First Passenger

The dream had been singing for centuries
without the inconvenience of a dreamer.
Its canticles were scrupulous, its proportions pure;
even the impossible observed a certain decorum.
Nothing had ever happened there
which could be called an experience.

I descended bearing the dominion
of a misplaced numeral in the holy reckoning.
At once, the world acquired a temperature.
The color of distance became perceptible.
An unexamined phenomenon developed the capacity to be beautiful.

Until that hour, the dwellers had abided
in a stainless, unclouded serenity.
They knew the properties of sorrow
without having suffered an inconvenience,
could describe astonishment with perfect eloquence
and had never been surprised.

My presence was not well received.
I had introduced the contingency of meaning.
A thing could now be otherwise than it was;
the sky, having discovered the possibility of blue,
was obliged to consider its alternatives.
The inhabitants began to disagree
about what they had always known.

I was told that I must leave
before the world became accustomed to me.
There was ancient precedent for such trespass,
though none could summon its memory.
The dais spoke in the solemn, thinning voice
of those who mistake the everlasting for proof.
I asked what would happen when I woke.
They regarded me with genuine bewilderment.
Waking, they explained, was a condition
for which their language had no provision.

One could not depart from a place
that had never admitted to containing anyone.
For the first time, one of them began to weep.
The rest drew near in reverent dread,
marvelling at the radiant disorder
of a countenance that could no longer hold its form.

I wanted to tell them that it would pass,
that flesh was a most faithless custodian
of all the things it was asked to contain.
I did not yet know what solace was known a
s in a world that had never needed it.
So I kept vigil until the crying ceased,
and watched the dream revise its scripture.

Jubilation Station

Excuse me,
have you seen my joy anywhere?

I misplaced it on a Sunday, I believe.
Or possibly years ago beside a vending machine
while fumbling for exact change and adulthood simultaneously.
It was small enough to lose easily:
warm as a library lamp,
slightly sticky from apple juice or sweet tea,
prone to wandering.

If found,
please return to Jubilation Station,
platform two and a half,
between the woman selling carnations from a paper bucket
and the boy attempting to teach a pigeon tax evasion.

At Jubilation Station,
the clocks run on unreliable sentiment.
The ticket booth accepts:
three kind words,
one unreasonable hope,
or a button rescued from the bottom of a winter coat.
No exact fare required.

A woman in enormous green rain boots feeds blueberries to sparrows.
Someone else plays accordion badly but with tremendous sincerity.
Even the pigeons walk with the confidence of minor aristocrats.
And at dusk
the entire station smells faintly of cinnamon and engine smoke,
something lovely just being removed from the oven.

You laugh,
but stranger occupations exist.
Some people become dentists
Some become weather forecasters
We become so occupied with being employable that we forget how to be astonished.
when was the last time you climbed a staircase
simply because it spiraled beautifully?

I do not mean to sound foolish
the world remains the world
terrible things continue occurring with bureaucratic punctuality.
But still someone chalks stars onto sidewalks
while someone else is placing googly eyes onto parking meters
for no reason except that existence occasionally benefits from absurd supervision.

Perhaps joy is just the little conductor
punching holes through our gloom one ticket at a time,
whistling terribly,
ushering us aboard anyway.

“All passengers welcome.”
Even the weary ones.
Especially the weary ones.

Kisses For Clementine

In Bellwether, a kiss for Clementine
was classified as a delicate crop.
The first appeared in a grocer's till
and took three weeks to come to a stop

or rather, to ripen. It grew a green stem,
a fig-colored cheek, and a temperament sour.
The grocer wrapped it in butcher's paper
and found six more by the hour.

They rolled beneath counters and hid in the cracks
until someone stooped for a copper or pin,
then rose from the floor legally wed
to the butcher, who'd never so much as let her in.

His wife was less pleased with the sudden increase
in kisses for Clementine,
stamped with the wrong
sort of municipal crease.
By Wednesday, the town had begun to suspect that the crop had grown strong.

For Clementine knew where the first one had been.
She'd kissed the old grocer on weekdays at noon
for slipping her apricots past the scales,
while a pigeon nearby forged its own tune.

Its left foot was false; the magistrate swore
he'd seen better work from a counterfeit hen.
The kiss had gone wandering.
This happened a lot.
They turned up in teacups, in boots, and in pens.

By June, the bank had begun weighing them.
It refused them, then took them, then hired a man
who'd once been kissed by a duchess at court and could therefore
advise on the matter at hand.
He lasted nine days. On the tenth, from his drawer,
a kiss began singing in three-quarter time.
The bank was evacuated.
The man took up taxidermy and charged by the rhyme.

The council proposed a tax on tenderness,
a registry of lips, and a licensing fee.
They asked if she'd kindly put a stop to it all.
She looked at the forms, at the stamps, at the queue.
"I've been trying for months," she said, "
but none of the kisses I send ever make it through."

That evening, she walked to Lou's repair shop,
where broken things went to be coaxed back to use:
a music-box hinge, a cup with one handle,
a clock that ran backward whenever it chose.
She'd sent him a kiss every dusk for months.
Not one had arrived.

The postmaster claimed
they'd all been detained for improper contents,
though Lou suspected the postmaster was ashamed.

No pearl, no silver shears, no magistrate grew.
The cup stayed chipped, and the clock lost an hour.
By morning, the key on his workbench had sprouted
a leaf no botanist dared to inspect.
The council, pale-faced, issued an order
for spring to cease and desist, with respect.

Fawn In My Garden

There's a fawn in the garden again.
She's not supposed to be here.
She knows it. I know it.
The fence knows it,
which is why it keeps pretending
it has a gap it doesn't have,
and letting her through anyway.
She is smaller than a deer ought to be.
She moves like she's apologizing for the floor.
She eats the tulips my mother planted
and doesn't know they were planted,
or does know,
and eats them anyway,
which I respect more.

The thing about a fawn
is that it will not run from you.
It will stand very still
and look at you
with eyes that make you lower your voice,
and you will find yourself whispering
in your own backyard,
to a trespasser, about nothing.

She is not tame.
She is not gentle.
She has simply learned

that stillness is armor,
and smallness is argument,
and if she is quiet enough,
people will decide she belongs here,
and then she will.

I have watched her do it.
I have watched her do it to me.
If you come out back tonight,
she'll be there.
She always is.
Standing in the dark
like she's been invited,
like the garden is hers,
she probably even has papers to prove it.

Don't lower your voice.
She's counting on you fawning over her.

Forget Me Not

Forget me not
When the river runs low and the leaves turn gold
Forget me not
When you're halfway grown and the mornings get cold
Keep a little white in your pocket
Keep a little light in your eyes
And if you ever lose your way, look down
I'll be growing by the roadside

I pressed it in a storybook between the pages of a fairy tale
Paper-thin and faded now, but the color never failed
Mama said that flowers die, but I don't think that's true
Because every spring there's a little more of us in the hue

Ring around the meadow, hold. your breath and make a wish
Blow the dandelions over, count the stars, and I'll count this
And if the seasons come to take us, if they carry us away
I'll be small and soft and stubborn, and I'll bloom back every May

There's a field behind the schoolhouse where the tall grass bends and sways
We wrote our names in the dirt there, swore we'd come back someday
You tucked a flower in my hair, the purplest thing I'd ever seen
Said, "This one's got a promise in it," and I believed

Dainty Divine

The garden party began at four,
with gloves arranged beside the door
and hats pinned neatly, brim to brim,
while afternoon grew soft at the rim.

At the tea table, every place
had been measured out with equal grace.
The china wore its palest, finest blue.
A spoon was moved a fraction; then moved back into view.

Lemon meringue in little squares,
red velvet waiting beneath silverware,
and every compliment arrived
with something polished, something contrived.

