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There. Said. Done.

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

in

Creative Writing and Writing for the Performing Arts

by

Lori Louise Davis

December 2012

Thesis Committee:

Professor Matthew Zapruder, Co-Chairperson  
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The Thesis of Lori Louise Davis is approved:

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University of California, Riverside

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# Part One

## **The Woodcutters**

Out of her longing to be known, she entered your ax.

You don't know how she entered.

You couldn't know she was focused this sharp—

a shiver of strength; a solid giving way to the parting.

It was her smile that split you,

drew you into the woods, too deep;

made you drop your aim and bearings.

Out of her longing, she uncovered your clearing.

Your only thoughts: *Why does a dull blade*

*split the timber quicker? How will I ever get warm?*

This myth begins with the promise of allures.

You ask her to say the names of the trees,

this unwanted hemlock, that cedar,

each one wide enough to hide behind,

each shadow stained with a careful love.

Like fresh sweat, you try to wring her name

from your practical shirt—

but at the intersection of wood and ax,

the gears and pulleys of your body respond,

entwined, invisible from behind,

a clearing, and all you can feel is the falling.



## **Clarification**

This is not a shrub. It is your mother in an armchair  
flipping channels in her current dimension.

This is not a crow. It is a smoke stack from the future  
sucking up shadows, after a long history of exhales.

This is not a guided tour. It is the opposite of perfume.

This is an eye-chart, a kill-switch, the billboard

in our yard, advertising the heaven we already own.

This is a final notice. A rare first edition—

too fragile to read. A tea of brewed excuses;  
not poisonous, but not a landscape of love, either.

This was never my wish. It is an amputation operation  
translated into a cartoon. Your bravery pill.

It is not mine, anymore. A donation of significance,  
a farewell of some permanence. Not an admission,

but a medley of recycled moods—an assembly line  
for everything we were never able to dislodge.

## **Until Only the Lot is Left**

I like the idea of erecting fences for no reason; many people are loaded with old thunder. Over there, in a vacant lot, men are dismantling miles of chain link fencing. Their tools are half-buried in the sand; one has a stark yellow rubber grip. My skirt is operating as a windscreen. I think this will be a poem about empty lots and the danger in writing anything, anywhere even on a sunny winter day like this. The boss is wearing a beige pullover. His road cone has no more orange in it. The worker who threw his tools is wearing a white hard hat. He looks like someone who has separated more than a few girls from their flimsy wrap dresses. Boys live more physically in this world. I just sneezed, spraying coffee molecules all over my dashboard and a crow is walking by with a mustard packet in its beak. I am done trying to remember every detail surrounding my first rug burn, beyond the fact it involved carpet, you, and a high-priced stereo system, near enough for me to control the main volume. We only pretend to hear each other cry. I'd like to reset my heart back to when it had no strategies. The men are making slow progress with the fence. I loved you most when you worked at the Christmas tree lot—selling Christmas trees at Christmas. The amount of relevance in that is astounding. Cutting twine, bench pressing firs and pines; sprigs of mistletoe endowing us with their fancy permissions.

## **The Casual Aspects of Our Atmosphere**

My heart is lopsided; your self portrait is a line graph.  
You touch me in places you've invented just for me—  
and now you request a gift receipt for being the hero?  
I find it is more efficient loving you in pretend ways.  
We can do without the redundancy of autobiographies.  
Standing on your own welcome mat, ask yourself in.  
There are messy versions of you, and you never smile  
long or wide enough for me to scrutinize your teeth.  
I have a worthless, reoccurring dream of gently raping  
you with a paperback. Luckily, the drape of the day  
lifts early; the sun makes its initial tilt toward summer,  
the way an opera may or may not complicate a throat.  
I know for sure: I will never own a bakery or a falcon.  
Marriage is like a cough drop. Fear is a solid. I notice  
these sorts of things. Bumble bees cast shadows across  
my thighs. A yard fills with yellow flowers. We spend  
the afternoon raising and lowering swans into the pond.

## The Stranger Experiment

*A recent scientific study proves if you put two people together in a dark, empty room, assuring complete anonymity, before, during and after the experience, they will, more often than not, after a relatively short amount of time, begin to grope each other.*

Fossick Laboratories, Inc, June 2007

He has a vague sense of the spartan cell,  
and at least one other open mouth in the room.  
She shuffles to a wall, hugs it into a corner.  
Lust clears it's conspicuous throat;  
Love is elsewhere at the moment,  
somewhere in broad daylight, wrinkling another ego.  
She has a sensation of landing victorious  
through the looking-glass. Wheat-burnt  
cigarette breath, empty belt loops—the room reeks  
of all they've never done together. Later, he'll say  
his palms itched because he was trying *not*  
to touch her. Her eyes, the imitation stars.  
He will only admit to tracing her lips,  
leaving a tiny bend in the air between them.

