

# Vagabonding



**Vera Wilde**



Against the backdrop of a burning world, a young woman writes honest poetry about discovering a new continent, new love, new meaning, and her own – sometimes confusing – hunt for ever more art, sex, and love.

"This is a good book. Big!! Tremendous. I don't read books. Too busy being a very stable genius. But I'm told this book is important. Because I'm in it. It's all a matter of good genes."

— Donald Trump, 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States

"Thoughtful reflections on forgiving and forgetting men who abuse women."

— Harvey Weinstein

"When I go down at a future war crimes tribunal for my role in CIA torture and evidence destruction, I'll look back on this book's prescience and laugh."

— Gina Haspel, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency

"What's squirting?"

— Anaïs Nin

# ***Vagabonding***

*by Vera Wilde*

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***Part One:***

***Expatriation and Other  
Forms of Homeostasis***

# *Newly Arriving*

“Painting on Southbank”

*London*

“Those are nice paintings. Do you sell them?”  
 A stranger with his friend asks with a grin.  
 It’s cold but beautiful under the bridge.  
 I’m hungry but I’m happy, and my smile lets them in.

“Well thanks, I guess I’d like to”—my unarmed reply.  
 “That would be a crime and we’d boot you,”  
 plainclothes security’s gold-toothed reply.  
 “What’s the threat that responds to?”

I can’t help but want to know.  
 “It’s the damn Gyps running cons here,”  
 says the one scratching below.  
 “So you kick out artists for fear of thieves?”

Quietly packing my things  
 as the argument’s shaking begins.  
 London loves barbed wire and guards—  
 the England of my dreams in shards.

But while the Parliament burned over the Thames,  
 Turner sketched and painted gems.  
 When his specimen grew old,  
 Fleming paid heed to the mold.

Ours is a time of fire and of rot.  
 Time when the weird ones are needed,  
 get to use what we’ve got.  
 No time to mourn what it’s not.

“Compreensão”

*Porto de Lisboa*

The shoreline shunts contemporalis—  
realist rocks rolling out to impressionist waves  
before pointillist glints disintegrate into disjunct houses.

This is how the stories that can't be passed on  
get caught, snarled between their bearing minds and times, and beyond.  
Buoyed away in bits from the farther shores of others' hearts.

This is the port where artists work, in the not knowing  
how to, with the, and then, although, perhaps.  
What voice, which strokes, whose ship can carry care home to port?

The water points, laughs, holds; forgives, forgets, laps.  
It is always, my dear, the ship you tried to keep from open sea  
that sails because it must, farther and freer than before—

carrying with it currency as well as cargo,  
ready at last to spend the penny you have heard singing  
all this time at the bottom of your own well,

but not yet flung up and tossed out to the world, to us, to me.

“Finding Praça do Comércio”

*Commerce Square*

The water calls you even if your feet are as dumb as mine,  
not knowing direction in your own country,  
much less finding your way wandering, except  
there is no more way to find, but you know what I mean.  
Every time I’d wander out, I’d find myself at the water  
and so the city center where the Tejo meets the Atlantic,  
or nearly enough that the water tastes of salt  
and the cruise ships look embarrassing.

Juan wants to sell me weed.  
Nicolas wants my number.  
And a tiny, unbent butterfly of an ancient, burnt sienna woman  
dressed in a doll-pink dress and backpack, long white pants and orthopedic shoes,  
red plastic barrette, gold hoop earrings, silver cane,  
and imperial frown lets me walk beside her in the protest against the failed bank,  
showing me her statement with her money she can never have—  
her life savings, stolen by bankers who will get away.  
I ask if I can take her picture, and she has me snap  
her paper with my cellphone, too, as if believing  
in my ability to see, or know who to show.

But I never know who to tell anymore.  
So much is going wrong.  
Someone give Lucilia Santos Cruz her 106.56 euros back.  
Or was that all she had left after the theft?  
I am trying to understand the world and failing,  
because the world does not make sense.

Still the water pulls me, away from the shouting of protestors  
who would like to but will not attack the bankers’ police in their new riot gear,  
away from the wider everyday bustle of Baixa,  
away from the litter and mosaics of Lisboa,  
to the smooth stones and mossy rocks by the gently rocking water.

One circle of stones not too far out looks like a wreath underwater,  
or a nest the fish-birds are flying over, skipping stoney kisses  
across the bright and cloudy surface of their sky.  
A young boy’s melody of question laces a father’s answer  
as a migrant’s bench-beat hugs the farther coast,  
and there is so much music in all this longing.  
The water pulls us—its force without logic, demand without reason,  
peace without words.

“Wandering Cemitério dos Prazeres”

*Cemetery of the Pleasures*

Something splendid about being surrounded by stone and natural death—  
a peace, a slowness, a feeling of family and of rest.