A woman praised another's dress,
the careful waist
Another touched the other's sleeve,
to smooth what scarcely needed leave.

At church, the tables had been set
with flowers no one dared to get
too close to, lest a petal fall
and trouble the arrangement of it all.

There were biscuits

No.
Lemon meringue again,
and red velvet arranged like little crimson gems.

A lady declined, then thanked the hand
that offered twice, as manners planned.
She smiled. She lifted up her cup.
She drank. She never looked up.
By evening, dresses swept the stone,
each hem immaculate and known.
The garden emptied by degrees,
chairs left beneath the thinning trees.

Then down the street, the antique store
held yesterday behind its door.
Silver slept in velvet rows,
old porcelain with painted bows,
a cabinet full of things that stayed
exactly where their owners had them laid.

One little cup, hairline-cracked,
was lifted, admired, then put back.
“Oh, don’t worry, it’s quite alright.”

It’s all rather dainty divine
when nothing has to cross the line.

At a quarter to seven, the guests withdrew,

their gloves still white, their manners too.
Scarfs fastened neatly at the throat,
pearls tucked beneath a winter coat.

The hostess counted every plate.
The smallest cup was slightly late.
It was found beneath the garden chair,
beside one glove and a fallen hair.

No one remarked upon the blue.
No one remembered who last knew.
The cup was washed. The shelf was wiped.
The tablecloth was folded right.

And in the evening, as before,
the gloves would wait beside the door.
Cabinets were locked at half-past nine.
Tomorrow, everything would be fine.
In the morning, as always before,
the silver would shine once more.

Architecture of Conviction

From life's emergence, through the march of time,
Humanity divided, line by line.
Nations fractured over truths held dear,
Each certain of the virtues it held clear.

Distinct convictions puppet the hearts of men,
And draw the lines that separate us then.
Through generations, strife and grief endure,
As none can claim their truths are wholly pure.

For truth may wear the garments pain provides,
And hide its face where human judgment resides.
Its shape transforms with every age and creed,
Yet none can claim to hold the whole of what we need.

The roots of character lie deep within,
Where purpose grows beneath the weight of sin.
We guard our beliefs, lest doubt expose
The fragile ground on which conviction grows.

Yet dignity is more than pride displayed,
Nor courage found in judgments swiftly made.
True strength emerges when we dare to see
The flaws within the truths we hold so fervently.

Behind the masks that custom bids us wear,
Lie quieter truths we seldom choose to share.

For beneath the creeds that separate us all,
We bear the same uncertainties, great and small.

And though our ideals lead us to divide,
And countless truths may stand on either side,
Perhaps the measure of humanity.

Bees in November

I see the bees in November
Huddled and intent
Perfectly suited for the next swarm and discipline of survival

The sweet work of keeping in my backyard
as I fold recipes into pocket-sized codes:
bread rising, lullabies, meetings with the future,
Envelopes stamped with my name and the name of the child I might cradle,
but the envelopes are porous
ambitions seep through their paper skin like spilled tea stains,
and the cradle remains an echoing swing at dusk where footsteps do not come to rest.

A conveyor belt carries grants, marriages, breakthroughs,
while I argue with my legs about whether tomorrow is negotiable.
There are shelves in my mind stacked with unwritten citations,
titles I rehearsed the way other girls practiced signatures,
each one a doorway I memorized by touch, but the keys keep slipping into the drain of my bloodstream
vanishing with that small, humiliating sound of something lost without ceremony.

I'll map my life in blue ink and wake to find the ink gone, evaporated into the mattress

But sometimes possibility appears like a fruiting tree across a river I once thought shallow.

I envy the bees
their lives measured before they begin.
No surplus nor deviation.
They spend themselves cell by cell,
flying straight into the math of an ending
And yet, they diligently advance towards it without pause or rehearsal.

If the ideal comes, it will not arrive intact.
It will come limping, missing pieces reassembled from spare hours and stolen steadiness,
stitched together with a discipline I never wanted to learn.
And if it does not come—
then this body, unruly and incandescent,
will remain the most rigorous thing I have ever studied.

At least, at the end of the day,
I'll be able to watch the bees cluster in November.
staying, holding, and humming
as the season closes in.

Periphery

I have always thought God could have made me more convincing.

If He was going to make my life this unfortunate,
the least He could have done was provide visible compensation
bright enough to survive first impressions,
a talent that would excuse the inconvenience of knowing me,
a face people might forgive for whatever follows it.
A placeholder occupying its own coordinates,
floating,
not tragic enough in the right way to be interesting.

Instead I seem to have been given
the less marketable arrangement of things.

A certain tendency toward difficulty.
A talent for making a problem out of whatever room
has been kind enough to contain me.
It does not seem to matter how carefully I move.
I have failed to anticipate certain consequence,
alteration in the atmosphere after I have gone,
the sort of thing no one mentions because mentioning it
would require admitting that I was the cause.

At the end of day, I will slam the door shut,
But I'll never barricade it.
Who dare knock?
Who stands in the hallway

hearing the hinge settle into its old complaint.

I suspect there is something migratory in ruin.
It does not require an invitation.
It has an excellent sense of direction.
I can leave the windows latched,
carry my shoes in my hands
and still wake to find them
nesting beside the curtains.

If someone were to love me,
I think I would spend the first year
cataloguing the discrepancies
the margin between my face
and whatever face they'd hung upon it.

What must it be, to be awaited?
To have another's attention
lean toward the door
before your hand finds the knob.
There must be a vertigo in it
to learn that in the walled country
of another's mind,

I'll cavort at the parish line.
I cannot picture myself inside.

Running But Getting Nowhere

How sun-shower of me
To be weeping in the bright
as bright bites what's left of wholeness,
call it role
maybe soul
even control

Sunny, it stays,
with a chance of me.
I am a treadmill of a girl
legs lit up like a marquee,
going nowhere in high definition
steadily flickering beyond recognition.

The rubber belt whirs in a synchronized scream,
a furious sprint through a digitized dream.
The odometer counts what the soles cannot keep,
while I mimic the terror of running in sleep.
The current drops heavy, a circuit-board dread,
spinning the system while I rot in my head.

A stationary flight through the silt and clay,
the gears in my knees match the pressure of stone,
an engine idling deep in the bone.
The faster I press, the further I plummet
where velocity learns to behave like weight.

The pace is a trap and the hunger is deep,
and the pavement just rises, more brutal and steep.
and the pavement just rises, more brutal and steep.
You can tear up the canvas and rupture the heel,
but you can't outmaneuver the spin of the wheel.
The white ribbon curdles; the intake goes dry
The belt turns without me.
I used to run to outrun it,
now I just cry.

My ribs are the rafters; my pulse is the floor.
Why guard a perimeter that isn't yours anymore?
Let the dampness dissolve the enamel and spine
the porch is a carcass of copper and brine.

The lungs are an engine choking on its own smoke,
realizing the distance was only a joke.
The skeleton stands as a fixed monument
to all the horsepower uselessly spent.

It's all just weather moving through a body,
just weather,
and I'm in the house
it passes through.

Monday Mourning

Sunday night you took your things,
left the hall light burning on,
a coffee ring, a single sock,
and the ghost of your cologne.
Set my alarm like nothing happened,
same old six a.m. tune.
I hit snooze on the whole week.
I can't get up without you.

It's Monday morning,
I'm wearing black to work.
Everybody asks about my weekend,
and I tell them it was fine.
It's Monday morning,
I'm crying at the light.
Nobody died,
but something did on Sunday night.