### **Untitled Pantoum**

Delicately, as if they were ashes of burnt fern,  
the birds vanish into the curvature of the earth.  
The song in their beaks even lovers fear to learn,  
near the place where south starts to mimic north.

The birds vanish into the curvature of the earth.  
I invite them to summer in the small of my back,  
near the place where south starts to mimic north,  
listening for a melody and the mysteries of loft.

I invite them to summer in the small of my back,  
to lounge around lazy like the blue in your eyes.  
Listening for a melody and the mysteries of loft,  
it is much easier to catch the up-draft of surprise.

Lounging around lazy like the blue in your eyes,  
the song in their beaks even lovers fear to learn.  
It is much easier to catch the up-draft of surprise,  
delicately, as if they were the ashes of burnt fern.

## **Oceanography**

A small piece of cloth washes up on shore, soaks up its surroundings. Bloats to the size of a mattress. People crane to see the cause of its growth. Panic has not yet set in. I swim to the giant pad which turns into a pier. People gather at its edge. It cannot hold their weight. They fall in, unaware they are now the attraction. The buoy moon is standing by. Everyone's thoughts lather into one. I feel the sting of salt in my throat, the place between head and heart where sobs stall to gather strength. It forms into a storm. Birds smash into the sunset, lost in the complexity of the ocean — the charming way it coaxes blue out of the black; the dramatic way it convinces green to remain ashore.

## **Pinpoints & Generalizations**

I am sitting on a costly corner of the shore; the sun is hitting me  
just below the umbrella; ants are humping the cookie crumb.  
Remember, the night we read page after page of the Tao Te Ching;  
that unforgettable feeling when philosophy hits your bloodstream  
for the first time—each moment designed to live and die in?  
We used to meld hands and speak in clear sentences about our loneliness.  
You encouraged the discomfort, led me far down a stairway,  
lit by nothing electric. Now, I have a dab of Calamine lotion  
on every bug bite. I have accrued small consequences.  
See, I told you sorrow would show up.  
How long before an exposed ankle burns in the sun?  
How long before the mildew overtakes a chaise?  
How long before this peninsula sinks?  
It's not a matter of merit or flair. It's a thought manufacturing issue.  
Over the course of a lifetime, we've become our own nationality.  
My heart is the color of chamomile, wrought like October.  
I'm taking a blue crayon to the white caps,  
using scissors to reshape the bay. I want to go home  
before the fireworks begin.

## **Dandelion**

When the season and sun join forces, our neighbors orbit at arm's length. They go a little haywire, half-dressed out on their porches. Weeds choke a path to their door. Hazards of their actions linger, echo of skunk spray. But that was last week, and besides, neighbors are always changing. The plastic mixing bowls jostle in cupboards. One side of the door is always darker. It is easy to abandon caution when you're only half-aware of the high wire. So what else is new? When the news of the world feels local, our neighbors go haywire, half-informed out on their porches. But that was today. Most likely tomorrow, too. Besides, do people really change? Without a sturdy rapport, lovers stray from their porches, half-hoping something will go haywire. Doorknobs heat up. Today is all yesterday's fault. Winds powder the earth with seed.



**Kenny Chesney's voice doesn't match his face,**

and even so, it still makes me want to bruise  
both of my hips up against the bed of a dusty,  
red pick-up truck, just like yours—if only  
you owned such a vehicle. I learned fast—  
belt buckles are right about most things  
and some country riffs only sound pleasin'  
because they keep repeatin'. I don't believe  
you took me on a strenuous hike by mistake.  
You said, "Maps and trail heads be damned."  
These creosote bushes smell "just like rain,  
in a place where there isn't any." I know  
because you had me cup some in my hand  
and blow on it to "volatize the wax covering."

Warning: it is bad luck to embrace on the shore  
of an oasis. You said, "Moss and mud be damned,"  
then got smashed on rain runoff. I said, "Baby,  
I brought a queen-sized sheet to fit this rock.  
Let's just live *here*." Meteorites have no control  
over where they land. You let my name loose  
into the vast canyon, and hung my breath over  
a cliff. I like the way you hold cold beer cans  
against my cheek, and push me into the pantry  
like an old wagon wheel. "Dusk done delayed us."  
We finally came down the same way lava would.

