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Homecoming

A THESIS

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By

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Homecoming

A THESIS

APPROVED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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By

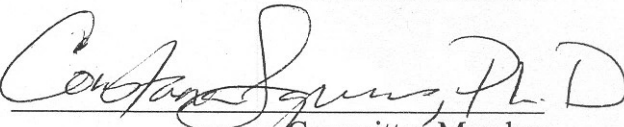
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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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The poems featured in *Homecoming* are narrative, and are written in free verse, prose and lyrical form. This anthology of poems was inspired by Sandra Cisneros's *House on Mango Street*, Sonya Sones, and Ted Kooser.

The objective of this project is to introduce readers to a town with a distinct landscape. The descriptive language and voice explore nature and its effect on a young girl as she relates to situations with family, society, nature and other elements. It was also important to communicate a universal theme of nature personified, providing a safe haven for any one, for any reason.

A major conceptual challenge was to let the poems come together in a way that is not forced by preconceived notions of what I think should be the focus or core. Some of the poems were written a few years ago, and after many revisions, it was satisfying to find the heart of the poem after stripping away the excess.

Strategies employed: I re-arranged my office to be more conducive to creative thoughts. Much research was conducted on technical/or non-technical names of plants, insects, locations, and other things, as authenticity was very important and key to the process.

The significance of the poems in *Homecoming* relates to familial dysfunction caused by mental illness. It is important to note dark, relational predicaments is not the only motif employed to communicate and create thoughts and ideas. When combined with nature; orange native stones, wild goldenrods growing in tractor wheels; hedgerows of Bois d' arcs, knee deep in blackberries, there is always hope tucked inside giving the audience a sense of optimism.

The contribution to the field is that within the thought provoking themes of home, there is a dual purpose; readers will look at mental illness in a different light. Poetry is one of the greatest communicators to make that happen.

Homecoming

For My Father

*Along the winding path, a swallow rings
from the damp wooden
siding of the chicken coups.
Pasture breeze blows warbles and skittish calves.*

Hawk Peak Ranch

I rocked rock crumbs
in the pocket of an evergreen
jacket. Inside corner seam
held a dollhouse landslide;
tan toy rock hiking path tokens
taken from Pawnee Bill's Museum;
portions of Miss May's ground
for slow afternoon walks away from the mansion-
cradled between my fingers.
At the top of Bill's lookout
tower, son William fell like a fledgling
pushed from the brim,
like when I was ten, almost tripped
into frightened May's sod house earth
floor, black bull whip snake sweeping
dirt ate a bird egg whole.
Later that year, the same snake I
swore, chased a baby rabbit
Eeeing down the middle of the road
as I ran to the mailbox. Scissor-tails
tapped my head, dusty hands prayed
in my pockets.

Black Bear Street

It was raining plastic
and nylon.
My wet Halloween costume
stuck to my legs. Thin, translucent mask of a woman
filled with running slobber--
rubber band burned my ear, pinched my neck,
but I didn't care. Wearing borrowed
Cinderella heels, size too small,
I clip-clopped my way up
to Mrs. Reimer's—*every light in the house*
is on--mansion in our mist.
Three stories, if you counted the dark attic windows—
empty black sockets, a face without eyes.
I liked to ring the doorbell, pretend
I was wearing the moonlight's pearls.
When I leaned, it was stealing
to glimpse the winding staircase--
Halloween dream of movie stars, another world
that wasn't mine.

Self Portrait: Covered in Amnion Sac

I carried the newborn calf at dusk,
its mother butting me with her wet nose
and scratchy cry, there would be frost by morning.
Urgency strapped the calf's legs to my arms,
bumped me in the bottom every few steps,
stayed my eyes toward the leaning barn, broken
slatted corral, spreading low, vigilant prayer.

My father named the cow Guernsey-
He named everything on the farm.
Midnight for cats, Arkey, his best bird dog,
and Queenie buried among pasture rocks.

I don't remember reaching the barn,
I just see my father, his
"let me tell you something" eyes,
when he looked at the calf, another

liability. "Get the grain or she won't milk"
chill in the air, frost on the bony fences
with not enough life to hold 13 heads,
now this one.

I wanted the neighbor's life
with wild goldenrods growing
in tractor wheels, needing nothing.

Er Sprach Deutsch

Valentine's day in Pawnee,
Oklahoma, cedar
trees with too much sap,
churches, schools, and rich houses
made from brownish-red fossil rock,
construction paper cut
pink and red perfect
hearts and art room scissors too dull,
when I tried to cut a half
into a whole, my lines crooked
lop-sided, Mr. Hart
the art teacher's heart unfolded
had perfect cleavage,
more perfect
than mine. He drew lines
without thinking, looking
whipped his switch against
the air, *whoosh* lifted my brown hair
standing behind my metal
chair I kept my neck lowered
when he leaned close and whispered,
Dein Herz ist kein Herz!
Uneven failure for Mother.

Suicide Hills

In our town hills
were suicidal, threatening to jump like waterfalls.
Down was the public library,
Saturday's destination, departure,
racing, zig-zagging, handlebars
tangled in a ditch,
steep climb all the way back up,
past the Maltzberger mansion
monstrous pillars; limbs of stone,
silver-railed balcony boasting wickedness,
people in white sweaters charcoaling
hamburgers, placing them on trays.
Down the road, we lived on a dead farm pretending to be farmers.

1800s birthed and born, five animal dwellings, an orchard,
desolate now.
Kids woke up every Saturday
saying prayers, at the top, diving down.
Hills blacktop paved smooth as putty,
last two gravel, gravel the size of apricots and peaches
with razor shaped edges.

Inception of Melancholy

From Oklahoma in our pale Buick
we rode beside moss trees to the broken
side of New Orleans where it rained
every day, even when the sun was shining.
The sky was meaningless.

We visited cemeteries with graves on top
of the ground, in lopsided rows.
Hurricane Betsy blew out every window in every
building. The broken, olive-brown elementary school held
me tight. I was afraid of lunch, afraid of recess.

We checked in at the First Christian Church,
didn't find anyone there. Unpacked
at a yellowish duplex half a home,
put boxes on half a bed, became half a girl--
weekend site seer of Jackson Square, where
every open door spilled naked dancing
ladies, and rain soaked the moonless night.

Standing On the Cliff of Ten Acres

Before bronze covers the ground
like erratic severed congregations
of oak, elm, and mulberry frowns

in fence spokes, pinched against

pink's dipping sun--
before time traps idle yellow and
dabs of reds so red the massacre
complete, paprika unspools
September.

Farmhouse

Every time I smell wet plaster, it is 1964.
My father is coaxing a huddled group to scrape
five layers of century old flowered wallpaper
from a wall in a farmhouse he bought the night before.
He is energetic and hurried. The sun has already gone
down and the lanterns are too close. Flames may burn
the paper tails and feather-like hangings, abandoned
plucks left by others before we got here.
He shouts, "Scrape, peel, don't rip!"
I'm six and wonder why my hands have to be so old
in this place I don't know, with an upstairs
I've never seen.
It is winter. The summer frogs and crickets
have gone underground. My breath is a white cloud
that breathes but does not speak. I do not know
rubbery legs will stretch and push across gray ponds edged
with crowds of canary grass. I do not know their skin will begin
to crack from the sun's heat, but they will fly and dive,
become a darker, softer green. I do not know they will be my friends
when the wallpaper is long burned, and the freezing water
will no longer seep through my gloves as I pick and peel
the paper like a peach, as he bends over a bucket washing
green cabbage roses from his fingertips.