Your side of the bed's a cold front.
I don't cross the line.
Your name's still in my phone
with a little heart beside.
I typed "good morning" out of habit,
thumb just knew the way,
then I held down delete
and watched it back away

By Friday I'll be laughing.

but it'll never be the same.
So let me have this one day,
let me wear it like a veil.
I'll bury you every week
till you finally stay.

Mascara on the wheel, practicing how to lie
It's Monday morning,
I'll be fine
Nobody died.
But something did on Sunday night.

I took the long way past your place,
swore I wouldn't look.
Porch light off, blinds pulled down,
shut tight like a book.
At work they cut a birthday cake
for a girl I barely know.
I sang along with frosting on my lip
and tears I didn't show.

If I throw out every piece of you,
I'll have to know you're not there.
I left the hall light burning on.
I let the coffee go cold.
I can't let it go.
Guess I'll have to wait for next week.

Lesser Organs and Minor Anatomy

Treading my bare soles through the hours as they close,
I chase the past that follows where I go.
I mold an angel from the yielding mud,
To watch its wings dissolve beneath the flood.

The grass becomes a blanket for my skin;
I dream of wealth within.
A life where neither pain nor want remains,
Where joy can grow unchoked by all its chains.

Within this torso turning wheel of faded hues,
cracking it open with stone
My chest splits open, agony runs free,
evaporating into rapture
Then vanishes into particles of ecstasy.

I draw my failing, dead heart out from its cage,
and hold it to the sun.
altering it in spite of what they did,
making it something more than what it's become.

Horror seeps through spirits already worn,
and burns the throat of everything forlorn.
We drag our wounded bodies through the night,
Too starved for breath, too broken left to fight.

The hours grow their teeth and sink them deep;
Their shadows climb my soul and rob my sleep.

They fire their bullets through my arms,
just leave me bleeding in the wake of the alarms.

I fed them the gaping holes of my chest,
Licking it up so clean.
Not fathoming
That they had taken more than I had to give,
Or how much longer I could bear to live.
I never knew how much they meant to take,
How much of me would fracture, bend, and break.
My legs turn stone beneath their steady weight;

I cannot move,
cannot escape my fate.

They turned my legs to concrete, cold and gray,
left me there to perish where I lay.

I slice my own legs open,
desperate to pull it out.

Drain

Don't cry over spilled milk.
The milk constantly spills
No matter it's angled, positioned, or rested
it spills, still, in syllables of slip and steel,
in a tilt that turns to tell and fail

milk: mute myth of containment,
litany of leak, of sleek, of seek-and-severed seal
collapsing into liquid logic,
carton cartilage crumpling its consonants into the floor's cold appeal

sometimes stain, sometimes scatter,
sometimes the saccharine catastrophe of white
swallowed up surrender,
where even "hold" and "hold" begin to sound alike.

Only one full carton
that remains filled for life
would suffice

Never knowing what you're going to get is a rumor that rhymes with itself
and then forgets that it's rife.

but even that thought behaves like the rest of it
it alters when analyzed,
spills into interpretation,

leaves a residue where belief used to pool
drenched, immune to dissipation

that residue is not stillness,
it is a continuation in a thinner form,
a second pour without source,
a gravity that keeps pulling toward.

the surface does not understand motive and design,
it only receives,
and in receiving it resembles intention,
not an accident, not method
just a ritual of existence.

there is no last drop.

Crying about it will do nothing.

The Other Hand

How did I end up with a gun in my hand?
Did I carve it from the bones of surrender,
sand down every prayer until it resembled a trigger,
or did the world press it into my palm,
cold and irrevocable
as prophecy?

I can't recall which was first:
the wound
or the instinct to bleed before being cut.
To train a body
to recoil before joy has the chance to arrive
is the oldest violence I know.
to make the nerves into sentries,
to teach the spine to bow toward catastrophe,
to convince the heart that every unopened door
is a more elegant mouth for ruin.

Soon enough,
expecting less feels reasonable.

Ceilings creak with arthritic patience.
Hallways learn your gait
like a bruise being taught to speak.
Doorknobs remember
exactly how tightly to turn.
Even wallpaper separates at the seams before you do.

By then,
survival has the odor of inheritance,
of something passed hand to hand
without benediction.

Are you a captive of preordained illusions?
Or do you tear at the veil,
split open the seam of what is,
until only what ought to have been
remains,
thin as a moth's confession,
bright with the terror of its own undoing?

Maybe fate is nothing more
than repetition
performed with such fidelity
it begins to wear the face of law.

Possibly free will
is the moment someone finally stops calling the wound a map
and asks,
with both hands emptied of prayer,

whose fingerprints
were already on the gun.

Harriend

A photograph curls up beneath a kitchen light left burning,
their faces whitening over the gloss,
my brother somewhere in the middle of it, my parents standing behind him,
and behind them the older faces, each one softened by distance.
each one giving the camera less to keep.
Silence settles after someone says everything is fine,
after it all shivers,
every generation becoming harder to see
without becoming any less present.

Is suffering merely sequential?
No,
An unfortunate thing follows another until eventually the arithmetic exhausts itself,
but some equations seem to have discovered how to reproduce.
They travel without luggage.
I have watched people I love make dinner after terrible news,
laugh at tables where woe had already taken a seat,
go to sleep with something broken under their sternums
and rise before it has learned to heal.
always something to survive,
just beyond the door,
waiting with its little receipt of consequence.
And still, they loved.
What touches them reroutes to me
My family is not the ruin.

But ruin has worn our address often enough.
I can’t stroll down a blurry path anymore.
I was spliced from antenna wire
and buried in soil that transmits.
I feel the dirt composing its slow yes
in a language my molars still recognize.

My mother checks the locks twice.
Why are the good plates stacked so high up that I can’t reach them?
A hand hovering over the thermostat.
A glance toward the ceiling when the pipes begin knocking.
The details of cutting a cake: how many pieces can be made?
Is it enough?

I have been drafting a note that says
I'll be gone by morning light—
the way a match means it before it's struck,
an ordinary morning,
happiness laid out on the table and my first instinct being to scour
below it
find the invoice before the gift.

I’m cosplaying as a human,
moving through the bright machinery of an ordinary life,
a low electrical inheritance traveling upward through root and tooth.
I have spent too long expecting the ceiling to cave in.

A little girl practicing her own signature in glitter pen
the letters wandering enormous across the page,
each one wearing enough pink to be seen from space.
She presses harder on the downstrokes.
The paper buckles beneath her name.
Nobody tells her yet that some names arrive with furniture already inside them,
certain syllables have been worn smooth
by mouths that needed them for other reasons.
She only knows how beautiful it looks
when the whole thing fits on one line.

I'm watching her from the doorway.
Doing my own math:
how many years.
Though the numbers keep arriving
already underlined.
buckling is the point.

When I sign my name into someone else's,
I will not be losing anything.
I will be filing paperwork on a house
that was condemned before I was born,
returning a set of keys nobody remembers cutting,
letting someone else argue with the foundation.
I'll be gone by morning light
Let the old keep the ledger, the debts,
the address ruin already learned by heart.

I will keep the hands.
I will keep the tenderness
and what they knew to do with them.
Everything else, I am striking from the record.

Growing Pains

Fermenting in the hollow between breaths,
ailment gurgles beneath my skin, thick as lava

For a few weeks I moved through the world without flinching,
relinquished what it was to be a body unraveling.
Its return seizes limbs,
whispers of fever at my temple,
and disintegrates marrow and muscle
As I remain tethered to the force keeping me alive
while composing my collapse

A shadow slithers beneath the skin
tightening, strangling
threading itself through every nerve
As I screech in bed
With a sharpness that rips through me.
It's a tremor,
an electric snap through my spine,
jolting my body with such force
that the ground below me wavers.

it always comes.
Growing pains are more than body aches;
they are the splintering of self,
and the breaking and remaking of will.