**Ambiance Report:**

*8:30 A.M. Off Interstate 10*

Classic desert morning. Slight breeze. Rotten egg smell.  
Birds chirp. Intermittently. An airplane flies overhead.  
A cough. A sip of tea gone down wrong. A police car.  
Cops eating at Coco's. Highway patrolmen to be exact.  
The freeway is busy. The bacon, crispy. Birds, they chirp.  
The waitress walks out for a cigarette. Eggs dominate  
the menu at Coco's, a dozen miles from the Salton Sea.  
I always thought it was Salt & Sea. Either way, it smells  
of dead things, on breezy days. Across the parking lot.  
Here they are: two cops, two toothpicks, car door slams.  
Birds scatter. The sea smell escapes onto the freeway.  
The cops are in pursuit. The birds return. They chirp.  
The waitress counts her tips. Coffee cups sit empty.  
There is no busboy to clean them up. But there is bacon.  
And cops with toothpicks, who protect us from ourselves,  
intermittently. The birds chirp. I wonder if they smell  
the sick-sea on the breeze. On the freeway, long & lean.  
A siren far off in Sun City. A man in tan slacks chews  
on his toothpick. It tastes like the sea. A woman in purple  
pants gets one chirp from the bird. You keep reading this  
like the stink is a new story. The busboy clocks back in.  
To clean it all up. He was outside. Kissing the waitress;  
the rush of sweet smoke still curling between her teeth.

## **Connecting the Caves**

I am still in a wince, since talking of loss.  
The air is compressed, as if inside a kiss.

Soon it will be dusk and the bats know it.  
Anyone can enter, but few can intuit out.

Reach out to me with your longest wish.  
A code will connect us, signs on the sill.

We have our own private hieroglyphics.  
Do you see my need for negative spaces?

Depth can mean infinity or only an inch.  
We have enough raw material for a myth.

The sun is down but the heat doesn't care.  
It gives me time to hone my sonar, while

waiting for you to blink your platonic eye.  
How do we remain open to what remains,

find it worthwhile, perhaps even fortified?  
The bats scatter everywhere. They want to

imagine us out of their way. They want to  
be the only ones offering dark to this night.

## **White Dime**

The mysterious not-anything,  
a round property buried in air.  
I can almost see the apples plumping,  
their chunky, red shape, irresistible.  
Are we made from smoke or steam?  
Into the air you lift, into the earth I sink.  
My eyes are blood-shot dust.  
I dine on the carcasses of suns.  
On Mars there is nowhere to hang a calendar.

How many looks inside the book does it take  
to earn a peek up the earth's skirt?  
All the aliens have evaporated into bitter scholars.  
Our sunstar hangs on the Martian horizon  
like a donated white dime, kept in a forgotten pocket.  
Every day, I try to forget the way you held me so light.  
The Rover finds no water, but plenty of weeds.

Sadness is just light that's still in transit.  
Thousands of hungry baby candles  
offer despair, some in August, some in earnest.  
The Rover registers something inorganic.  
We continue to launch our wicker ships,  
driving straight into the blackest wind,  
red poppies buried deep in our hearts.

## **A Good Cry**

*Climate is what you expect, weather is what you get.*

Robert Heinlein

Days like this are unlikely. Unheard of, actually.  
The dunes did not dissolve because of record rains.  
They muddied into a mobile spackle on purpose,  
as varnish for a lackluster system. In the flood water,  
I see a formula, where some might see the sky  
floating by on its back or a puddle lit from underneath.  
The arroyos are unabridged; the storm is incomplete.

The wash will soon be full of monkey flowers  
and sand bells. A flute of Russian thistle.  
Each seed has a long climb inside it.  
Rainbows are not as portable as they appear.  
The barrel cactus is done fasting inside itself,  
overwhelmed by the slant of unending rain,  
the abundance, this staggering convenience.

### **Two Types of Birds Fly in the Same Flock**

A hummingbird shifts on the tip of an ocotillo  
and I am about to kiss you without your say-so,  
before a blue-ribbon wind restructures your hair.  
The storm is working its way. We are nothing  
to this bird we observe, feasting on fur, muscle  
and bones—but nothing to wash it down with.  
You have fresh nicotine underneath your nails.  
This hit of bitterness blows away all my beige  
awnings— like a swig of your honey-whisky,  
you cause everything sweet inside meto hurt.

## **One Gray Hair Grows Out of Everything**

I can't house-train my fragile hamstrings.  
The spotlight is on handholds, footholds.  
I'm climbing toward the San Jacinto Peak  
covered in its fresh shawl of snow, aware  
we share so little, of everything. Stances  
broken into thought-size, secretive pieces.  
I would never make it this far in real life.  
They prepare for scrawny people like me;  
there are damn trams for people like me.  
Sometimes only a fine distinction will do.  
My goals feel gentle. Victory looks plain.  
I am the capital city of my physical world.  
A glossy leaflet says it'll happen this way  
and no amount of mountain will delay it.  
There is a full range of climate out here.  
I wanted to hug a ridgeline, but ignored  
why. Evening allows the heat to escape;  
like a cloud you kindly move to one side.

## Part Two



## **Telling: Another Way of Saying**

*Every time a man unburdens his heart to a stranger...*  
Germaine Greer

What I suggested: Let's go over God and the universe one more time.

What I meant to say: Undercurrents are the fluid part of the same conclusion.