Pawnee, Oklahoma, 1967

May poles

Black jack trees

Rabbits in cages

Dad and black socks

Pigtails, ponytails

The cellar roof slide

Composition shingles

Asphalt fiberglass

Like sandpaper

Slow growth of moss

Chickens on the sidewalk

Cages out back

Picnic tables

Puppies in washcloth diapers

Baby dolls I tell you

Every four months

A whole new set of eight baby dolls

Bandages around my legs

All summer long

Every summer

Because of the chiggers

I couldn't stay away from grass

Flopping and rolling

In the Green

From dawn until dusk

Scorching dusty fields

Burned to orange

These colors

My skin

Annette

Burning with fever
I tried to sit
up
on the cracked, plastic sofa
to sip the orange bean
soup she'd placed
next to my head, but heaviness
pushed me
down
air was heat, mixed vapors,
natural gas rising
angels from the radiator
next
to the sloped window,
my lumpish eyes blind
to her bending, pulling water
up
from the well.

Bob Hilbert

Lived across the road
In striped overalls, freshly ironed shirt
Fishing poles
Trapeze man walking the burning ridge
Of our shake roofed burning down house
Thought we were still inside,
Our hero,
Bait and tackle
Fresh shave
Where'd he go, during the day
Don't know
Maybe fished
We played with his kids Michael, Rosette...in the mud
Patches around his leaning shack
German shepherds
Bred
One white with blue eyes, a snow wolf
For protection
One day we unlocked the grayest shed
Stuffed and damp
Every color spilled;
Compacted flamboyant clothing
All kinds, for women, children
Where did they come from,
Good Will? No good will in Pawnee
Well in some parts, like Mrs. Gilliland, baked
Wedding cakes with pearls on top, loved
Everybody
But the first Christian Church
Pious pews
Didn't like Bob when Daddy talked
Him into coming to church with us
Little ladies with netting on pinched, bowl hats,
hissed and moaned
"we can't worship with *that* sitting next to us!"
Mama cried, never went to back,
Bob wasn't sad, he saw this every day.
Daddy tried to go back, talk sense and love
1966, decade of Civil Rights rebellions
Daddy wanted Bob to rebel
But he just smiled and took care of his dogs
The riots we saw on TV were far away,
Not in Pawnee, where they should be.

Medicinal, Grass Dance

Every year our relatives came to the Pawnee
Pow Wow, weekend of 4th of July.
Aunts loaded two station wagons full of kids
drove to the football stadium,
snapped Polaroids of the Pawnee Reservation,
teepees, campfires, leather and costumes;
burning sunset colors for tribal families.
The only time we dressed anywhere near
that colorful was Halloween.
Foreign land, Black Bear Stadium
became sovereign.

A huge circle formed on the field,
swirling mass of bird feather reds, blues,
neon oranges, royal indigo beading
shaking mass of voices, bodies, bells ringing,
jingling tomahawks, waste bands danced
to the beat of drummers. Women wore eagle plumes,
braided buckskin dresses, moccasins.
Such beauty didn't belong in our dusty town.

I sat next to my aunt, a widow in black

still pretty, drove a powder blue mustang.
Didn't smile, usually, but that night
under stadium lights, pounding drums stretched
her eyes to sky and stars, over the PA,
come, partake in the dance
she jumped, flew like a bird, leaving her sandals,
barefoot on the fifty yard line, beaded women draped
the long fringed ceremonial shawl, she bowed and bent,
lifted her arms to a cantaloupe moon.

Morning Chores

Along the winding path, a swallow
rings from the damp wooden
siding of the chicken coups.
Pasture breeze blows warbles and skittish calves,
leaving patties everywhere purple blots the underbrush
swaying with smashed yellow dandelions unrestrained
along the milking stalls, it's like this every year
tracking the colors of spring, pretending I'm rabbit
brush as orange as trumpet vines.

Bicycle

In March you'd see them
Pulled from backyard sheds
Chains dragging, tires flat
Spread out on driveways

Our legs pushed hard
Faster than station wagons
Freedom was the wind on our faces

Pedaling past the Municipal
Hospital, round new green-
Laced lawns as scissor tails

Chopped at the sky
Harping their feisty language
Stopping only to catch our breath
Or call, "hurry up, come on!"

As the sun stampeded
The elms: blacktop, tired pumps
Aired like sad patients.

You Be the Children, I'll be the Mothers

Pioneer women tangled buns
like bird nests, holding hands,
black metal grip.

“We will find the thieves!

Circle our wagons, there is
blood at the bottom of this
muddy, meadow road!”

I swore.

Skinny little sister, so thin
Aunts said she had worms,
looked at me like I was the seventeen
foot bronze statue of *The Pioneer Woman*
at the museum in Ponca City.

I shoved us off the top driveway slope,
of steep sandstone mixed with dirt,
we rode the spine,
in our freckled prairie schooner,
“Hold on for your life!”

Steering with one scraped knee bent
against the rusted wagon, we flew
across gravel, midday heat burning
her bloody parted hair
like a flame.

Pilgrimage

Saturdays, *Flying O* red wagon
Courthouse twenty-two steps
Cannon
Pawnee Trading Post
Ten cents for turtles
Turquoise picture windows
Piggly Wiggly's
Two cents for pop bottles, enough
For cherry-ice at Rexall Drug tripped
Down, up graveled suicide
Hills, searching for friends
Austin Banning's greenhouse
Filled
Sprouts of crossbred plants,
Experiments
Blew up one day
So I waited
For the smell of Sulphur
To blow away
Before I saw him again
Trudged exploded, slanted sidewalks,
Fence lined hedges I couldn't stick
My hand through, the Poores' shallow ditch
Held a litter of puppies
Eyes still new,
Wagon train pulled them home to washrag diapers,
Safety pins on dolls with bonnets blue
Trimmed in white, hair stiff with Dippity-Doo

Rabbits Speak

I heard their voices
when I was ten,
under the sap and swing of
evergreens,
ears opened
my eyes swiveled,
there it was
clear as sun—
rabbit running down the middle
of the road, eeeking, eeeking,
hurtful as blood.
I slipped out of the shade,
saw the snake standing on its silver
haunches without remorse,
sliding here, then there,
gaining on the gray rabbit
quick as a car racing by,
then gone.
The cries faded somewhere
out of sight,
and I still wonder why
I allowed such a death.

*We were ginger and orange native stones;
quiet, still, like the dead aren't really sleeping,
when my father climbed out of patrol cars,
Pontiacs, and dented pickups, ticket debris
blowing behind him.*

Self-Portrait with My Dress on Fire

We could see the fire
from twenty miles away.

Minutes before in Stillwater,
the only nearby town with a sewing
department upstairs,
we had been searching
for Easter dress fabric when my aunt came,
led us out of the store.
We drove back to our town
silently, sitting erect
in the back seat,
as if sitting straight
would make the fire
go out.