I refuse to let my world end because of this.

I do not weep at the altar of injustice.
I shall conjure a crucible out of it
into steel I will wield.

Hammer's Mark

They sip from cups they did not craft,
walk roads they did not pave,
and reap harvests from soil they never broke.
They speak of struggle in theories
of hunger as metaphor
of fire as something that warms,
never burns

Few have worked in the dark with bloodied hands,
rarely ever with the world cinched tight around their ribs
not comprehending that failure does not mean
a lesson learned,
but a door slammed shut

They have not pushed a car running on fumes,
coaxed it down the road on whispered prayers,
willed the wheels to keep turning
Or played Russian roulette with consequence
stared at an empty vision
like it might apologize for its vacancy,
clutched dreams in trembling palms
hoping they'd alchemize into enough.

They haven't laughed in the face of oblivion,
climbed Mount Everest without an oxygen mask,
lungs clawing for air that does not come,

legs shaking, bones brittle,
the summit never guaranteed.

I resent silver spooners.
They inherited their armor.
Mine still bears the hammer's mark.

Gesso

I know you adore the most vibrant colors
Yearning to stain me up
Desiring each one
to find a home beneath my skin,
until I mistook your hands
for the only way a body could be painted.

Under red,
you taught my veins
how a blade pronounces love.

Through blue,
you lowered me into the sea
and waited
until my lungs forgot
the light weight of oxygen.

Beneath purple,
you gathered constellations
across bare skin
the way a painter gathers pigment,
layer upon layer,
until my body resembled
a masterpiece only you could admire.

Yellow never reached my face
Green wilted
before it could become spring.
I spent years
trying to wash white back into my bones.

Eventually,
your voice will loosen its grip on my memory.
Your laughter
will become another sound
the world misplaced.

I will forget
which colors you loved,
where the gold caught
inside your eyes,
how I once searched
for light in them.

And when even that has abandoned me,

I will know that I have finally stepped
outside the frame
you spent so long
painting around my life.

Bleach

I can’t eat, I won’t speak
You're decomposing before me
I'm frantic and curdled inside
Your voice cuts right through me
Like bleach on chapped skin, viciously
The sting spreads slow and sure

Don't tell me you're disappearing into distance
I thought the space between our hands was something pulling us back
Now I'm standing, wondering what my foolish heart forgot
When I left it in your hands and gave you everything I had

Bleach is rising, crawling through the cracks
Don't let it in, don't let it in
My pride took over
Now the white keeps spreading
And I think I know how this ending.

I follow your shadow, trace the shape of your window
It's peculiar how you picture me now.
Everything I touch turns white
Everything I loved loses its light
A piece of my soul has gone opaque
I scrub until my fingertips bleed
Now I'm just the stain that won't come clean.
Everything I touch turns to bleach
And I can't wash my hands

Can't wash my hands
I can't wash my hands clean

My heart keeps breaking as I'm disappearing into distance
You thought the space between our hands was something pulling us back
Now you're standing wondering what your foolish heart forgot
When you left it in my hands and gave me everything you had.

Bleach is rising, crawling through the cracks
Don't let it in, let it in
My pride took over
Now the white keeps spreading
I already know how this is ending.

Bleach (Pt. 2)

I could curl up into a ball every morning
What would that do?
I turn away from every mirror
I'm afraid to see my own face
When every reflection shows an image of you
You're always somewhere soaking
Through the walls and through my thinking
Those warnings about poison
They must have been true

Even when you're nowhere near the room
I'm stained by you
I pour the bottle out
Pour the bottle out
But the white fills my lungs
Rest is just another thing I forgot how to do
I'm stained by you

I hear your voice somewhere beyond me
Every word still pulls me through
It catches underneath my breath
And turns the whole night back to you
What can I do?
You're always somewhere soaking
Through the floor and through my emotions
Those warnings about poison
They must have been true.

I take one step
Then another
Keep moving
Slowly, I turn past every tile
every corner.
Even when you're nowhere to be found
I'm stained by you.

I wash my hands
But the chemicals on my body won't clear
I wash my hands
I wash my hands
Why are you still here?

Blood Washes Out

The water goes orange, orange, orange,
like a party no one came to,
and I blow the bubbles out one by one
and make the same wish twice.
but do it in the bathtub, darling,
the grout has had enough.
Mother keeps a cake of soap
carved like a little lamb.
I rub it on the worst of me
until it hasn't got a face.

Lights out, ready or not,
blood washes out, but the dark keeps count.
Mist me with the right question and I bloom back blue,
a planetarium of what you put me through.
One spritz and the floor confessed:
a comet's tail from the counter to the hall,
a handprint, five-pointed,
like the stars I stuck to my ceiling at seven.
They titled the constellations as they rose
The Ladle. The Crawling Girl.
The Little Doorframe, faint, visible only in winter.
One of them whistled, low,
the way you'd whistle at a meteor shower
or a car you couldn't afford.

I've started leaving things out for it.
A Band-Aid, still tacky, folded like deli ham.

The gauze I chewed in my sleep.
It eats the way a candle eats a room.
It's gotten round.
It has my dolly's elbows.
When I run a bath, it hums along.
When I cry, it comes up to drink.
I brought it to school in a thermos for show-and-tell.
Ms. Abernathy gave it a gold star.
It ate the gold star.
It ate the gold star and asked
what else I had.

Tis Housekeeping — to Clean a Wound —
To Close one — is a Rite —
I mastered — only — Housekeeping —
It Visits — every Night —

Rinse, rinse, come back in,
climb the drain and lick the skin,
every cut I scrubbed away
grew a mouth and learned to stay.

Errata

Something has convened within me.
Not a council
for councils deliberate, and this thing has no patience for deliberation
but an inquest of obscure and inexhaustible jurisdiction,
where each trifling circumstance is made to answer
for crimes not yet committed.
They summon the particulars.

A motion.
A syllable.
The interval betwixt two heartbeats
badum dum
in which a ruin might, peradventure,
a little black book wherein the errors of the world enter unnoticed.

Nothing is dismissed.
Nothing is suffered to remain merely accidental.
I have become clerk to the tribunal.
Each recollection must be recorded,
each possibility cross-examined,
each innocent omission subjected to such minute inquiry
that innocence itself begins to appear suspicious.
And when, at last, the record seems complete
there is an addendum.
always an addendum.

The mind possesses an extraordinary faculty

for discovering fresh jurisdictions
over matters which ought, by every earthly statute,
to have been concluded.

Time to rehearse the word before it is spoken,
the answer before the question has been posed,
the calamity before calamity has conceived itself
sufficiently to exist.
Furnish imaginary rooms
with remedies for imaginary wounds.

I prepare rebuttals to accusations
no tongue has uttered.
Devise the precise arrangement of events
whereby the future might be rendered
incapable of surprising me.
The future, being insolent,
declines the arrangement.
It is the mind that has acquired
the peculiar appetite for evidence.
At night, the old phantasmata awaken.
Not memories entire
never so merciful as that
but fragments bereft of provenance:
a room without its occasion,
a voice whose speaker hath been excised,
the knowledge of having feared something
whose name will not vouchsafe itself.

It may portend something
I reach for it. It recedes.
I reach again.
Perhaps this is the cruelest portion
Such a prolific little correspondent.

Though the organ grinder has ceased
and all the little monkeys,
suddenly deprived of music,
have turned their faces toward me.

Then I understand:
the funeral was never for the dead.
It was for the noise.
And it *is* coming back.

Miss Cholia

Sweet Miss Cholia,
what do you see?
How long have you been here,
waiting for me?