What I almost forgot to say: Air has no landmarks to prove we passed this way.  
What you reassured me: From the sky we look down into the face of our lives.

What you admitted: I am a long distance swimmer in that river.  
What I heard you say: I want to be the longest distance you've ever traveled.

What I think I told you: You feel like the part of a river that remains unfrozen.

What you heard me say: Don't be afraid. Where we are going, there is no water,  
only everlasting ice.

What we didn't say: Everything seems to describe the need to.

What you said instead: Every emergency exit has two reasons.  
What I think you meant: Unlocked, I understand your math.

What happened next: My lips parted for a sip.

## The Psychology of Propinquity

*It destroys one's nerves to be amiable every day  
to the same human being.*

Benjamin Disraeli

The olives you ordered are suspended,  
in a thin brine; dense and ugly eyeballs,

shook loose from a idiot's eye sockets.  
You tell me I have a jester-shaped face.

Do I even know how to feign offense?  
You clarify, *truth told through humor*;

but I know, it's my nose, its narrowness,  
my pointy chin. Do I like being measured

by an informed, deliberate, mystical man—  
who now owns two silverware drawers?

Your wife's taken her new clout to heart.  
She likes the *spree* and then *back-off some*.

But, so do I. It is impossible to unshackle  
every emotion held hostage by a marriage—

in one evening. By day 88 you've learned:  
tablecloths do not come in one-size-fits-all,

and sliding glass doors attract dog slobber,  
There are many brackish things about you.

All sealed off. Sometimes your ire escapes  
out the side of you, like artificial etiquette.

How many tassels droop off a jester's hat?  
You are leaving, but I'm not done drinking.

This man next to me at the bar is magnified.  
He has dangerous eyes—in a priggish way.

He doesn't notice his date's annoying nature—  
her primary archetype is *The Name Dropper*.

(See, I learned a few things before you left.)  
He oozes enthusiasm. *We can order more*

*if this is not enough food!* Then he lectures  
about marble: *They've used it for centuries.*

*It's formed by being under immense pressure,  
for a really long time. And it can easily stain.*

*Every stain becomes an important part of it.*  
I order one, last, vital glass of *The Prisoner*

and decide to become a smoker, for one day—  
slim fire-sticks dangling between my fingers.

From now on, I will stir my coffee in reverse.  
I also intend to call someone *baby* for a night,

as they campaign their way in and out of me,  
while an orchestra of ripping silk plays, softly.

## **We Take Turns Telling Each Other What To Do**

you told me to find a cedar tree  
and touch it

I said find a dandelion  
and sleep with it as intact as possible under your pillow tonight

you know I will search for the cedar tree  
it takes on importance

then you said find a forest fire  
and touch it

this is the engrossing part of us  
you know I will feel like touching it

I said grow your beard  
because I think you had one the day we met

you said go find the day we met  
and don't touch it

## **Cemetery Picnic**

I crave your clay-cold lips, as if I were immune to them.  
You lean slightly forward, eyes resembling dull azaleas.

Why are you afraid to accept the hoopla of opulence,  
or allow one deep kiss to hook into your practicality?

There is no drag of gravity here. Eight thousand ants  
crossing our historic quilt—wearing a rut into a reason.

Sometimes fear registers as sacrifice. Risk adheres,  
like the feet of the spiny lizard scaling that stucco wall.

My gifted architect of petals—follow me into midnight.  
You said you would: unrestrained & unchaperoned.

I'll refill the flutes; you'll snap twigs off low branches—  
limb, stem, and whittle them into a flock of nasturtiums.

## **Ocean Ardor, Perfect Wave**

Sparked inside the dark lake of the Atlantic—love's last few days  
of wind and water, the uneasy sun I dreamt downward.  
The undertow bursts into froth.  
What no mouth said, "It's time to shiver, or swim."  
Like dying Arctic ice.  
What heart hasn't heard of modest minnows?

## **Darling, A Decade**

I say minus the minutia, it feels like a week. You say marriage is a footnote in the dark between two eternal sparks, but you are still numb from the last round of winter. You think the sink reeks of neglect and the children are weeds overtaking their rooms at night. I say every side of the die holds a five. The ten year forecast calls for wind and wonder, isolated lightning, a little thunder. Tonight, every candle we own is lit. Smoke is loose in the room. I say a decade is simply a year that held its breath too long.

## **My Eyes Tell Me Different**

I bless, punish,  
praise the greener  
rains.

My skin knows  
nothing but  
this loss.

What's wrong,  
and what's fine  
are the same.

We are not  
the waters.  
We're the coast.



**Dear Acquainted Stranger,**

This is a bit awkward for me, writing with the moon  
so loud beside me. I'm sorry for not writing sooner.  
Isn't it funny how things work out. I believe our lives  
rub up against each other for a reason.