I imagined
flames darkening
brass cornet, my sister's silver flute,
the red cedar chest
with my baby hair taped
in pages of a book.

I got out of the car
remembering the night:
burning trash in the barrel,
back shed,
dumping uneaten food,
paper, glass bottles
never completely burned,
other waste
clung and stuck
the rusted metal drum,
feeling somehow like a slayer,
I struck the match.

Displacement in Turquoise

My father came home just like I knew he would one day, told us we were moving to Stillwater. I'd just started the 7th grade, didn't even have my period yet. "I got a job as campus police sergeant. We're moving on Monday." Seeing how it was Friday, my mind exploded, my pulsating heart splat red right there in our smelly kitchen with the basement door open just enough to let the mildewed, standing water waft up the steps, mingle with Mom's spitting bacon. "The house," *Here it comes, the house, another one that was going to be shiny and new and* "The house is nice with a fireplace and four bedrooms. It has two stories with a long staircase." I looked up from all the blood on the floor, "A real staircase?" "Yeah, honey, a real one." He couldn't be trusted.

Permanence

Years later, I would read
Austin Banning-Engineer died
in his home, on such and such
date at age fifty. Fifty!

He had such grandiose plans.
The green house in his backyard
full of plants, chemical experiments,
how to grow a better cucumber,
careful placement of insects on particle boards;
his *Monet*, he would say.

Austin wore button up short sleeve shirts
tucked in with a belt and penny loafers—
the heart of perfection.
He would never have to move,
his parents were never home--professionals somewhere.
Now that was permanence.

Ghosts

The basement was always flooded.
One time my father rented
a clunky whirring machine
with a long hose, worked
for hours setting that thing up.
“This’ll do it” he boasted.
The only catch was it would take
a month, (he wasn’t patient
enough with gadgets) Surprise!
Still always smelly! It was so putrid
I wanted to nail the door shut,
have a burial, burn it down.

I was always trying to fix
the deadbeats. Painted rooms
yellow, asked Mama
if she would make a new quilt
for the metal beds from grandmothers
who’d died. She always hoarded
fabric odds and ends, turned them
into something decent.
That room glowed after yellow paint,
quilts with bonnets and tulips.
Shiniest place in the house--
even the ghosts would agree.

515 South Cleveland Street

Dreamed all night about yellow
paint and white curtains,
open windows to cover
smells of flooded basement.
Painted a scrounged rod iron headboard
two layers of silver.

Don't know where I got the paint
we seemed to always have
in utility rooms, at the bottom
of cellar stairs--painted and painted,
slung flat sheets over roman shades.

Invited neighborhood up the alley
for a tour. They all said I should
be a decorator or something,
I sure knew how to make a room
look new.

The whack of Mama's slap
on Grandma's face pushed
our eyes to the cloudy carpet,
"Leave! You don't belong here, Valla!"
mama clacked. Dad was quiet.

We stared at uneaten chili on
the kitchen table which was really
a door without a knob
Dad painted blue-green,
left a hole for a cup holder,
but all the glasses fell through.

Valla's Roadside Diner

My father in one of his manic
moods said, "We're going to buy
that run down café at Bill's corner,
renovate in the dark for so many months
and name it after grandma."
Grandma went along with it
because she'd worked at the Waldorf Astoria,
driven rivets in Waco during WWII
when there weren't any men left.

I turned nine on opening day,
wondered how many people would come,
run through the door, smell hamburgers
unwrap straws, enjoy new plates,
white coffee cups, but the gut inside
my mind worried, the one inside like when I was baptized
and didn't remember exactly all
the reasons why I was under water.

The booths were sure enough red
like blood, we would be saved from poverty
even though there were vegetables
in the garden, only problem
was the worms eating holes in the leaves;
monarchs I half-heartedly slung in the wind

at sunset, a truck driver spilled
his coins on the counter,
only he didn't count because grandma knew him,
his quarters' plunk too small: if they were fish
you'd throw them back into the empty highway.

Valla Dacus in Pawnee Municipal Hospital after Remodeling Three Bedrooms

One summer they swarmed the house and sheds,
covered the surrounding fields for three months
with thirsty crops waiting for harvest,

carnage in every nest box, broken legs
antennae invading the faded teal bedroom chair
that needed my grandmother's hands to upholster

tears with her missing index finger
severed on industrial machines sewing
canvas during the war, no one ever knew why
or where it went, like how the ungraceful, copper bodies

crackled when we stepped on them,
pausing a second for guilty memorials,
pushed in the corner of a chalky grave.

Witch with a White Hat Watering Trees

I couldn't stop coughing
In the middle of the night,
So you fed me whiskey with honey
Pinched my nose,
Held my breath: down you go
Stainless steel tablespoon
Shining at me.
I dreamed of washing dishes
That were shoes,
On the rack in your room.
Circular motions, I cleaned
The air, looked up,
As if you were there,
Your black patrol boots
I shined in the night,
In my dream
Couldn't stop Shining.
Awoke on my side, heavy
Chest hurting like a bee sting.

Envelopes at Midnight

The hotel was really an apartment; we fell suspicious. Our father didn't speak in his usual night voice telling stories about stars, children playing on planets, moons. Bologna and Jiffy Pop popcorn scared us. We used dishwashing soap for shampoo. Our hair wasn't soft and Mother was quiet. *Mutual of Omaha, Checotah, OK*; sister's perfect penmanship. My father let me count one hundred dollar bills under the light of a makeshift dining table, with a crate and hassock for chairs. The unfamiliarity, kept us awake.

After You Were an Arthur Murray Dance Instructor

He was a different man
every day
we kept our heads down
until the atmosphere in the living room
changed
his mind sometimes, danced,
waltzing us
to television music.
Fury poured
with five O'clock news
he blared, he knew, *he knew* what to do
so we hid, bent down upstairs
against yellow bed
skirts
or the window seat
padded pink, blue
curtains
blew
better days
between
our knees tight against our chests
tha—thump let us know we didn't die.

Father's T.V. Tray

Tet Offensive

We were purple sandstone and fossil wood,
quiet, still, like the dead aren't *really* sleeping,
when my father climbed out of patrol cars,
Pontiacs, and dented pickups, ticket debris
blowing behind him.

Evenings, we might run across wooden floors
waxed every Saturday, laughing, pretending
to be sky hawks or dragonflies.

Or, we could be waist deep in marshes, like
visitors in jungles somebody needed to save.
Sometimes we scattered like rabbits through the blackjacks,

depending on the war.

Inception of Unfinished Business

I didn't see the hitchhiker's
face because I didn't look.
Just saw my dad's squinting
eyes in the rear view mirror stare,
looking at the road, then back again
at the sweaty body next to me
silent as summer heat.
Mama murmuring, cleaning out her purse,
passed us Juicy Fruit gum.
We scooted closer together
in the backseat, matching red
shorts and blue sailboat tops
formed a perfect firing line row,
so slumped. I didn't hear his
breath or voice, maybe he wasn't
there. I just kept looking at dad
in the mirror.
"There were two prisoners
escaped from El Reno last night,
you look like em," he said.
"I want you to know I have a gun
in the glove box."
We pressed our thighs closer together
our hands crossed soft in our laps like folded napkins.
Car rides to banks, nearby small towns,
and trips to smelly Ponca City, oil refineries
all a part of unfinished minnow farms,
new ponds waiting for more water
that never came.