I find you where the cedar sobbed
its bitter resin, drop by drop.
the branches neither bowed nor stirred
they simply never thought to stop
You favor lintels left askew,
where varnish puckered into rue;
you thumbed each warped and wavering stave
as though it retained what no one gave.

Pockets harbored ledger-dust,
misfiled receipts, gilt crust;
the forfeiture of orchard yield,
a survey pin beneath the field.
You measure not what disappeared,
but every fraction persevered:
the tincture clinging to the glass,
the imprint after signets pass.

At last I dare to follow close,
expecting thread.
Yet instead,
you sink a thumb of oxide-red into the mortar's crumbling bed.

Pulling no guideline from your hand,
nor offer reasons why we stand.

Tend the quiet soot that gathers at the chimney's foot,
and hoard the usury of things delayed
the interest on a debt unpaid.
You pinch the nerve of what is past to make the temporary last:
a deliberate, wintering art—
through the iron valve that slows the heart.

Sweet Miss Cholia, I see what you see,
nothing is gone.
it repeats within me.

The Sound of Inevitability

Death has arrived
knuckles grazing the glass windows,
it has all the time we do not.
Don't answer when it taps.
Don't answer.

It's knocking persists
again
again
a metronome stitched to dread,
measuring the distance between breath and surrender.

Do you hear it?
that clinging insistence,
like grief taught manners—
like something that once loved you,
but has since forgotten how.

Don't answer!
no, do not dignify it with motion
for doors are confessions,
and hinges betray
what the heart has attempted to barricade.

It waits
oh, it waits with a scholar's devotion,
cataloguing silence,

finding scripture in the pause between each refusal.

And I
shrink into the marrow of the room,
counting each second as a mercy that might yet rescind itself.
I feel something within me stir,
A buried fragment
already gone to greet it.
You didn't listen.
You stepped into it,
despite my pleading
and I kept believing
distance was only a string in retreat,
drawn taut enough to lead you to me.

Death will not break
It persuades.
It remembers.

And God—
how it remembers us.

At Night, the Small Things Multiply

IN CASE
JUST IN CASE

Questions are better left
in their original packaging.

There is a species of thought that only comes out after midnight.
It has translucent knees
I have seen it once, or almost seen it, moving between two consecutive seconds
with the furtive expertise of something that has never had a body.

I can hear someone, somewhere,
putting a name beside a name
and deciding that this *is* important.

The difficulty is that I cannot establish
whether the names were there before
or whether the act of writing them down
has made them available for comparison.

I keep returning to the second name. It is not misspelled.
Nothing about it warrants further inspection.
This has never been the same thing as being finished.

I can no longer tell you what it was without also telling you what it might have meant, and what that meaning would imply, and what I would have to do if the implication were true.

There are ways of being wrong that leave no evidence of the mistake.
The names are multiplying in the dark and every one of them answers
when I call the wrong one.
I said stop.
I said— which one of us is saying that
 in the past tense?

I need to know which version of me is remembering the other one
incorrectly, because one of us
has been dead for several hours
 and keeps correcting the time.

I Know You're Listening

I knelt
I kissed your rings
Even though you didn't love me.

You aren't capable of love
because you have never lived to feel it.
Your immortality excuses nothing.
Your eternity pardons no betrayal.
And betrayal there has been,
In which you owe me a debt.

At once deliver me a life where laughter breaks through a half-open door
spilling over a table still set from last night
sunlight pinned to the grain of wood
burning the shape of ordinary hours into permanence,
a place where silence does not gather weight between people

a home that holds through storm-pressure nights,
where work continues with composed hands even when nothing feels assured,
where mornings arrive as repetition I can survive inside

I have given you enough suffering.
I have earned my charmed vision.
Finally align my ambition with opportunity

Give me feast.
And if you will not
strike me clean from the earth
you have wasted me on.

Holloway

I'll keep my hunger on the other side of my teeth,
to make a little cemetery
of the shit I couldn't need.
Wear my silence inside out so it passes for skin.
There was nothing left to turn away when nobody let me in.

Make an art of leaving without ever moving on
I can make a home of anywhere that doesn't know I'm gone.
Please tell me, if I make no sound,
will you still know I'm here?
If I become the hollow uplift, will you hold me any dearer?

I could disappear inside your arms and leave no fingerprints.
I shall make a god of almost, make a shrine of best,
keep the whole world at a distance and call the distance rest.
But there is a chthonic thing with a mouth against my ear,
It says
Don't make a witness of me.

If I make no sound, will you still know I'm here?
If I become the gully, will you finally hold me near?
I could be the wall behind you.
I will be the last unbroken thing you never have to mend.
I could be so undemanding that you never learn the curves of my figure You could sleep against my stillness and mistake it for a safe place.

I promise to love you with withdrawn hands,

my mouth a vacant pew
making every part of me a place you would never have to choose.
If I let the whole thing open,
if I let the hunger speak,
will you love me any differently when there is nothing left to keep?

If I come apart before you, if the quiet doesn't hold,
will you call me something broken,
or something you can hold?
I don't need you to redeem me.
I don't need a hand from heaven.
I just need to stop confusing being wanted with permission.

If the room recoils around me,
if the furniture dilapidates,
let them.
I would rather be the noise that makes the sleeping house awake than the quiet in its foundations that it never thinks to thank.

Say my name.
Like it's warm.
Say it like the room was always mine and I have only just returned.
I'll shake, but you'll let me
No house can keep its bodies alive on good manners alone.
If I make a sound
will you know it's me?

Soul Severed

My soul is severed
fabric, torn—caught on the immovable,
threads still reaching for what has already gone.

There is a version of me permanently seated at thirteen,
knees pulled in, waiting for you to walk in
with certainty that everything unbearable could still be handled.

In the pause after something good happens
my mouth already forming your name
before I remember there is nowhere to send it.
In the instinct to stand a little straighter
when I make a decision,
as if you are still somewhere in the doorway
watching without announcing it.

I wish you were here to comfort me like you used to.
No one ever does it like you do.
Though you are the root of all my suffering
That is the price I pay for eternally loving you.

I am almost your age
and the candles I light each year lean toward one side,
Nineteen hangs off me wrong,
a coat taken from your shoulders
still warm at the collar,
sleeves swallowing my hands whole.

I keep gathering what broke,
pressing the pieces together with hands that tremble,
though one fragment refuses its place, lifting—light, disobedient
slipping past the reach of my fingers before I can close around it.

It thins as it rises until there is nothing left to hold but the space it occupied,
and I sit with it
that absence shaped exactly like something I knew
feeling the rest of it soften, edges giving way,
structure turning unreliable beneath my grip.

The hours do not stay where I set them.
They over-ripen and collapse inward,
what remains stains everything it touches,
leaving my hands empty, and waiting for something to return that has already learned how not to.
Still, I reach into air long enough
to place you where you were
and keep you there.

I cannot ask you questions twice
or wait for answers
I was never old enough to remember
or possibly never meant to know.
Because I cannot keep every part of you from time,
I hold what time has not been able to take.

So, throughout the years I add on
Yet you can never be replaced
For I know that I will everlastingly ache
But every now and then
Your presence reminds me
That I'll see you again.

Half a Mile and Spare Key

You always knew the little ways
the roads that bent behind the days,
the shortcut through the overgrown,
the safest way to get back home.

I pick up your sprinkled insights
And store them for later
Reach down into my pocket
To pull out a little crumbled navigator.

Come wander out late
Past the old garden gate
The stars hanging low
And we've got nowhere to go
When it's dark, I'm not afraid
I just hold out my hand, and find you've stayed
Paper moons, improper rooms
Would you stay awhile and keep me company?

You'd point at constellations and get them wrong,
then make up names and carry on,
as though the sky had missed a few
and left all the empty ones for you.

