, only an

open-mouthed gape stretched

with the conceit of living,
and trying to live.

No time, just hard-edged
syllables and warm breath,
and fight and more

fight—one arm,
underwater, the other
punching a hole
right through the air.

In Praise of Dysfunctional Relationships

after Edouard Vuillard's "Mother and Sister of the Artist."

Perhaps that is the message
It's true that sister protrudes
from the wall like an overgrown tumor
weighted with the idea of feminine hysterics.
Oh, the lunacy in her refusal
to be married off, most likely to a man
old enough to be her grandfather's
grandfather, or dumb enough
to be her wide-eyed pet.
And watch how mother grimaces,
center stage—an unrelenting mound
of darkness the size of a child's fist,
or a well-fed rodent
that can't be killed by ordinary means.
Here, the whole room is bent
in the rigid precision of angles.
Violent geometries jut
as if the wooden chest
stabbed the last shred
of tenderness from everyone.
Still, there's a history here,
a lineage knotted
to the surface of things,
even in all this sharpness,
some care—mother and daughter,
endlessly imperfect,
but endlessly aiming not to be.

We are all Maniacs

after Yves Klein's "Leap into the Void."

Perhaps that is the message
conveyed here, Klein.

Black sleeves like bat wings
fastened to air,
arms wide as a wirewalker's
minus the wire, you're dropping
quick as a hurried sunset
glad to rid itself of the day— maybe
from your second floor with vine
and moss-swept undoings
curled beside you like the
hair of stunning women. As if
you've discovered the secret
is not about levitation
at all, but about madness.

At the core, Klein, we're all senseless enough
to see oil-glazed roadways below
rising as cushions
or soft continents stretched with
people who will surely love us,
and will scowl toward
all the gravity that
no matter what
will not hold us up.

But we aim, steadfast
in our efforts— launch ourselves
and believe that our bones

are the only ones
that will not break.

So you've decided to end it all,
Chatterton. Might as well make it count, maybe
upstage your own death with all the glib
theatrics of a curtain-dropped stage at performance end.
Might as well make it an art—oh,
the sweet satire of complete resignation
lives inside you like an unfinished sigh
stretched longer than any city's limits.

Listen, Chatterton, listen and lift the window just enough
to mirror the weary-eyed glances
you gave your lovers
who dead will love you no longer.
You'll want them to grieve your loss
in the grand tradition of artists dying,
stupidly, while you plot
a full body collapse across bed,

and the bear-bellied curve in your arm
slopes down and your hair falls
in an eyesore splatter the color of infected wounds.
You're so obvious, Chatterton.
Might as well shred the manuscript
in tiny shreds of white—the pulled teeth of your labors
proven fruitless,
while everything around you wrinkles

Chatterton's Bad Day
after Henry Wallis's "Death of Chatterton."

So you've decided to end it all,
 Chatterton. Might as well make it ornate, maybe
 upstage your own death with all the glitzy
 theatrics of a curtain-slapped stage at performance end.
 Might as well make it an art—oh,
 the sweet satire of complete resignation
 lives inside you like an unfinished sigh
 stretched longer than any city's limits.

Listen, Chatterton, listen and lift the window just enough
 to mirror the weary-eyed glances
 you gave your lovers
 who clearly will love you no longer.
 You'll want them to grieve your loss
 in the grand tradition of artists dying,
 stupidly, while you plot
 a full body collapse across bed,

and the beer-bellied curve in your arm
 slopes down and your hair falls
 in an eyesore splatter the color of infected wounds.
 You're so obvious, Chatterton.
 Might as well shred the manuscript
 in tiny shards of white—the pulled teeth of your labors
 proven fruitless,
 while everything around you wrinkles

in spurts and lines like narrowing roadways.
Might as well make it memorable.
Raise that arsenic up high as a wedding toast,
all these different versions of forever.
Might as well face them all head-on, any way you can,
then look outward—that gloomy mantle of night
you invented. Look at it. Then, drink it up,
Chatterton. Might as well drink it up.

who've sharpened our fingernails
claw-like, severe—

five manicurist's dreams
boxed on the spines
of our books (which has proven
to be their lone purpose).

And so, we're angry;
and rightfully so,

in our rejection
in the prominence
of our predecessors.

We're waving our heads
like toddlers or flags in the wind.

Can't you see the horizontal
shuffle of "no"
swept across our faces?

And so, we've scratched
beneath this surface
into another surface entirely,

all this white writing tugged
in opposing directions.

broad-sloped points
strewn erratically.

The Painting Teacher

Where you see canvas,
we're tricked into the illusion
of chalkboard. And so,
we are your students
who've sharpened our fingernails
claw-like, severe—
five manicurist's dreams
honed on the spines
of our books (which has proven
to be their lone purpose).
And so, we're angry;
and rightfully so,
in our rejection
in the prominence
of our predecessors.
We're waving our heads
like toddlers or flags in the wind.
Can't you see the horizontal
shuffle of "no"
swept across our faces?
And so, we've scratched
beneath this surface
into another surface entirely,
all this white writing tugged
in opposing directions,
broad-sloped points
strewn erratically.