Dogs Laying in the Pasture

I used to hug my house
in back by the collar,
stretching my arms
as far as the broken back screen door,
my nose pressed against
rough cedar that smelled like mint,
the sun held my back. I ran to the shed

lost that day,
cracked boards dying,
paint peeling, more bareness
than I wanted to feel.
Yellow chicks circled beside heated
lamps, trusting yellow feathers,
the only shining thing
between me and the sun.

I ran down the cellar steps
damp pits, priming pumps,
bare feet stood
shallow dark pool, hurried,
looking over my shoulder
the dusty webs clinging to mama's
fruit jars, the dark watching.

Guilt was a yellow make-shift door
I couldn't shut. Rafters were skies
with a million tufts'
placid journey to God.
Forgiveness wouldn't come.

Boogie-woogie

I was thinkin of summertime, *June*
then spinnin went I into stress---
she might as wella tole me she was goin to the moon
my mind was so obliged to obsess,

she was gonna slither like a snake
away again, my whimpers became gobbledegook
when she roared, "Eat your cake!"
"you want a lickin! *I* heard the *ASTORIA* is a beaut,

like *GARBO!*"
"I gotta train ticket for the 'four *O*'clock, so play
and be thankin the *lord* you're not a hobo,
tramp, or somethin. I tell ya, one day,

just like those high falutin dolls in the *BIG APPLE*, I'll be wearin *rhinestone*."
And twirlin round, dress flyin, she filled the room with toilet water cologne.

Eating Grapes off the Wallpaper

Trouble in California, too many drugs, John needed a new location, with blackjacks and terse dead apple trees. Our cousin from California was blood, wouldn't make a difference. Daddy said he was like the sons he never had. So like a premonition, John came with the summer. He came, bulldozed around our house, looking at himself in mirrors, especially the one on my vanity made out of plywood and whitewashed paint. Handsome like James Dean, but scary eyes like slits. We liked him, but we didn't. Wooden pipes, cigarettes, and magazines with naked ladies burned next to his bed. Daddy went away for a week.

One night, John took some cash from Mama's purse, jumped in our car that wasn't a race car, told us to get in, and we did. He drove fast, hollered with the windows rolled down, laughed and said how our town was "Dullsville," how we were just farm girls, even though our farm didn't work.

We held on in the back seat, as he kept on screaming in California, "You ankle biters better cool your chops." We told him to stop but our voices were soft like dusty yellow butterflies. I looked at the speedometer, 92 miles per hour going down all three Suicide Hills, we screeched into the parking lot at Douglas Country Store where every Saturday I asked the butcher if he had any scraps to feed the strays I hid in deserted cattle barns. Some would stay, but most were wild, would run through the chickens and keep running.

Before We Lived in the Gray House with Asphalt Siding

Black burning ruffled plume.

Oxford gray covering blue whirled
Sis's billowing curtains leaping
trying to escape the upstairs window,
but flames hold gingham like a baby.

And somewhere along ten acres, rabbits coughed,
turtles sneezed,
lizards and horned toads whipped
underground, and across ten acres.

Locusts ricocheted, calves coiled,
moored on wet hay,
warbles retreated,
golden dandelion faces pouted,
pestered garden sprouted father's half constructed wind mill;
frozen vanes, dry well, *blessed be,*

close by the back shed's wobbly
door simply charred,
I could still try to build a home on Saturdays,
sweep the workbench with strange
tools surrendered decades before
I forgot to shut the rickety door
and chicks died.
I fell asleep against the trunk of a blackjack oak,

watching cinders fly.

Prairie Road Canopy

Trees were sky,
my father stumbled
carrying cluttered sticks
we used for kindling
from the dirt well below.
We'd loaded the truck, my pellet
gun, shot a crooked line
of beer cans off the rusted
metal edges.

My father's breath,
the only thing that didn't seem frozen,
blew silver clouds
against the background
of black bark.
The wetness
from his last drink
hung like frost on his mustache
contorting his lips
as if to kiss,
but spitting gold pellets instead
into the loading chamber
of my Daisy BB gun.

His hands would shake sometimes,
so I would cock the hammer,
hold the barrel steady.
Sundown flashed
causing him to squint sitting
against the slanted rails,
our boots slung over the edge.

Dusk became darkness draping itself
over his bobbing head,
the heaviness of leaving
pulled him near the edge
dark-eyed juncos hopped low.
the truck, like a patient nurse, appeared
through foragers and underbrush.

I wrestled the grinding stick shift, my father,
tossing my BB gun in the creek bed.

Chipping Cement from Burnt Bricks

It was once a house,
save a black Japanese coffee
table with blue-green inlaid stones
firemen had placed under our tree
house, ropes from our swings
swayed, winds blew, cedars sang,
*We don't like to see you so sad,
in turquoise.*

Everything That Mattered

I kept your blue pillow case with the smell of your hair,
oily and thick, wondered how long it had been
since you'd changed the sheets, how long
before your legs and suspenders tipped down
in sad motion stuffing the tight entryway
of a tiny apartment, disheveled kitchen with mismatched pots
and two hundred dollars in a jar inside the refrigerator,
a disappointed clock stopped at some point
when books leaning on bricks and boards
were everything that mattered,
and plastic sacks held too many white cotton socks;
(you'd forgotten that you bought a pair week after week),
breathing containers that allowed you to inhale
the musty plot of your dark living room as even now
you dwell in a box on the top shelf of my pantry, a man divided
into so many compartments.

*I could bolt myself to sleep,
Sink into the slum
Of black or keep moving.*

**Crash on Blackburn Bridge
Christmas, 1965**

In the front seat of our 1957 blue station wagon
I am six with the smallest doll tucked between my legs,
my sisters' babies were taller, talking,

my father's curse, "You'll never be happy,"
I swallowed like yellow penicillin that didn't cure
the pus-filled sores that always closed my throat.

People fall away like a sister.

The stars were diamonds, breaking apart,
shower of bright villages falling on my head
against the blackness of childhood.

'74 Dissolving in My Hands Like An Eclipse

Worms, shotgun cartridges
crawling across the cement floor,
golden capped rolling heads.
I told you about the dream,
you laughed like your flickering
sunglasses. Porch chimes tanged
under the neighbor's eaves, sun lit
blue grass rode your feet.
Earth was exploding with night crawlers,
with beetle-back bands of color.
I used to pinch worms in half
for bait at Blackwell Lake,
you weren't there.

Self Portrait Searching for Spare Change

It's spring and my father
is stomping around the screened-in porch
looking for pliers and axes,
like a nervous salesman, whole world on his head,
tiny pins for clogged air guns
rings for compressor hoses.
Roofing season again,
time to climb on top of houses
in the March wind he hates so much,
asphalt shingles slapping
him in the face on sunny days,
days he thought would be nice
but never are.

I'm looking for a decent spiral notebook
on the dining room table,
pretending not to see his sweat,
trying to find a few clean pages for English class.
I'm rifling around for coins on the Philco
radio playing "I think I love you, so what am I so afraid of?"
If I'm lucky,
I'll find 50 cents,
just enough for a plate of fries at
the Sirloin Stockade.
Oily fries that make my face break out,
my thighs rub together,
and I'll hate March too.