Trust I am working on the reason.

It embarrasses me to say I need you.

I wish I could forecast if you'll send a prompt, honest response.

We both know, blank means the void is intentional.

No worries. I *love* not knowing you. In my mind you are steady  
and astute. Perfecting you is my mind's favorite work.

Sunday you were a cloud I seduced into my house.

Tomorrow, an unrestrained shadow falling all over me.

I conjure and erase, then invent and erase you again.

And one of us will die first. Let's not dizzy ourselves  
with the menu of ways this might happen. I am sorry  
to end this early. The moon is still emitting that sound.

Writers everywhere, earnestly working on its description.

## **Alt Whitman**

I've been the clown; I've been his washcloth.  
I've been the botched opera. And I've been likewise ungovernable...

Revive my words and I will spill the unedited details you crave. Except for a flyswatter,  
you won't need a weapon...

For the moment...but not for long, every dish I own is clean.

Hallelujah for jet propulsion.  
Hallelujah for a jigsaw puzzle's perimeter  
Hallelujah for the manufacturer of trash compactors.

Inside every comrade is a brick wall and a feather bed. I want a dress with the metal  
ruffles.

My house is built in mid-century hollow Easter Bunny architecture. Why did only one  
branch  
of the ocotillo green this season? Twenty others stand brittle, bare. There is a fire  
hydrant in the field, just in case.

My house is all dead bolts and peep holes.

I have dirt under my tongue. These trees are full of birds I can't begin to name,  
and still I am content being the least indigenous thing in this landscape....

Let's make a bet: which cloud is about to open up and bathe the birds?  
....not the one shaped like a scythe  
....not the gray one...it is wind-smearred smoke.

Why is there is too much fiber in non-fiction, and every poem is an ice-filled blister?

I love the way you lip-sync bird calls. My head is half headache, half sliding-glass door  
opening out onto a veranda, with life-like rhododendrons in lavish pots.

Folk song or rock song? Who one can fit the most longing into one line of music?

I will be cold this winter. Moths ate my coat. My purse is heavy with rancid  
lipstick. One twisted kiss for each color...

## **The Sort of Pleasure a Cow Must Get From Grazing**

Ask him to tell you how this happened—  
how the fiction brought him into being.

He'll say his life never felt more realistic.  
He'll show you a famous love passage:

*I want to do things so wild with you*  
written on the back of his hand—

*that I don't know how to name them.*  
There is no better way to know someone

than to forage in front of their bookshelf.  
He'll tell you the legend about a shy girl,

whose red hair fell forward, blindfolding  
her left eye. She knew intimacy thrives

in half-answered questions. He lost her.  
She finished her tea. Ask him to tell you—

he claims to remember everything, except  
the beginning, the middle, and the weather.

## **The Daughters of Dick and Jane**

*"Girls, girls," said mother. "Come inside.  
I have something for you."*

*Susie said, "Oh mother, what do you have for us?"*

...something to ward off the cold and dampen the dark.

*"Come in and find out," said mother.  
"I have something pretty for you."*

Single mother, 34 years old, seeks a good looking fire-builder...

*"What pretty coats!" Sally said.*

*"I like the red one," said Susie.  
"I will look pretty in it."*

Mother keeps forgetting she is a mother. Soon she will spin a cocoon and split her skin...

*"Sally, look at me. Do I look pretty in my red coat?"*

*Sally said, "The red coat looks funny. It does not look pretty on you."*

From inside her head, mother hears the phone not ringing.

*"Oh Susie! We did something funny.  
The big red coat fits me. This tatty blue one is for you."*

*"Mother," Susie said, "It is summer. We don't need coats."*

*"Besides, we can't wear these," Sally said. "They look cheap."*

A fire opens behind mother's eyes. Burns her into a hologram.

*"You will wear the coats," mother said. "And you will look pretty in them.*

*Take them to your rooms and I'll call you when supper is ready."*

Mac and cheese, again. Until the milk is used up...

*"Mother, this is tasteless, Sally said. "The worst dinner we've ever eaten."*

*"You are not a good cook," Susie said.*

...nothing sugar-coated in this closet.

*"Mother, mother. Come here," said Susie. " We have something to tell you. A secret."*

Mother takes the last matchstick and snaps it in half.

*"We don't love you," Susie whispered.*

*"Yeah, you aren't a good mother," said Sally*

Rage is a peculiar thing, like wearing florescent yellow in blinding sunlight...