There is no pattern here;
and perhaps the best
we can hope for
is that in all this
that feels like unlearning
there is little something gained,
a little art.

but a building collapsing
on its own brittle bones,
paint-scraped ceilings drop
into brick as if to say
even the walls here
are drained, coming undone.
But you must not, no,
no unraveling today—
must not. So what else can you do
but rest the plants on your pants,
your Sunday best and stomp
the wooden floor imprinted
as a bully's face or an ex-lover.
But there will be no frailty today;
back-arched, sturdy, whole body
wrapped into a pompous smile,
knowing, knowing,
what else can you do,
but press your lips
into a fat pucker
ready to extend, always,
ready to reach out
what's left of your fierceness
to this senseless and beautiful world.

Who to Sing Praises to
after Milton Rogovin's "Choir Boys."

when even your church
is no church at all,
but a building collapsing
on its own brittle bones,
paint-scraped ceilings droop
into brick as if to say
even the walls here
are drained, coming undone.
But you must not, no,
no unraveling today—
must not. So what else can you do
but hoist the pleats on your pants,
your Sunday best and stomp
the wooden floor imagined
as a bully's face or an ex-love.
But there will be no frailty today;
back arched sturdy, whole body
wrapped into a pompous smile,
knowing, knowing,
what else can you do,
but press your lips
into a fat pucker
ready to extend, always,
ready to reach out
what's left of your fondness
to this senseless and beautiful world.

The Paper Mill Town

So we can have our fine and cherished texts
(those rocket-launched epiphanies emerge
when we scratch temples, hazy-eyed in thought),

they went to work—noses upturned in that
nearly shriveled and rotted pulpy stench
tossed sideways into air like chimney smoke

on gray days with no contrast to offer,
every day the same, unyielding; they went to work,
lonely machinists gripped toward lunch pails

and counted hours, and counted hours,
while the boys—pimplly, cactus-stubble shaved—
pushed mops and daydreamed backseat adventures

with girls who'd never acknowledge them,
and counted hours, and counted hours,
while clippings scolded tile floors in quick hits

piled high as our shelves flaunting those book spines
on a slight tilt—dominoes that won't drop.

And we lose ourselves in the words, those words,

can't speak the story inside the story,
of how they made thought, and counted hours,
and counted hours—so we can think it.

Man Stops on Walk to Work

Complains he cannot go on,
not with the arch of his shoes
constricted, tight as a belt
on a overstuffed belly.
So, man drops umbrella
expertly—a pinpoint halt on tiptoes
it lands— a sad dancer
draped in black so dark
it startles the muted day,
and matchstick towers burning
with the background sound
of distant machinery.
Man is languid, though he hoists
himself skyward,
a nameless savior over bricks.
But man is not swift
when he sprawls lengthwise—
his whole body a jackhammer
to fasten the city
down and closed for good.
Man lights cigar that springs forward,
unruly, like a bad cowlick
or a middle finger
shoved in the face
of all things strenuous.
Man takes another drag,

exhales eagerly on all the world,
breathes in again,
grins,
and likes it.

It's happy how still,
the black and white
floor beneath you
like an impossible game of checkers
you can't stop playing,
while shadow puppets
reflect biceps that gesture
and curl into something
like smiles split under
the burden of twelve-hour
shifts spent loading
and unloading all these things
that could never be yours,
but you carried them anyway.
Now's the time to let it go.
Tilt the brim of your hat
like a wink toward a beautiful
woman, just enough to
exude swagger, then bend
your arms, a little awkward
at first, and shake wildly into
a festive chicken salad
of total disregard.
You need to sense this
deep in your workman's marrow,
tear out the parts of yourself

Dancing after Work

It's happy hour still,
the black and white
floor beneath you
like an impossible game of checkers
you can't stop playing,
while shadow puppets
reflect biceps that gesture
and curl into something
like smiles split under
the burden of twelve-hour
shifts spent loading
and unloading all these things
that could never be yours,
but you carried them anyway.
Now's the time to let it go.
Tilt the brim of your hat
like a wink toward a beautiful
woman, just enough to
exude swagger, then bend
your arms, a little awkward
at first, and shake wildly into
a festive chicken cluck
of total disregard.
You need to sense this
deep in your workman's marrow,
tear out the parts of yourself

that still feel, like your feet,
 a black boot sidestep
 quick enough to take flight.
 You need to understand this motion;
 the carefree strut of your grin,
 or a full-bodied slant to a friend
 extended to anyone worn threadbare
 and beyond this, where the body serves
 no other purpose
 but to follow the rhythm,
 follow the rhythm,
 and dance.

She's a Brick House

She's a Brick House, she's mighty, mighty, just lettin' it all hang out.—*The Commodores*

The song blares,
turns our brains into disco balls
that shout "dance," and we listen.

Doesn't matter that I think
myself more of a straw hut,
flimsy and fair game for arsonists;
or you think
yourself an igloo, unfeeling
as a lifetime of northeastern Februarys.

Nevermind Mr. Gawking Bartender
because we'll threaten
to crack his kneecaps later.