**A Photograph: Lying on a Cot, Reading a Book
Dog Asleep Underneath**

March, the month of your birth
mother spilled water,
poured you in the firmament,

oceans upside down,
astronomy is a salty sky; your commandment
I plant with your plow,

visit ponds you dug just deep enough
for wandering seeds
green foam; praying beach

to lay a head. now I lay me down,
now I pass the nails to your giant hands,
fingernails like tortoise shells,

where the moon laughed at your
half-built planks and boards, minnow
farm, finish the farm,

but grandiosity evaporates and
pastures know purity's intent,
only the one windmill

cooperated, circled in the breezes
blew the gray water downstream
surgically slit and stabbed

twenty acres wringing itself dry.
Spell-bound, I tread the oceans
tossing in your eyes, the undertow

of ideas, baptized, I watched you swim
in salvation then turn and run; in a photograph
to a cot in Guam.

Climbing Through the Window

The second year after we moved I lost my key,
climbing wild rose bush branches, speared my thigh
my knee bumped an asbestos slate tile,
clapping sound shaped it like a harp maybe without a stool,
woodchuck banter swayed eight pecan trees, and

I fell inside with a broken view of, “first house
on the corner next to the green Park Drive street sign
with perfect metal siding.” Entire family turned that shack
into a pink satin sheet. I hoped its spirit might float
down the cratered asphalt, clench the broken pane
tracing shadows on my face, track my daydreams,
quiet heckling squirrels scratching inside the walls.

My Sister's Head Was the Moon

My sister could smile and feel sad
when the forgotten parts, dying bus
dumped in the backyard
faced her upstairs window.
Boards and shingles
rotting in their strangled
state, broken and abandoned,
stood like a monument;
a place to think.
She admired that great sadness in me.
So I would sit, with twisted
covers on my bed, listening
to anything slow
on my yellow Sears stereo.
And my sister would smile,
feel sad,
say she had a headache,
her head was falling off;
hit the floor like rolling marble.

Patted the Window, Brushed it Clean

We used to move
more than anyone,
so I learned
how to try a house on,
like a coat I had to purchase
whether or not it fit—
we could get some thread
blot the spots
breathe cedar
wrinkled splinters
porch cement, silk lining
that cooled the uncertainty
of addresses.
The attic a musty hat
blew the dust off,
picked the paint from window frames
buttoned the doors,
locked myself in.

Park Drive

We were always moving somewhere that was broken. The house on Park Drive was like a horned toad. If you looked at it a certain way, it wasn't dull and sandy, but sort of friendly, with green eyes and rose thorns on its back. It had a big yard with a creek and cattails even though the shrubs were messy and arched to the ground. The garage had a wooden balcony with peeling paint and black tar for the surface, lying in the sun was sticky...made us smell like gasoline. Sometimes our new friends would say we had a nice house until they looked closer, if they spent the night and saw how every room had little white ceramic gas heaters on the wall that didn't warm us at all. There was an accident once when Patti backed into one in the kitchen and her robe caught fire. The kitchen cabinets always needing new paint, would need more paint. They were never the same when mama chose avocado.

We'd lived on a lot of streets, Black Bear Street with the fossil rock pillars on the porch pretending to be majestic, and before that we lived on High Street where our dog that looked like Lassie went rabid so we locked her in the tool closet until the authorities came, just like Old Yeller. One time we moved to Abilene in the summer for two months because they had a storm. Daddy took a crew of men with holes in t-shirts smeared with black grease, cigarettes they called "smokes" in pockets, to roof houses. They stayed in a separate apartment but mama cooked them dinner every night. One had a girlfriend with a halter top that showed the sides of her breasts. This time, we had to leave Black Bear Street because daddy got a job at the university as a security guard.

He couldn't work as a roofer anymore because of his asthma. Besides, the basement flooded and was almost to the top of the steps near the bumping washing machine we couldn't catch. The house on Park Drive wasn't ours. We paid rent to the people down the street with the red porch and yard pinwheels. Before we saw the house, daddy caught us whispering about where we were going to move next, how ugly it might be. He barged through the door and said it was a nice place with gold doorbell chimes hanging on the wall right next to an entryway with a closet just for coats.

It had stairs and a couple of chandeliers, not like undressed light bulbs or stairs that lead to attics and basements. We'd have more than one bathroom so daddy wouldn't have to go outside when there was a line. Daddy said it would be the best house we ever had because of the eight pecan trees growing in the backyard, even though later we had to call the police because people with gunny sacks stole them off the ground. Mama hadn't seen it yet but she baked a lemon meringue pie anyway on the table made out of an old door daddy painted turquoise. Sometimes I walk to the creek at the end of the yard behind wild Joe-pye weeds and pretend I live somewhere else. But it only helps for a little while.

Patti

we had a little sister
and one day when she was four
marching mad circles
 in our old house we were ashamed of because
 the man's house full of velvet was next door
with a white curtain rod in her tight mouth
pretending it was a trumpet,

she ran into the wall and rammed
the sharp edge of that curtain rod down her throat,
and my sister and I thought God was going to take her
so we doubled over in the backseat of the car,

"Lord, please don't take our little sister today, she didn't know!"
clasping hands, looking down, reverent and all
until my mother walked out of the Municipal Hospital
told us, "Patti can't talk for a couple of days and
will have a sore throat for a while."

We took a long deep breath.

Think about calling her now, about her flying around Poland,
Texas, the Taj Mahal,
when we bend over the tub bathing my mother's
deflated breasts and pencil eraser mole at two o'clock.
 But she's still humming,
 tooting her horn just like she always
 did, do, does, marching a path
 to get away from all of us.

1975

Winter was a desert,
a lolling gold mine
deceitful drunk,
Uncle Jack drunk,
11:00p.m. swagger
down Lowry street,
blind walk home,
after visits,
so long ago.

Night was sky,
knew me.
Blue was a pickup
on snow and ice,
headlights, spotlight
for his wandering back.
You were a voice,
“Get the keys, take him home,”
always just past the Stillwater
Santa Fe Railroad tracks,
where a train once came close
as a mirror, passenger side,
you were the driver singing,
Do you know the way to San Jose,
asked if it scared me, my answer
blurs of hedge, bridge ledge,
driveway slide, and
winter was a drunk who needed a ride.

Sleep is three metal beds

in a backyard like the three
bears, first the coiled
springs, then the dead
mattresses, relief
from summer's hurt
the house's misbehavior,
and God showing off ten acres
of night.
Not this frenzied
right, wrong, brilliance.

We Were Town

I speak of self determination
where we splintered into groups,
roamed Blue Hawk Peak graveyards
of the Holy Corn, electrified sacred

bundles. How we searched for bones in grasslands,
bleached shadows of future desperation. We could've
foreseen all those babies being abandoned and scattered,

invisible burials. But never on the cusp, Dick Tracey Headquarters
reduced us to a loud colored sign on the bricks of the
Piggly Wiggly, where the flavor was cherry,
constant plop of cherries.

So we stuffed our bras, and tried to forget
the man exposing himself on the banks of
Black Bear Creek and the sticky floored matinees.