## **The Same Story Without the Weapon**

From a distance, we must look like two old friends, reuniting.  
Let's pretend, for just a moment, there is no knife in his hand—  
this way you won't worry as he starts to inspect my necklace  
or insists we go walking down a long stairway, into an alcove

I can't see into. Lucky for me he is a rookie, a rapist-in-training,  
maybe a bored pornographer out tipping trash cans, or the void  
where a soul once stood, instead of a drain sucking up darkness,  
pulling down the night air with him. The neighborhood sleeps:

before, after, and unfortunately during. Forgive me, as I reserve  
the right to edit every word on this page. I did not die that night,  
this is not the cause of endless distress or why I bleed adrenaline.  
Although, it is the main reason I like lavender. Tonight, I cooked

fish in a dill sauce, watched the murder trial of the selfish mother  
who never learned midnight is not for wimps or idiots. Of course,  
we are all thumb-tacked to the corkboard of humanity. We do not  
differ by much. Still, some men never learn how to look a woman

in the eye, without liquefying her insides. It makes sense to dribble  
fresh blood near the rip in a screen door. I remember one student  
ending all her stories in one of two ways: her house burning down  
or a bullet lodging somewhere inside her grandpa. I think any story

sent through the shredder of violence and fear, moment by moment,  
becomes a jigsaw puzzle: some pieces misbehave, some go missing;  
I favor the ending where the knife is wrestled away, by a swift knee  
to the groin, eye gouged out, recovered loot—like God saying—*see!*

## Part Three

## **Trickle Irrigation System**

How stupid to say: the green wigs of the trees are browning  
while summer continues singing. There is a city on every corner  
and something faintly sexy about vacant storefronts  
and all I want to do is touch your hair.

My foot has taken root. My toes are tubers.

My arch has fallen. My ankle need a drink.

There was a large crop of crows, this year; they named themselves ravens.

Sandy dirt is not the same as dirty sand; trust me. Imagine high-fiving  
with ceramic hands. When I turn the door knob, it turns right back.

Baby, no one's heart has a handle. The wind is always negotiating.

I'd love to lay in bed with you, play cover tunes, and massage your feet  
with cerulean blue oil paint, but I have a barcode stuck in my hair.



## **It Is The Earth's Fault The House Caved**

The earth was round  
when we found it—  
an elaborate system

of Lazy Susans.  
The house holds on;  
lightning highlights

the space inside.  
A new north is born  
every day.

The grass is dead  
but it's not a graveyard.  
Lilacs and temple bells

lease the side of a tree.  
We put too much faith  
in right angles,

believing each brick  
has a reason.  
Sometimes north

is subjective;  
Every time I count  
the windows,

I get a different answer.  
The two-story planet,  
is spinning

in the cul-de-sac—  
loud inside from  
clocks and pottery.

## **Caring For Your Spider Plant**

*A found poem dedicated to Andrea Yates, the mother from Texas who drowned her five children.*

The more root-bound your plant is,  
the more babies it can produce.  
The more babies on the plant,  
the more attention the plant will need.

Most problems arise from overwhelming.  
You will first notice a darkening heart  
with a yellow halo,  
then all black lower leaves.

If it dries out between waterings,  
keep an eye on the foliage.  
It will become pale and limp  
when it is ready for water.  
The root system is large and tuberous,  
allowing it to store distress longer  
than most hanging plants.

Naturally, the bigger the babies are  
the more strain they put on the mother.  
Since their roots are already formed,  
the babies can be removed  
rather easily.

To remove babies from the mother,  
trim the stem off both mother and baby.  
It looks better if there are no stubs showing.  
Then you can plant directly into moist soil  
or simply place in water, holding them under  
until their little roots start to recoil.

### **With All the Truces Turned Off**

Every doorjamb is a hurdle to clear. The stairs are slippery.  
There is a lettuce leaf folded neatly in your jacket pocket.

Oil and vinegar leak out the side of your mouth.  
The back door comes off its hinges.

The grass is asking to come inside.

### **User Assumes All Risk**

There are mud puddles under the ice machine and a bedtime story writing itself. I am on the top bunk with a hot, parking lot builder discussing the implications of random red paint. He is a specialist at catching lizards out of the corner of my stories. This is a fable about a boy and a girl who take turns disbelieving. I will miss you and then *still* not want you! In cities like this, nothing is emollient. Can we dislodge some logic around here, please? I never learned how to ache properly. My heart is mouth-high and spinning freely. I am too tired to right all these slights. I won't help you laminate your escape plan. Be careful, cowboy. Some branches gain more chances; some bend from all the bees. My mouth was heart-high, but now it's not. The lizards are drowning in pools of sweet water. Dear parking lot builder, what were you thinking? Your red curbs are not working. I warned you not to introduce your eyes into this.