Don't mind the women
built like amazons because they'll door-frame
thump their big heads into
the perfect shape of ugly on the way out.

Doesn't matter what this dancing amounts to—
awkward walking, poor-gaited
like limps specific
to new neurological conditions;

Fingers raised overhead,
then forced down again—a sky
full of shooting stars
on amphetamines.

So swift we repeat each motion
again and again, laugh at our attempt
to make something last long enough
we have no choice but to remember it.

Remember, remember,
these hurried bodies
are the only houses we can inhabit.
And these legs know there's no one to walk to,
so we might as well let it all hang out, friend,
might as well dance.

The Idea of Safety

will come to me some night, I'm sure,
in the unruly rush of pupil-dilated darkness,
before I can see fully—that angular stretch,
the ceaseless lineage of frost
dangled white down the window,
rough-edged like half-healed cuts
and I'll clench for whatever's next to me,
that sweet Louisville slugger. I'll tap
its metal skin and shelter it
like a lost child or a lover,
while I tiptoe lengthwise, careful ballerina strut
door-bound, pulse unsteady
as a voice stuck in the windpipe.
But, I'll be ready, always ready,
fingers curved to the bat so tight
I'll strangle the air from everything.
I'll be ready, my big, dumb eyeball pressed
to the peephole, ready to pummel
any skin willing enough to touch me
before I see if there's any beauty,
any goodness there at all.

A Breaking of Days

Friend, for us, I'd like to tear these days
from their precarious hinges; a calendar
tugged and cut from the safety of its wall space.

I'd axe-swing and dismantle
each moment into fragments

for us, at first, to uncover
Earth's strange physicalities.

How each tectonic plate nearly collides
with another in disaster narrowly avoided.

How everything green seems to freeze
and bloom all at once
opposing the slow dance of daily rotation.

For us, I'd jackhammer against
the thick stone of all that's unrequited,

those emotional twinges that settle
on the seat of our lips and sob

for all our haves and have-nots
clock-ticking at the center of ourselves.

Yes, I'd strike these days
down against the asphalt's icy gleam
for you and me and anyone adrift as we are.

Because how else, how else
will we ever grasp the thoughtless
but gentle atoms that dwell in the houses of our heads?

How, if we don't see these questions
in pieces before us,
will we ever live our way into the answers?

Remove Sunglasses

What I'd like to do,
traveling west-bound to my house
is uproot this king-sized sign,
Remove Sunglasses, preceding
Central Pennsylvania's snaking tunnels
through mountains like a conversation's
annoying interruptions.
What I want is to plant
the sign in its rightful place,
adjacent to the red-lettered
Welcome to Ohio,
as if to say, you won't need these
sun-blindens in this state.
As if to say, this crimson welcome
is too spirited for the Midwest's
tired gloom constricting
the luster from everything.
And what I'd like to do,
in my mind's reckless center,
is fling these tinted shades
highway-bound,
in fragments that gleam
in a dim hybrid with the
low beam lights in fog,
trusting and hoping
there will be enough light
to lead me home.

In Praise of Grand Gestures

but to break.

Or this could be about

This poem could be about
the inventor of the standing ovation,
so moved he emerged like Jesus
on the third day.

Or else this poem could be about
your friend who did the dumb thing,
then flew a single engine jet
above the shell-cracked beach
and boardwalk grit of Jersey,
banner flapping behind that read:

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry
so all the sun-freckled girls
on towels like royal carpets
could know of his error.

Or maybe this poem is about
your junior high boyfriend
whose wrist you dislocated
in a handholding mishap.
Remember how the tiny bone
poked through and bulged
a bug-eye with a bruise for a pupil,
and the laugh you faked
afterwards, at the idea
of holding things so close

to yourself they have no choice
but to break.

Or this could be about
your father who dove onto
his own father's casket, flailing,
enough slobber to drown
all the stoicism in the world.

And secretly, isn't this what we want,
to laugh and cry the loudest—
large proclamations spewing
out of us, easy as air,
while we fling ourselves
at the merciful feet of everything
and wait to see
what we get back?

Notes:

"How to Sing the Blues" includes a line from the Muddy Waters song, "She's Nineteen Years Old"

"Song of the Rest of us" includes lines from Walt Whitman's poem, "Song of Myself."

"A Breaking of Days" includes a phrase from Rainer Maria Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet*.

"In this Light" is based on the painting, "The Kiss," by Gustav Klimt (1862-1918).

"Your Last Words" is based on the painting, "The Shipwreck," by William Turner (1775-1851).

"In Praise of Dysfunctional Relationships" is based on the painting, "Mother and Sister of the Artist," by Edouard Vuillard (1868-1940).

"We are all Maniacs" is based on the photograph "Leap into the Void," by Yves Klein (1928-1962).

"Chatterton's Bad Day" is based on the painting, "The Death of Chatterton," by Henry Wallis (1830-1916).

"Who to Sing Praises to" is based on the photograph, "Choir Boys," by Milton Rogovin (1909-).

"She's a Brick House" is the title to a Commodore's song.