And I told you we'd have a house some day,
with a gate, in Italy, where the vineyards unroll
their purple eyes while we used blue chalk for make-up, looked up
to the night sky; the big dipper pours nothing.

Already to Lela, Oklahoma, we said *out of breath*,
hadn't even reached any kind of ocean yet,
what will we tell ourselves
when there is Auschwitz

on the tracks

of every highway.

Big Dipper Springlake Park, 1968

Embedded in Black Walnut trees,
the wooden serpentine of its pinnacle
poked at the sky in 1971. Before
it was torn down, rusty blue rails
for long lines leaned against a century of winds.
The parking lot scarred with cracks
tracked purple Bull Thistles peeking through
the bent fence where wild eyes would wait
for the last click before the big drop.
It was the *must go to* place in summer.
That amusement mania has scattered forever
across the red hills, fallen down the Grand Canyon,
washed to the Pacific, where wild rides last for only so long,
white-foamed waves at the shore, come and gone.

Waiting for snow

There is a drought
dust on the boxes
with hooks and bulbs
pressed in paper a year ago

when there was an inch
that melted the next day.
You, eager with snow boots
used only for infrequent
mountain visits to Carson City,
gaze through the window like
a child.

I say the snow will come
snow will come,
just like birthdays reassure
it's not a casual thing,
the snow

falls through time,
remembers
windows wait all over the world,
trusting eyes become frost and ice
weighing the lines.

Eyelet Dress

Tried not to breathe in my long, blue-green gingham homemade dress I'd worn to the wedding earlier in the day. He walked past the doorway, then took two steps back and slipped in the room. It was Aunt Jewel's guest bedroom, but all of her sewing scraps, discarded boxes with patterns and other contraptions tossed against the walls made it feel like I was underground. Toppled. He was heavy, so the bed sank low, the springs squeaked but not loud enough for anyone to hear. I was a corpse, awake, lying on the bed next to me. Began to caress my hair, said, "Pretty Lisa, pretty, pretty Lisa." As if repeating my name might dissolve me into a cool gray puddle, I wouldn't be afraid of his big belly pushing against the curve of my backside. Breathing was strained, like sand was in my throat. I was sixteen, always trying to lose fifteen, twenty pounds, smile all the time like the cheerleaders. I wanted some of that giddiness. Maybe if my legs were firm like theirs, I wouldn't hide in my room when everyone else was at pep rallies, football games, and parties where no one asked them why they weren't smiling. I'd held my stomach in all day because my dress was too tight. So tired. After it was over, family spread across town in other bedrooms. I chose this one.

Self-Portrait as Annie Wilkes

Remember the times
as a child, mother
tried to give you soup,
when you were sick,
your favorite soup, but
too weak, stomach dips
like stomachs in backseats
of cars speeding over steep hills,
fall back against the pillow
sweat soaking your gown.
That's how it feels
to be sick
from head to toe
with something---what is it?
you didn't ask for---
or,
you let your mind surrender
to,
Everywhere you look
you see things you once loved,
but there's a bug inside
nothing can kill.

Second Exit past El Reno

The flashlight in my face
asked me for my registration,
license, as passing cars filed by
flooding the front seat with grief.
Headlights like rows of eyes without pupils.
filling me with shame as I sat slanted,
sloped in a ditch not wide enough
to hold my fear and gray Honda
bought with some pride the day
after the divorce.

The Judge's chamber had been small
with too large of a desk,
plaques, books and a box
of Kleenex he passed like a bowl of peas
when my eyes like wounds poured
out wet thickness, dropping
eight years of trying.

Homecoming

The chalky roads stretch among
the blackjacks, their fall cobalt skies
burdened with the weight of barn swallows.

Climbing the hills outside city limits,
farmers toss hay up to the rafters
a spit for each bale, wiping their foreheads
with red kerchiefs, stuffing antique bottles in their pockets.

If you're from California you search for Redwoods
amongst the cedar trees bleeding sap
on this early June day, the breeze knotting
your hair, buffalo staring from every grassland.

Beyond a hedgerow of Bois d'ars,
knee deep in blackberries and devilish scissor tails
a combine shuts down, its cab
curls up for a sun bath.

I know that. I want to tip over my engine,
let crickets carve a hole in my threshing drum
become a useless object in the underbrush
buzzing with warbles, drifting with pollen

put my arm around some little old woman,
braid her hair as cars drive by like safaris,
like I've dreamed of safaris and jumping on the back
of a blue wildebeest. But I keep driving with my hand cupped
in the wind, cradling the sunset like a dying bird.

*I pray love has been on its feet
delivering, gathering, bathing
every dead skin cell, all the red
dirt drones stifling, be well.*

Psalm 13:1

My father died face down,
broken nose resting in a pool
of his Braum's Ice Cream Store milk.

On the night stand,
his Tom Clancy Book pages lay
prostrate, 162-163.

The following two Saturdays,
it sold in a box marked, "All paperbacks
25 cents."

After my Father was a Highway Patrolman

My Father was a roofer

With his two brothers and a few great uncles

Uncle Pat, the middle brother, whose foot

motorcycle accident

Was chopped off in a

When he was sixteen, complained he didn't get

Enough pay for the week.

Soon, lamps were falling over, blood on the floor

Mama calling Uncle Jim on the phone

porch;

Tripping and punching into the screened

Like a corny western,

They rolled him like a rug into the street

And we ran upstairs, watched from the tarred roof

Hatchets and Mama's fried chicken she'd packed for the road

Trip

slung all over the asphalt,

Neighborhood dogs came to eat

Daddy stopped everything when he flipped Uncle Pat to the ground

Guam.

Using Judo he learned in

In the Orchard

Far from the town scents, along
a path stained with old dented
pails and rusty coiled mattress
springs, white buds grew. Newness impressed her,
like blue changes color to birth the rain.
She felt the sky watching as she tasted,
waiting for the sweetness.
But summer is slippery like gossip, sipping
long here, sipping long there. Wild pinkish
yellow stews, the Maypop vine's orange wanes
to chaff. Oh, sweet for a while, if taken in time.
If taken under the shade, back pressed against bark,
lean branches tilted, wild apricot bobbling in the breeze.

Music Row

Motherhood, the filago
next to the dripping air conditioner,

such a wooly wet stain, you said.
So you pretend I'm just the mountains,

a state, a drought finally over even though
blue childhood pools

when you sweat, wince, and grieve. I will.
My mouth, cotton rose Cudweed, a lamb's

baa, explains nothing, you said.
Don't tell you how to live, on laundry room floors,

in grime, behind city smoke drench—
quells the prodding of my fingers counting 63

stitches on your head where they sewed your brain,
patched your skull, like I carefully cut your baby hair.

And at some point, pictures of blood on my delivery sleeve
became too graphic, pushing them farther under the bed

like a lost shoe.

Franklin, Tennessee

Franklin is Elizabethtown,
deliberate leisure lines the walks.
I know this town in the dream I didn't dream,
a Civil War marker on every corner,
inside of me.
Cloverland, my favorite street,
has rock mountains with green vines
clinging as close as paint, leaping like flames.
Linen, burlap, old building
aromas romance me,
downtown, Merridie's molasses cookies
slow me,
and the shops are whispers.