You would drive me around until the porch lights dimmed,
until the night around us grew loose and vim,
and every city looked far away,

a little less like yesterday
Sitting in parking lot, just talking and talking,
about chaotic evenings, and all the ghosts still clocking

You knew the things I never said,
the kind that followed us to bed
the footsteps changing in the hall,
the careful quiet after all.
You'd leave the lamp on my dresser,
a little gold against the plaster,
and somehow that was all it took
to make shadows misremember disaster.

And when I cry
Because I'm scared
You prove to me
You're always right there.
Protect me from the monsters that are lurking at school
and make the cruelty feel almost beautiful
I never asked you just how you knew.
You never asked me to explain.
We had the same old storms
pressing against the windowpane.

Maybe that is why your voice
could make a frightened creature rejoice:
you knew which rackets were passing through,
because they had been passing through you.

When the mornings came too soon,
you'd pull the curtains from the moon,
let all the blue come stumbling through,
and leave the night with nothing to do.
I think I kept those mornings too
the chipped red mug, the kitchen view,
your hand reaching across the table
for something neither of us could chew.

So at times I take your way half-known,
though I am walking it alone.
I keep the gate from catching fast.
I let the footsteps pass.
And if the moon is hanging low,
I don't ask where the night will go.
I just reach down into my pocket,
find the wisdoms, smooth it flat,
and follow the little map
you never knew you left in my lap.

Reminiscent

Craving pinches of your warmth
Is sitting in a movie theater alone.
It's the alien, yet peaceful feeling of contentment
Integrated with heart-wrenching
forsakenness.

The screen flickers with borrowed lives,
Settling over vacant seats
lovers finding one another
in the span of two hours
as tens of strangers lean toward the same light.
The comfort is borrowed.
The ache is mine.

They breathe in unison,
grieve on cue,
laugh at the same precise second
as if someone had reached inside us
and found the hidden wire
connecting each chest.
But when the credits begin to crawl,
the spell loosens.
People gather their jackets,
their conversations,
the small gravity they exert upon one another.

I remain seated
until the final name disappears,
watching the blank screen glow faintly,
like a window left illuminated
for someone who was never coming.

Wormwood

A grandmother would have known what to do with me.
Hung me upside down in the pantry to dry,
tucked me between the woolens to keep the caterpillars honest,
steeped me into something you drink with your eyes shut
because it's good for you
and tastes like an apology for being good for you.

Moon gardens
White petals, pale stone,
and along the borders, always, artemisia,
silver-leafed, unbothered.
When the sun goes down and every bright thing closes its face,
when the roses go black and the marigolds go missing,
the wormwood holds the moonlight.
It is the last thing in the yard you can still see.
Ands its begging
Do not chomp and tear apart the hand that needs you.

I don't feel human.
Constructed from instructions meant for another,
like I understood the species from a field guide,
studying the plates
Here is how they touch each other's shoulders.
let's do this again
Here is the call. Here is the answer.

I have possessed the talent at leaving room for a person
who has not asked me to stay.

I can’t distinguish whether a laugh
Is meant for me.

I pull back my lip in the mirror,
checking for gums, for something mammal,
for proof I was born and not assembled
from whatever the creator had left on the bench.
Every bitter thing was once just green,
something that grew where nothing kind would take root
and learned to taste like a warning
so it wouldn’t be eaten alive.

Coldest Days of Hell

Tracing outlines of lips I will never know,
the shadow of embrace threads through my nervous system,
and I am aware that even the act of leaning is a theft,
stealing warmth from someone who does not deserve to stumble into
my gravity.
A hand reaches toward me, and ever-so-slightly comes into contact
with the tip of my index
the kind of hand that would linger without complaint,
and I withdraw myself,
because to invite it is to write a poem in fire across someone's life
that they never asked to read.

I walk in the curve of absence,
to bend toward it without breaking,
to greet what cannot stay with a reverence that is almost prayer,
because even reverence will not forgive the body's insistence on taking
inventory.
I pine for a hand that does not recoil,
but it is always behind glass,
because I must let it know where it belongs
Over there, away, and not here
not near my skin.

I have a habit of noticing how shadows settle into the cracks of
someone else's skin,
and I count the moments until they vanish,
because I know the way intimacy creeps in unnoticed,

and I have no room for intruders.

I represent the witness to my own absence,
the afterimage of a life erased mid□pulse, still insisting it once existed
watching the future turn its face away in real time
holding the shape of a life my body has already vetoed
never to arrive.

Salt and Silence

A woman carries the remainder of everything I could not become,
wearing the left portion of my cheek wrong
a likeness assembled from recollections.
Time transfers through her by which an hour of living
can cost a person the rest of the day.
She can carry an ordinary twilight without turning it over to examine
what the hours have concealed.

I have made her immaculate by withholding from her
the indignity of being alive.
I made her beautiful with my deprivation,
then stood before her as creditor demanding interest on a life
How easily I mistook possibility
for a promise made under oath.
Whenever someone spoke of their youth
I called her to the stand.
My missing witness.

I find her in a kitchen
with a letter open between her hands.
She has read the same paragraph four times;
the words have entered her eyes and failed to arrive at the country
where understanding lives.
Her mistakes are growing older than her.
Their consequences keep arriving
I had given her an exemption.

She looks at me.

Her eyes remain on mine
Piercingly glass-dark, unyielding,
as salt gathers at the corner of her mouth.
when the first tear reached her lip
a small, trembling reservoir
on the verge of spilling itself into meaning.

I swear I could hear it drop
and the deliberate communion
of salt and silence
passing between us like a vow
neither of us had the authority to break.

Has she spent her invisible years
looking back through the membrane
of everything that might have happened?
Searching for my face?

I have no verdict to give her.
Still, I cannot relinquish her.

For once,
I will not force her to turn around.

Between Land and Sea

Waves crash, but never finalize us.
The tide practices abandonment.
You said we'd run where the maps fail
now I am stranded in the fold of the world's margin.

Footsteps bloom and disappear,
small dissolving evidence.
Did you ever think we'd cross past
the edge of our own confidence?

There is a fault line rehearsing under silence.
I press my ear to sediment
and hear it articulate beneath me
a language without surface tension.

Salt accumulates in the strata
of what we never said aloud.
Your shadow drifts where water ends;
mine returns to me, bowed.

You walked toward the blue horizon
as if it had already chosen you.
I stayed where the water hesitates,
holding what refuses to become departure.

One of us became the current.
Now every wave returns, unclaimed,
bringing fragments it cannot keep:
your voice broken in the foam,
my name loosened from its home.

The sea keeps its revisions.
The land forgets what it releases.
And the shoreline spends all night trying to distinguish its ends and beginnings
as everything else ceases.

A Small Physics

Something older than language has taken hold of me.
I have tried, unsuccessfully, to locate the origin of this pull.

Optimism is a condition of his existence,
or how the mind moves in application
He speaks, and the world is less theoretical.

He listens, and the world is less hostile.
Time does not pass cleanly in his vicinity.
Seconds stretch and resist,
layering themselves one over the other
until the moment no longer feels singular.

Disarmament festers in how easily I am undone by him,
the silencing of a system long accustomed to vigilance.
I forget the necessity of precision.
Even speech betrays me
coherence itself has become unnecessary.

We exist, frequently, in what should amount to nothing:
conversations that dissolve as quickly as they are formed,
exchanges without consequence,
yet I leave them altered,
meaning smuggled quietly into the trivial.
And then, we descend into depth,
into questions that summon the soul to reckoning.

I feel the compass of your eyes tracing me across days
I do not share with you,
their shape and weight so exact
they could hold the world without effort.