The job that must be done matters less now, again,  
than this togetherness with stones, bones, sun, kingfishers, and former men.

There is no job. There is no “I” who must and must. There is not one recorded line  
echoing the violence that breaks the eternal mirror, tricking us into time.

“Outside the Closed Church Door”

*Igreja Paroquial de Nossa Senhora das Mercês*  
(*Parish Church of Our Lady of Mercy*)

Disused door doves  
say sacred sensations  
wait—willing and wanted.  
Fleeing (feminine phantom)  
closer cooing, crumbling  
in need not unknown,  
I look at the locked-out lingerers  
and pray for pairing perfect.  
What would also work  
would be wanted oneness,  
so needed necessary and now.



“Lockpicking”

*Techinc, Amsterdam*

Be a lily, don't toil or spin—  
that's the way hackers break in.

The clicking you feel  
when one piece gives way  
is like the thought on a walk  
when you know what to say.  
Words you weren't searching for flow.  
The solution to the problem you weren't solving,  
when you stop hacking at it, can come and go.

The lock is never picked.  
The cylinder does not know open  
does not know closed.  
Locks never lock  
never unlock  
don't open  
don't close.

Only doors  
and only when you make  
an in and out  
only when you fall alone  
in the forest of a wall.

The problem does not know solved  
does not know stuck.  
A spinning coin does not know its last flip  
does not change its luck.

And I know it's easier for some  
like relaxing into feeling the cylinder's way  
but speaking for me is sometimes like  
a cylinder in a door  
never the right words  
never the wrong words  
only the speaker opening and closing  
finding out as she goes what for her is locked  
checking door by door  
feeling click by click  
listening to hear if the pin has dropped  
if the spinning has stopped  
trying not to try so hard  
to unlock  
not the lock  
not the door  
but her own entrance  
and exit.

“Picnic in Vondelpark”

Blurry leaves sway over birch tribes, and they are  
how there is no time—only lighter and darker moments,  
and the wind that moves their weaving orbits,  
and the owl’s anthem announcing that they’re mine.

My throat is growling again at the world.  
Although I trust in your goodness in my head  
and in my heart, something in my animal softness  
needs to be apart, bows its head, kicks at the dust.

Half a forest away from the blanket and your question,  
a husky field with chirping frogs infringes. I must walk further.  
Nothing is wrong. But I would like to wander now, deep into the dry grasses,  
and lie down alone forever under a blanket of clouds.

“Walking along the Amstel”

Bicycles, babies, and boats bob along the Amstel—  
the Rival, the Tramp, and the Res Nova exhaling in gentle troughs.  
Amsterdam after L.A. is practical and gray.  
Here, bits of blue sky make no Technicolor promise.

Clouds come and go quietly, leading by example.  
Mothers laugh and trail behind babies on bicycles,  
Dutch stomachs effortlessly tight as they juggle—  
groceries, phones, older and younger babes.

I’m counting butterfly bushes instead of losses,  
no longer cataloguing colors to keep from staring at oncoming trains.  
Rustling reeds remind me the summers here are short,  
but my own season ample—time cool and long.

My new life is like a length of boat sailing across the horizon,  
with the slowness of scale but the smoothness of a cat  
comfortably at home. I am a stranger here, and illegal.  
But there’s no where to return—I will never go home.

All the world’s reset on roam,  
this vagabonding our Res Nova.  
Home in the world is the new home—  
banging along for Yucatán, discovering Cordova.

“Waiting for Wind and Trains”

My hope is a kite.  
 Its string goes limp.  
 Still I can feel for the wind.  
 Wait for its turning.  
 Turn.

Late in the day, in the calm afternoon’s climax,  
 when the sky’s cerulean blue cools to cobalt  
 and many trains have come, some of them our own—  
 you can rappel instead of flying,  
 walking down the clouds like so many paths  
 to unlocked doors. The air warms as you descend,  
 the world welcoming you. Do you know what I mean?

I mean to wait  
 until things are  
 effortless,  
 lift is in force,  
 and taking off  
 happens on its own.

You will know  
 when to go  
 because it is  
 a not-doing.  
 To float not fly  
 is the greatest high.

We watch the birds  
 to know from their arrows  
 when it’s time to go.  
 They do it  
 every year,  
 without sensors  
 without degrees  
 without calculation,  
 knowing more in bones than books,  
 never getting trapped in clouds  
 or tripping from looking down  
 after a taste of sky.

“Safe Space”

There is no safe space.  
There will be no saving grace.  
Wipe the slogan off your face.

The world has viruses in nests.  
While one attacks, another rests.  
We are evolving plated breasts.

But you have been a sanctuary friend.  
Let me tell the story to the end.  
Sung over the bones watching them mend.

## *Finding Berlin*

“Der Fernsehturm”

Blossom of light at night—  
True North shining bright.