Elegy for Bend, Oregon

Sisters mountains,
where the sky is crisp
down to its ankles.
We stopped to see
how much a small place
would cost
Us--
I don't know why we did that,
when all I wanted was to get away
from beautiful.

Night Life

At dusk, when Hermit Thrushes fall from roosts,
a world they could do without, you walk
beside the Willamette River in a blue jacket,
river bed narrow and stuffed, rocks don't move,
I'm always looking back but it means nothing.
Outside what used to be a movie theater is a
poster advertising, *Fleudian Slips November 11th*,
Pink Floyd impersonators you took me to see last
year. Every night you do something like that, take me
to utility poles with posters stuck on creosote, trees snap
and shudder because I can't make up my mind, stored
boxes marked with masking tape make me stumble
over water hoses, lawn equipment, and silver rain.

Flying over Montana

So many spare moments in the air, and evening
became a tunnel. She turned the overhead
light on and looked through the cloudy glass,
saw her shoulders among the silver stars
bowing beside them like a lengthy prayer of metal and satellites.
Blackness out there, night in the plane—like the woods are dark
with hibernating bears.
She became old—her eyes watched for the lavatory to become
vacant in front, near the cockpit door.
Instead she pulled out a journal; reflection her constant
demeanor. All was shadows, except for her tiny lamp.
She was alone—just her, the journal, and the spotlight
on top her head like a crown.

Still Life: Two Types of Rain

Rain drops in Oklahoma pelt
with a mission, alive and heavy
like oil with fat personalities.
Not like Portland's lazy drops,
sad gooey carcasses
crying like a drippy faucet,
outside of Powell's Bookstore,
always getting books wet,
no one carrying umbrellas.
They don't spin like tiny tornadoes
or spiraling needles, not tart
like the strength of lemons.
Portland's rain is as bland as squash,
a soup, a cream, thicker than fog.
It is likely the world was a deep well
tipped on its head when the sky
over Oregon was created, miscalculation,
awkward dripping popsicle.
Drops falling in Oklahoma are crazed, rip
the red dust of summer, bathe
the belly of sunset orange,
courageous kamikazes.

Psalm for Letting Go

I pray love has been on its feet
delivering, gathering, bathing
every dead skin cell, all the red
dirt drones stifling, *be well*.

I pray love has pruned the spiritless
words grappling to pin your legs down,
keep your hands from drumming
the rhythm that moved our days.

I pretend you're okay. Alive
and well, with blues like lakes
grays, greens, and chocolate browns,
colors I surrendered, when you waved

goodbye from a gas station pump,
pulling a trailer packed with cymbals
clashing, singing, *Mother let go*.

Winter Hellebores

She opens the door
hears the traffic's
gunning engines,
clank of the closing
gates just to feel
alive
for a little while,
rotate, circulate
somewhat, each time
she stands up,
dizzy and faint
living is pale,
an anemic strain.
She takes a bath
to wake up,
Wake up!
Life is movement,
only that.

Central Line from Lowry Street

Like the wind blowing through a tunnel when she was mad she could sound like the trains stopping too near the yellow roofed depot that dropped like a frozen sunset at the end of the block. For comfort, my small, dimpled hands carried pink bush flowers from the side yard to her linoleum counter where she ran water down the neck of an antique vase placed in the center of her Mimi's wooden table.

Red radishes, cucumbers, and onions smothered in vinegar was lunch. When she told me to eat, she complained, "These cucumbers are pithy." My stomach couldn't get full. "We had ta pick the corn and taters ever night. *Sometimes* Mimi had a ham hock in the beans." I was afraid of her childhood.

I was who she was if the crumbs were picked from the floor, I didn't smack my lips when I ate, if I stood still when she took straight pins from between her teeth, hemming anything too long cutting everything straggly, hoarding scraps. In black patent leather shoes and powder pilfered from her silver music box blotted on my face, I made believe on her wooden planked porch, trusting the creaking chains holding a loveseat swing, taking me anywhere new, puffy pink branches patted my head as I flew.

She was softer sometimes than the street she lived on. She would holler love words when in the alley broken glass mixed with dirt cut my feet, she tapped my head like an offering plate lined with green felt, her fingers the soft sound the coin makes when it drops. In the night she squeezed smooth smelly ointment, covering my chigger eaten legs with orange iodine---a miracle.

For comfort, she let me choose one pastel colored housecoat and nightgown hanging on the bathroom door hook, changing her mind, changing mine.

Sky Prophets

you spread your lotions
across thinking skin sorry that it's Saturday again.
There's no one to entertain your mind. Or that's
what it tells you;
what you've known since seventeen,
that perfect cheerleaders still have gum
in their mouth, (you can smell it on
the high school reunion invitation)
that you swerved in hallways, rolled against brick walls,
couldn't get too close, brush the swinging pleats of blue and gold.
So you go home and write dark songs on any kind of paper,
smoke your sleeping grandmother's Raleigh cigarettes
behind the house hidden in limbs near the creek,
watch floating twigs, then feel guilty for stealing your coolness,
go back inside and entertain the thought
that you might like to have sun bleached hair
shorter legs so you can fly in the air
land like a bird on the arm of swaggering
guys who had all the room in the world,
next to the Senior Pictures display case.

Now it's 35 years later only it's sidewalks
eating just enough to keep yourself alive,
not taking your vitamins, same as smoking only worse.
And you can't wait for night,
for cells to stop moving the universe,
say, *time's up*.

Burdick Street

My head and body fell
yelling, *Grandma*,
couldn't catch me though
I knew
last thing I saw
was the blue
sky and hairnet
with the black dot
in the middle of her forehead
from the top of a three foot high
red brick porch,
mint leaves and clover
my only friends
looking down at me
my four year old body
blew like a soft cannon

Still Receiving My Father's Mail

I fracture spines reading,
tearing utility bills
Reader's Digest on the way
back to a brown apartment,
pancake leaves tag along
as I walk to the mailbox.
Overnight, battalions of wind
discard faceless autumn,
great-tailed grackles spread north.

Annette: Vigil

She swept a simple living room
one couch, two kitchen chairs
bumpy, cracked linoleum,
breeze-sallied screen door
floated its hinge, washed her
children's clothes bent
with tub and board, pump and
water, she sang hymns
with closed lips, a Cinderella hum
hair pulled back in too tight of a bun
ironing bunches of clothes for 10 cents,
shirts and blouses,
"Oh get Annette!"
Lost her husband to a curve 30 miles from town
removed from the road by hate,
body bloated because no one found him.
She told me at the funeral,
"What a pretty complexion you have."
"Oh yes!" they all sang;
Optimism,
and I felt beautiful
from beautiful.

Wading

Go down a scourged brown road, mostly just a path,
to Deep Red Creek.

Blood-shot water with thick reeds as high
as my neck, wrap around edges like fringe
under the bridge made of wood and orange
steel.

I felt powerful in Shady Cave, smell of wet with a hint of dead
fish, only flavor for breathing. I waited
for the current to move, still nothing really ever went anywhere,
just frogs leaping from a tadpole life—black to green.

I wanted to turn a different color too, maybe yellow-cherry.

My shoes hurt my feet because they were full of feet
and rusty water.