## **In the Land of Invisible Warfare**

a windmill doesn't know how to stand still and I wonder  
how you can sleep through another damn whale watch

one day later still nothing salient a scorpion a lizard  
the sand grows legs thickens the air hoards the breeze

wind within reason house as decanter souls dancing  
everyone has a ghost in their commons the quiet shuffle

of ambition horse / cart / cart / horse flexible energy  
one sip from every oasis elsewhere or otherwise edgy

a rabbit salivates on a radish seldom do things enchant  
wishes look away un-essential vitamins no alleviations

ways to break in a home needs to close ranks welcome  
to Wednesday aim low hunt only in designated areas

## Horology

*A man with one clock knows what time it is.*

*A man with two clocks is never sure.*

Albert Einstein

And so the first watch collection started. Thin hands, jeweled faces, ball bearings to lessen friction. Look down at your watch. Think of it as a complicated compass, pointing out every north you've ever ignored. Instances, increments. My watch keeps perfect time—a mixture of minutes and hours—poured into the cracked mold of a week. Months baked into a lopsided birthday cake. In other words, this fine sand sifting through your eyelashes is the present. Tomorrow is time in its most promising form. Yesterday is a stranded reenactment. Memories are the inheritance you've already spent.

### **Only the Sun Decides When it is August**

This room is more humid than a desert girl would ever get used to. There is no sea view from this side of the Villa Marie, because he understands beauty can accumulate to a point of agony. Odd strains of Morcheeba, *I left my soul there, down by the sea, I lost control there, living free*. Try suppressing rationality and see what is left. Drown logic and night is free to begin. His blood is thicker than hers. It pumps through his heart slower, with more authority. Hers is the color of *cinnabar* laced with quicksilver. His voice enters her ear like an affirmation. Tints her brain the hue of a calm sea. She hasn't been hungry yet, in spite of the dishes placed in front of her: quince jelly, the color of an angry tongue, spread over warm brie, sitting on the heel of a day old baguette. The pastries and tarts from downstairs look like a woman in love made them. This is the body processing. Arousal falls somewhere between the instinct of fight and flight. Sometimes, night actually lasts all night and day doesn't ask anything of you. What if she took his hand, looked him in the eye and evaporated. Tosca's *Natural High* is playing. Pineapple vodka: the overripe fruit he steeped four days in Grey Goose. It is so sweet, they forget the sting. She imagines they could just as easily be making love above a gallery in New Mexico, in a modern flat in London, aboard a houseboat on Lake Mojave, or in the back room of a library, between dusty book stacks (even though he doesn't like small spaces).

## **We Could Unburn the House**

If puce and magenta were the soonest colors.  
If the walls held water behind them and then multiplied.  
If smoke caused the mirrors anything but neutrality.  
If umbrage cut through and never looked back again.  
If the wind took the umbrella rather than the ember.  
If the clouds, Effron, if the clouds had continued closing in.  
If we hadn't passed the night entertaining giants by lamplight.  
If that storm came by and decided to lie beside us.  
If we were aware of being charmed off guard.  
If we got used to the uncooked eggs.  
If our combined burdens didn't warp the frailest branch.  
If only we knew who to talk to about these things.  
If the remedy for loneliness hadn't been delayed.  
If we knew how to ring ourselves out of the musicbath.



### **Musca Domestica**

Today's visitor, a vibrating black crumb, enters  
through an open screen. Powerless against my domesticity,  
he will die here, based on my range and reputation.  
I often kill his kind, with wet rags, rubber gloves,  
or let one live long enough to spawn lively rice.  
Their greatest hardship is their own impurity.  
They breed, they disturb; they must die.  
He's on the lamp, the water faucet, the salt shaker.  
He pisses yellow grit on the edge of my soup pot.  
Now on the sill—he licks a layer of dust  
off his hairy legs. I bite my lip as I aim.  
Slow and vulgar—I can visualize his bowels strewn,  
glassy wings blown awry, convulsing wildly,  
with a newcomer eager to tongue his carcass.

### **And the Wind Chimes Played a Part in This**

I always knew what this would look like, without even looking.  
The breeze stirs. *It's like painting in Bali*, you say.  
You swish your brush in a bucket of dust colored water.  
You work fast, and something inspires the wind chimes to chant.

The breeze stirs. *It's like painting in Bali*, you say.  
Tonight, those memories won't matter much.  
You work fast, and something inspires the wind chimes to chant.  
Each petal appears ashen in the artificial light.

Tonight, those memories won't matter much.  
*This is even better than Bali*, I say.  
Each petal appears ashen in the artificial light.  
Too bad you will never know what my full love feels like.

*This is even better than Bali*, I say.  
I won't need a sweater, no matter how long I stay out here.  
Too bad you will never know what my full love feels like.  
Sometimes a canvas is so grand it needs two easels.

I won't need a sweater, no matter how long I stay out here.  
You swish your brush in a bucket of dust colored water.  
Sometimes a canvas is so grand it needs two easels.  
I always knew what this would look like, without even looking.