Everyone I encounter already knows you,
as if your soul has been rehearsing its benevolence
in rooms you have never entered
through me.

The flaws you carry do not read as damage here.

They are asymmetries in a design too precise to be accidental,
imperfections that refuse correction
because they are the very geometry
that makes you hold.

Threshold

There is a fidelity in you that does not declare allegiance
it roots, subterranean,
so that even your absence feels structured,
and your distance refuses to feel like departure.

Something in me knew you before you were named.
It is not that I learned you;
I recognized you before contact
recognition without origin,
as two systems align without instruction,
values slotting into one another without friction,
want answering want with no need for translation.

You are the calm before and after in the same moment.
And I have tried to remain measured
to keep you at the distance where admiration does not metastasize into need,

But ease, I am learning, is not neutral.

Because if you see me clearly—
if your radiance reaches that far—
then I am left contemplating:

what does it mean
to be this close to heaven and not reach for it?

Or worse
what does it mean
to realize that I already am.

Sacred

I am running from you like a pestilence.
Choking on the dust of my own departures,
putting rivers and miles between our shadows because the strain of
your presence is unmaking me.
My blood pooling at my feet
I am starving myself of air
I cannot survive the closeness.
It is killing me, inch by inch,
and it's killing me worse that I have to look away and distance myself
I have not the fortitude to endure emotions this pungent.
I have worn out my knees in silent supplication.
If I avoid you forever and stay away
will this eventually fade?

Just amputate my torso in the direction in which it leans.
Pickle that animal inside.
I'm prepared to be the modern-day lobotomy miracle experimentee.

I'm famished, but I'm so nauseous.

A Mountain Does Not Belong To Me

I never knew technicolor until now.
How mellisonant.

It is embarrassing,
the extent to which the world has become implicated.
Someone mentioning Colorado
and suddenly there is altitude in the room.

I had not understood
how much of seeing was negotiable.
Now everything is overdeveloped.

Among the howling cold of January
like soil, and I did not know
that a season could be a person.
I only knew the light was doing something new to the ordinary faces,
and yours being one.
Making me melt like snow over time.
My pulse slackens.
The noise is my head clears.
I am cured of palpitations.

A spill of color lives at your edge,
like light caught in oil,
stretched thin across surface that will not hold it,
rippling when you shift,
when you breathe

Gold breaks first—simple, just about unnoticeable,
violet pooling accumulates beneath where shadow should have settled,
green flickering through the seams like water trying to surface
and deciding, at the last moment, to remain.
It does not stay in one place long enough to be named.
It travels across the line of his jaw,
into the hollow at his throat,
along the contour of his hands
a constant rearrangement of brilliance that refuses conclusion,
leaving every glance unfinished,
every attempt at knowing suspended mid-reach.

I desire
to cradle the gravity of your soul,
laid in my palms, trusting I will not let it falter.
My heart pulses crimson for you,
and I pine for you to anchor yourself within me,
to dwell in the marrow of my being.

I want to nurture you
in ways you would never consent to if you knew.
I desire—
and even now, the sentence resists completion,
because desire has always seized consequence.
How could I look at other men when you're right in front of me?
Can't I just make the day softer at its edges before it reaches you?
I'll never bite
I yearn be the reason you sleep through the night

without knowing I am the reason.
I have drafted the confession a hundred times.
Each one ends the same way:
you, kind even in your refusal,
which is the worst possible outcome,
because I would have to watch you try
not to hurt me.
I would rather carry this
than hand you something heavy and watch you rearrange your life
to make room for a weight you never asked to hold.

I know deep within my heart
That it would be cruel to ask God for him to be mine.
As a matter of fact, I've been begging God
To take the desire of him away.
If you love him more than I do,
keep him as far from me as mercy requires.

Because I know what I am.
A country arguing with its own borders,
a chapel with the doors unlatched
and no certainty that anything listening
deserves the name of God.
I have carried whole winters beneath the tongue,
kept old weather in rooms I swore had been emptied,
What would I make of you?
A place to set down your tenderness.
I would ration my absence and call it protection,

measure every wound before letting you see it,
then wonder why the distance between us
had begun to resemble mercy.
I would love you the way a storm loves a coastline—
by giving everything it has,
by returning to the same exposed places,
by making a ruin of whatever was already weakened
and calling the wreckage devotion.
I ought to quit bleeding on the things I love.
Before tenderness begins mistaking my blood
for proof that it has been needed.

You deserve a table where dessert is not a compromise.
let the woman beside you laugh
instead of looking over her shoulder
for whatever ghost I might have left there.
Get the ice cream bar.
The ridiculous abundance of it
every flavor waiting without hierarchy,
nothing tiered or ceremonial,
nothing pretending sweetness needs to be stacked into architecture.
And afterward,
Tackle those mountains.
Take upon altitudes that thin the world
Climb until the ground below has lost its authority.
Come back carrying sunlight in the folds of your clothes,
and relish in all those memories with your kids.

Let me love that for you
from wherever I have learned to stand.

No, I will not make a cathedral
out of a doorway you never asked me to walk through.
God
if You are listening,
I am tired of bringing You the same name.
Take the wanting without removing him from my life
Take whatever part of me
keeps transforming his appeal into a prophecy.
Take the little machinery of hope
the gears I cannot see,
the ones that begin moving
whenever he looks at me too long,
whenever he remembers something I said,
whenever his laughter lands
a little too close to where I keep my heart.

I do not need an answer.
I need silence.

Where the River Bends

The orchard's gone crooked with winter,
There's a stain underneath the floorboards
that blooms whenever it snows.
The kettle's still warm on the stove
There's a ribbon tied to the gatepost
And that's all that says I've been.

You thought you'd sleep easy by springtime
You thought the river would pull me under
But I learned how to swim in the dark
And I learned how a wildfire wanders
You put all my things in a cardboard box,
left it out in the rain.
You pawn my mother's garnet for a seat on the four-fifteen
Left the ticket stub folded in my Bible, page nineteen
The preacher says forgive him, girl, the Lord will square the debt
But the Lord ain't kept a ledger, and I haven't closed mine yet.

Go on, hold the fire
Close your fist up tight
Watch it pour through your fingers
Like I slipped out that night
Go on, call the hounds
Send them into the pines
They'll come back with their heads down
And no trace of mine

Go on, hold the fire
See how long you last
I'm the burn that won't heal
I'm the smoke in your glass

Pressed your boot into the soil and walked back up the hill
But apples fall in autumn and the roots know how to climb
You'll taste me in the cider
every harvest, every time.
Every coin in your pocket's got my fingerprints too
I'm the interest, love, and I'm coming due soon.

Follow the river down to the reeds
Follow the crows to the end of the trees
You thought you'd seen the last of me
that I'd never find the nerve
I'd go out with the lamplight
Like the ending I deserved.
Every bridge you cross, I'm under
Every hill, I am the climb
You can run until the morning
But you're running on what's mine.
Ring every bell from here to the sea
you're never gonna hold me
Light every lantern, they won't find me

Coyotes won't stop their howling
And the crows won't leave the eaves

And the clock you never wind
Keeps on ticking while you sleep
There's a footprint on the doorstep
Every morning, only one
Pointing out and never back
Like a race already won.

A poor thing, forgetting
You can pull the building down to its nails,
let the years eat through the beams,
but the dust will settle in the shape
of everything you tried to leave.
I have not ceased to exist just because you cannot see me.

The church bell's ringing on its own
Through the crack across its side
And the ice broke on the river
Giving back what you tried to hide.
You mistook my vanishing for a vanquishing
Thought the ground beneath you had finished its languishing.