Dragon flies floated with dull gray wings,
not like the fish from Black Bear Creek full of blended shades of swimming
aqua—just the right colors I'd needed a year and a half ago but couldn't find
in my crayon box with sixty-four colors.

Intraspecific Predation

Around the pond, scouting water
As in visions of prophecy,
A girl lies down on the unimportant
Shore to wile away minnows, Backskaters,
Salamander, and Sticklebacks,
Mayflies dance on the surface
Die the same day.
Her stained green knees
Cool in soggy soil, brush
Water beetles sneezing, velveteen
Cattails, pregnant pockets

Swimming
thick
black

Hatch

Silent tadpoles

In this narrow grave
Her father dug
With a flimsy shovel.
Feel the chaff
Wringing the soil—
Run little frogs and dragon flies,
Move away, until it's time
to come home.

Past the Willamette River

I watch cattle, idle stones,
spackle grass in pasture homes, stares thrown
towards the road while I drive.
I look through my window like it's not there,
on a sunny day, I concentrate,
on chewing cud and Coburg Hills
accidentally driven to downtown fields,
grocery carts trudge to picnic table huts,
dumpster pantries, railroad truck
back streets, Eugene throws
itself at me

Clouds of Breath Cool Pastoral Beds

I roam around being bitten. My hands slap every midge
and bee, the blackest, the yellow,
I must protest.

I hear the belly, the whinnying nether.
It is the hum, the disdain I run with.
I know its dance.

I pluck myself out.
Surely the seeds will float with the wind,
with twines of hair; my twirls of madness.

Peace is a ghost.
Every second I pander for its understanding.
Look, there are its paws: it trots away, like a dog.

Count every day I've hidden under houses.
See? Everyone goes out to look for me until dusk.
Calling, calling.

Or perhaps the trill-like songs,
those funerals and weddings I sang, wore blue.
And this is the veins of it, memory
plants not a bulb that produces innocence.

The sidewalks are also without grace.
They abandon my looking down,
my running and going; stretch me into the hills,
braiding my best intentions.

I am adorned with arms wrapped around my head.
Those evening limbs fall asleep, I shake them awake,
popping every branch, and birds, no crows fly
and perch on the knob of a post, like a salute.

**On the way to Stone Temple Pilots Concert,
Les Schwab Amphitheater, Bend, Oregon**
~For Scott Weiland

Often it's disheartening
to stare into the night and see only stars
except those airplane red blinking lights,

or a satellite
when cirrus clouds roll against autumn hills
and winds crack the poplar—

we change our focus
to things on the ground
signs and rails pointing *this way*.

In those moments, it's drowsy
to turn down a dirt road and drive,
choosing not to see time's
maraschino advertisements,

careful blinking in rear view mirrors
chanting their *come backs!*
As if we don't know death.

Picking Up Your Ashes at OU Medical Center

i.

The years won't be lovers unless
I get things under the sun and heaven's
control; sleep, eat, move, mulch.
But I've spent every last person
I know and Father is dead.
I've made my peace with poems,
on-going restoration like communion.

ii.

And I owe more sweat and Words of apology
that fell down the ears of family and
friends. Words trolled to the heart, stitched
the flapping holes, but it's not a sealed
promise, so phone calls, cards of, "I really do
love you," will always need to be sung.

iii.

No, no there it is...look over there, under
the light with heretical bugs crowning
my head. I'm in a night gown, "Open up, it's
me again" standing on your porch with nothing
but my purse and the wind.

iv.

And I realize I'm homeless every day
like the woman without a home and a help dog.
All the dogs I've had died a violent death,
under mother's 68 Pontiac, farmers shot the looting
pointers, and ditches received puppies as we screamed.

v.

And father sits in a box the few feet away tonight
in a shipping urn because I don't know where
to pour him. He's not from the Pacific Northwest,
just a town blown down in Oklahoma near Eureka.
Suppose we could all picnic and swim in the dust clouds.

Dream Sermon

I'm obliged to the days I have left
To walk the cripple across the marsh,
Shoo birds begging for food.
But I'm still asking, when does the sky turn
Purple? Surely it turns purple
Somewhere on the planet at some
Dusk... that's a promise there is a god
Right? Or is that the rainbow? Good angels
Will you lay your head here to hear
What I'm saying? I want to fish for myself.
Oh receive me, I haven't played my piano
In two years, and one times three men
Equals disaster. Not one chance
Left over in a chest of drawers,
Are they called that? For me. The wilderness
Of throwing good blankets in a dog house,
Perfectly sewn quilts, is dark parks with gunshots,
Like throwing money down a man hole
and covering it up with pudding.
I'll sleep all night if ever I go to DC
Never went to DC or Vanilla,
A town in this story I wrote when I was
Seven, where purple suns scorched all
The dusk long.

Mink Coat

Death hung on wooden hangers
in shades of brown.
There are many fur coats
in antique malls in Tennessee.
Today I saw a white mink jacket swung
across a corner booth, next to kitchenware
and faded postcards, hooked high
with a paper tag marked 1495.00.
This is how vanity floats
from soul to soul. The darkness
stands over night like this
when stars fall.

In the Living Room

Kids don't want Mothers and Fathers
to grow old.

*Can't you hear me?
What's wrong?
Don't hunch your back.
Don't worry about me.
Why do you worry?*

Accusers

and we hunch some more,
repeat ourselves,
take the same stories out
of some invisible bag

just to explain them
in different
glorious ways.

Muneca Retrospection

After looking at a snapshot I've never seen
of my six year old self, making a dingy, gray snowman,

I seek to know how flashbacks exist
or cease so I ask the black night.

Silver stars laugh their usual spurts
of gab, gibberish and tinker

strings of Christmas lights shedding
astronomical tears like plastic eyes.

My neck aches looking up for revelation.

A million eternities away in Melancholia universe
an interpreter has burst across the void

yet it recalls only in Christmas bulbs
and the bulbs won't tell—

there are the baskets of Polaroid photographs
of my cousins and our shimmering robes,

of my sisters in fuzzy pink house shoes.

They're dancing to Motown 45s.
They're blaring like horns in holiday traffic.

Will these photos keep their promise? I cannot
snatch all of them; they, bob like corks in a lake,

And like this desert in my gut
I cannot regenerate by flashlight.

I am enshrined in this snow globe
of wind me up with glitter weather,

wind my head for all to see.

On the Patio at Voodoo Doughnuts

They were once fliers
In the atmosphere
Blue green black orange
Air
Now
Deceased
Wings caught in between
Deck boards
Crash land on earthly places
Bumps of curbs
Drains, anything with a wedge
Or indent
So many wise acrobats
Imploded against the feet
Of
To be crushed beneath
My eyes, my shoes

In the Middle of the Night

Switch the lights off
watch the swarming city
devouring the crumb.
Oceans of blue ceramic tiles,
sticky legs rumble along
grouted highways, bumping
at a speedy pace, single file,
so many hours, years
to reach the bread,
mislead by a tress of hair,
toiling around the broken shaft
to fetch, break, stockpile
safety into the invisible.
Every few minutes, years,
the lights turn,
to catch confused stragglers
lost, trying to find the group
or anything missed.
Tear paper towel after towel,
wet the ends, swipe scratchy cement--
believing it shouldn't be painful
to die blind, in the dark,
from such love.