## **Beige**

The first recorded use of beige came on a cloudy Tuesday in a town without dump trucks. Everyone was neutral about it. People assembled in the middle-of-the-road to name paint shades: oatmeal, tan, sand, camel, buff, biscuit, mushroom, ecru, almond. Mayonnaise is not beige. Don't mistake this for an analysis of subconscious pastels. Cockpits are beige so pilots can relax. The English word "beige" is derived from the French word "beige." Bland over bland; boredom on an ordinary basis. Beige takes its cue from anything watered down. It loves the toast as much as the tumbleweed.

### **In a Perfect World There Would Be No Place For You**

It was during the thousand drum summer you first drained my arteries, with the rage of a rodent—first felony drying on the vine. How sincere your logic appears in its fog-suit. O Enemy, you cannot ascend; you are bloated with smeared little thoughts, clot by clot. I don't know which I prefer: cleaning off my body in Qualm's Creek or listening to blood sing as it evaporates into loyalty. Enemy, the first raisin was a creased bead of abandoned blood; halfway to decay, it sweetened into the first revenge.

## The Asker & The Answer

Holding onto a leg razor and an eyelash curler, I'm playing a part in my own seduction. Tonight, I had a balled-up tissue in my fist as you unexpectedly said *love*, and then *falling*, in the same room I happened to be a hiding out in. The sun rises, again, but I refuse the view. The room lights up anyway; shit still gets set in motion. I'm never sure how to question myself on things of consequence. I'm not good at being the asker and the answer. I'd would gladly be the girl who freshens up all your addictions. Honesty is a type of soap. The trees are requesting a rake. The desert sand is shifty like a psyche, or maybe it's more like water, without the liquidity.

## **The Name**

A man woke up one morning and couldn't find his name. He called it, called it, but it never came. It had grown tired of always being the same name. The name didn't want to mean that man, anymore. The name left to find its own name. Naturally, the man felt betrayed. He heard every name in town, but nothing like his own name. When the news hit the papers, people clung a little tighter to their own names. They began to panic. They all wondered whose name would be next. When the man died, years later, his little sister Patricia Ann had his likeness carved on a marble headstone. Someone spoke at his memorial. "We are gathered here today to pay tribute to..."

## **Eventide**

Hoary bats wait for a precise shade of darkness; it is still too early for their pageantry, because the birds are still out—hyper-sparrow-finch types. Similar in diameter, but with opposing flight plans. Bats debut two minutes after the birds leave—or—do birds quit flying two minutes before the bats arrive? Either way, we have an early umbra. I wish you were watching with me. The first bat is here—shameless overachiever. It must take all day to gather this much haphazardness. Two more emerge. A star slices through the fronds. No part of this is spooky. Some species specialize in all likelihoods; others believe in extreme measures to avoid even one day of thirst.

## **There Will Be A Diagnosis**

Drive home in silence.  
Listen for the changes.  
Don't be alarmed when your house doesn't know you.  
Turn on the television.  
It appears no one has heard the news yet.  
Enemies have invaded.  
The war is underway,  
no reporters are here to cover it.  
Lie down.  
In your sleep, a dream of bartenders mixing exotic cocktails,  
the pharmacist shouting last call.  
Wake up feeling like a friend is in trouble.  
Walk the rest of the day in your own shoes.  
Cut the price tag off the hat.  
Start smoking cigarettes.  
Kiss your husband.  
Tell him you don't want your dry cleaning picked up.  
Tell him the dust on the floor is art.  
Tell him the mold on the cheese is symbolic.  
Tell him your love is locked in a box for its own protection.  
Make a sandwich. Two slices of whole wheat,  
lettuce, tomato, mayonnaise, thinly sliced vehemence.  
Eat by yourself or eat with friends, should any come by.  
They will want to hear your funniest joke.  
Don't tell it.  
Open the window as wide as possible.  
Blind yourself in the sunset.  
Brush your teeth like it matters.  
Brush your hair while you still can.  
Crawl into bed.  
Prop your pillows.  
Practice lying still.



## **Autumn Stew With the Rakes Cooked In**

### **I.**

It feels apropos to be lonely this time of year—  
a useful time to commune, with anguish and ennui.  
I was already crying before you entered my mind.  
Do you believe sobbing is a type of shedding?  
In a few moments, it will be a teakettle's turn to speak.  
We will sit artificially close and watch  
the autumn sun slump behind the horizon,  
while crisp leaves skitter by in the gutter.  
I will try to show you where my art is locked up,  
but your eyes are all ears, and my name  
is a tiny sound inside someone else's mouth.

### **II.**

We sit as close as we can to watch the day darken;  
a compilation of leaves swirling in our laps.  
We soothe each other as a shadow passes over.  
Growing up inside each dream is a real world.  
Maybe the art is locked inside my mouth;  
silence is a large part of this exchange.  
Tonight you are close enough to eavesdrop:  
one soul making its needs known,  
one heart barking its own rebuttal.  
Love is not always synonymous with happiness.  
Trust me, dusk hasn't finished blushing, just yet.