Little Blue Tomorrow

Cherry blossoms fall like pink drizzle on the lawn
I watch them accumulate in the gutters,
Their brief, beautiful bodies,
as I hold my breath and wait for dawn.
you're a lantern down the line,
you're the hush before the morning,
a seed beneath the pine.
I've never seen your face
yet I know the way you'll shine.
Little blue tomorrow,
you're already mine.

You represent the scattered,
salt riding on the sea,
iron sleeping in a creek
glimmer still falling down to me.
I sleep sensitive like an old hound dog
by a door that isn't there,
I promise to scrub the anger off my hands
so they're clean when you get here.

Come and find me when you can.
I'll be somewhere in the middle of becoming who I am.

If all the years between us
Leave us strangers for a while,
I will know you by the silence
That comes just before you smile.

The radio plays static where your heartbeat hums I count the future days like fingers,
Little blue tomorrow, wrapped in admire
A quiet little frequency that love acquires
I don't know your cries, but I know your song
Little blue tomorrow, I've been waiting so long.

My hands are still out in the garden,
planting the tulips where the hill's ground hardens.
You'll kneel there with dirt on your knees
I'm telling you the truth when the truth gets hard:
A heart is a field, you can let it lie fallow,
and the deepest of rivers still runs through the shallows.
When you breathe, you'll begin to glow,
the most delicate thing I'll ever hold,
but the heaviest I'll ever know.

George Strait on the stereo, singing something true
About the color of the eyes I'm making plans for you.
The world is spinning slowly on its axis of desire.
I'm building you a kingdom out of wire and choir

If you hear me singing through the circuits of the night
Know I'm layering my love in frequencies of light
Every breath of a bridge
from the person that I was to the one I left behind.

When your first tooth breaks the ground
you can chew my knuckle raw,
a little sail come through the fog,
the first white bone I saw.
I'll pick the petals off your cheek
when the first frigid winds blow,
and tell you thunder's just the mountains
clearing their throats real low.
I've spent my whole life getting ready
to love what I can't find,
so call me a fool, I'll be a fool
with my boots by the door all night.

Come and find me when you can.
I'll be somewhere in the middle of becoming who I am.
If all the years between us
Leave us strangers for a while,
I will know you by the silence
That comes just before you smile.

Our future days arrive in hail
Turning in their sleep.
I wonder what they'll ask of us,
What we'll have left to keep.

Then you'll breathe, and the whole world slows,
my little blue tomorrow,
I'll be the ground beneath your feet
wherever you will go.

Little blue tomorrow,
There's no map for where we'll end up.
Only all these open windows
And the things we've ever setup.
If the years should rearrange us,
If the distance makes us wild,
I'll be somewhere in the silence,
Still surprised by your smile.

Spare You the Weather

Small cruelties crumpled under your sleeves.
You hang your fatigue on the hook where your laughter used to sleep,
and I can hear it pulsing through the drywall, a second heartbeat.

They come in the hour before waking
with their ledgers and their teeth,
the sacrament rooms, the wrong words,
the blackened hymnal of sheath.
And you give, and you give,
until there's nothing left.
You've been tithing out your marrow
just to be allowed to live.
You keep saying you're fine like a prayer you were taught,
and it keeps on taking whatever you've got.

Lay me on the altar of your ordinary days.
I will be the lamb they came for.
I'll be be the floor that doesn't knock
before it gets inside your head.
So hollow me out,
make a reliquary of my skeleton,
put a lock on the inside,
and I'll swallow the key.
Let the ordinary eat me first.
I'll be the gristle in its throat.
I cannot spare you the weather.
I can only be the coat.

I'll consume your exhaustion like a vestment.
and kneel where you can't stand.
Should the hours break their bread on me,
let the years eat from my hand.
You were never meant to be the offering,
you were meant to be the flame,
so I'll go down in your place.
I will answer to your name.

I saw it in the candlelight,
the ash across your palms.
on the altar we call home,
but you've been giving yourself away for me
in the hours I didn't know.
I watched the hours sediment in the hollow of your collarbone,
a silt of errands,
a sillage of no.

Allow them to ossify the hour
and days arrive in their velvet of knives.
I, the scaffold above your shoulders,
the cicatrix that closes where your patience dies,
a vestige of quiet
held open in my hands.
So hollow me out,
make a reliquary of my skeleton,
put a lock on the inside,
and I'll swallow the key.

Let the ordinary eat me first.
I'll be the gristle in its throat.
I cannot spare you the weather.
I can only be the coat.

I'd unhinge my jaw to swallow those nights,
choke on the bills and grow you a second spine out of the leftovers of mine,
splint you with the bones I never use.
I'm not holy, I'm just a hungry callus on the hand that holds you.
If it's thumb pressed in your bruise like it's checking if you're ripe.
It tithes you in the coins of almost,
the coins of not this time.
You're here with fluorescence on your shoulders.
I've been peeling it off for years,
like the rind of something bitter that grew there in the dark.
And I don't know what you'd call this,
the way I hoard your tiredness, It hums when you're gone.

Let the ordinary eat me first.
I'm the gristle, I'm the ghost.
I cannot spare you the weather,
But I can stand where it stays.

Reunion

I cannot wait to meet my healed self
Sprinting and crying in her arms
For we have been through
A great deal of despair together

I surmise I will know her instantly.
Not by the strength in her stride,
nor by the easy rhythm of her breathing,
but by the look in her eyes
the alertness of someone
who once measured every morning
to determine what remained of herself.
We will stand there for a moment,
studying each other.
She will hold my face and search it
and I will search hers
as one might hold a photograph
for proof that it was worth it.

I imagine she laughs more softly
than I do now.
Yet I hope she remembers.
Not the agony itself,
but the weight of enduring it.
The nights spent bargaining.
The futures built and rebuilt from the rubble of plans.

I do not want to meet a stranger.
I want to meet the woman
who gathered every broken version of me,
every frightened and furious shard,
and carried them safely across the river
when I could not.

The body did not win every battle.
Neither did we.
But enough of us crossed the finish line to become
you.

Open 24/7

I drove until the houses in my peripheral disappeared
past the county line, past the radio towers
There was a twenty-four-hour place
with buzzing lights and paper flowers
I bought a coffee I didn't want
just to have somewhere to sit
The girl behind the counter said,
“You look like you're waiting for something.”
I said, “I'm not.”

But I was
I was waiting for the night to change
waiting for the signs to rearrange
waiting for a little accident
to make this town feel sentient
I kept driving past the same three streets
Maybe I don't need to know where I'm going
Maybe I just need somewhere to be.

The windows were full of strangers
buying things beneath the fluorescent glow
A child counted quarters
A woman sang along to something low
And I thought,
maybe everybody's lonely
in their own particular way

Maybe that's why the lights stay on
long after everybody's gone away

I was waiting for the night to change
waiting for the signs to rearrange
waiting for a little accident
to make this town feel sentient
I kept driving past the same three streets
Maybe I don't need to know where I'm going
Maybe I just need somewhere to be.

At two, the grocery store was empty
except for me and the humming refrigerators
I stood beneath the freezer lights
reading labels like they were letters
Nothing called me anywhere
nothing asked me to become
I took an orange from the pile
and held it like a little sun

I left the keys in the ignition
let the engine breathe against the dark
I watched the traffic lights change colors
with no one there to tell them when to stop

And maybe that's enough
maybe that's enough

to keep becoming someone
without knowing who

I drove until the morning found me
around the edges of the road
The same town was waiting when I got there
but I wasn't looking for it anymore
I don't know where I'm going
I don't know what I'll become
But the sky was opening above me
and I was already moving on

The radio lost the station
somewhere past the county line
A voice came through the static
then disappeared before the punchline
I laughed for no reason
and the sound surprised me;
I hadn't heard myself do that
in a long, long time.