Every German city has one—  
far-seeing, cloud-sprung.

This one reflects the setting sun  
accidentally as a cross—

the Pope’s revenge, across  
the old dividing wall of faith.

One empire fell to another;  
sent its wraith.

What relics will we leave the next?  
What accidental mooring for the perplexed—

to be dug out of sand or stone,  
or stumbled across in the ocean alone?

How shall we say across spaces and times  
that we knew, as we lived it, how history rhymes?

“Meeting Thomas Drake”

His face is paler than you think,  
and he smiles like it's unusual, like it's a treat  
when I ask him to sign my pocket Constitution.  
Paltry restitution  
for losing your job, house, savings,  
country, and wife  
for telling the truth—  
losing a life.

Tom Drake was number four at the NSA  
when higher-ups threw Thin Thread away.  
An executive spy,  
he didn't see why  
they'd scrap the solution  
(to the terrorist revolution)  
that would have prevented 9/11,  
try to roll a lucky seven  
finding signal in much more noise  
after collecting data on millions of American girls and boys  
instead of being selective,  
encrypting the mass.  
Was rule of law elective?

They came after his ass.  
He blew the whistle—  
first up the chain—  
giving the Inspector General  
a chance  
to throw him under the train.  
Coincidence?  
The evidence he gave them was destroyed.  
The FBI raided his house.  
After legal defense and a plea bargain deal,  
his assets were null, his expertise void.  
Pleading his innocence cost him a spouse.  
How were onlookers within to feel?

In Hawaii, a young analyst looked on with fear:  
blowing the whistle in this atmosphere  
would require more daring, and more public aid.  
People would have to know first why he had made  
the decision to show them the secrets within  
the war machine's heart.  
How to begin to grasp the gap between the Constitution  
and the black art  
of “collecting it all”—  
the NSA motto?



The law promises due process.  
 The surveillance apparatus, much less  
 protection of names and dates and times.  
 Who you called—when. What you typed—where.  
 The alphabet soup  
 troupe  
 look back when there are crimes  
 on the mass of data we share  
 without consenting to have lost  
 our basic protections there  
 in everyday digital benefit and cost.  
 Then pass on the intel to cops—white-washed.

So Snowden went farther afield to cry foul,  
 calling out to the People, the world,  
 with his Constitutional howl.  
 And how he was hurled  
 from the country he served,  
 for learning from Tom:  
 don't take your qualm  
 up the chain, or they'll crush you.  
 Both men deserved  
 heroes' thanks,  
 and the calm  
 of a whistle rightly blew.

What experiment are we running now,  
 in the land of wild experiments?  
 Can public scrutiny contain power's arrogance?  
 Tom and Ed still believe in how  
 our fathers' fathers made a deal  
 to dwell in hope, not live in fear.  
 Life, liberty, and pursuing happiness  
 require the audacity of hope, no less.

But I wonder, when their lawyers call me "dangerous"  
 and I leave my country penniless  
 for being a scholar and activist  
 of some small, forbidden thing—  
 (is this really happening?)  
 does the whole load of laws and myths  
 mean anything at all? Did it ever?

For all the well-meaning American Flanders and Smiths,  
 how many apple-pie soccer moms and teen-fucking dads never  
 endeavor  
 to question cars, guns, and drugs, however  
 many deaths from shit air and bloody crashes they see or hear about?

No questioning climate denial despite this flood, that fire, one more freak drought.  
 No taking the guns  
 that are killing our sons.  
 No recognition that the drug war's ignition  
 was always racial panic—and fear of the hippie left's organic  
 power to overcome corporate capture.  
 But when Big Pharma is after  
 a regulation, they get it.  
 So why can't it just be time to quit it?

War pigs say it's privacy or security—  
 and privacy is dead. They used to say  
 liberty, instead.  
 We've lost, lose, and will keep losing the war.  
 Now what's worth fighting for  
 will require rest and bigger-picture dreaming,  
 not small-scale resistance scheming.

Although he is a little old and gray,  
 I wish to fall in love with Tom and sway  
 him Europe-way,  
 speed his getaway  
 from the Apple store where he wastes every day.  
 We roam freely here, veterans of the silent war,  
 information freedom fighters,  
 living now for more—  
 hackers, scholars, thinkers, writers  
 in our ghetto of common mind,  
 all our future undefined.

At least here we are together in a herd that feels right,  
 like African animals in Sigean—  
 roaming by day, cuddle-piling by night.  
 They look so natural—lion, gazelle, bear, and all—  
 being with each other under blue skies, in thrall  
 to no cage bars or picked-off loneliness like in a zoo.  
 Resisters have our own reserve, too.  
 Send for me by carrier pigeon,  
 and I'll meet you at the dock.  
 How is it nearly six o'clock?

In the growing dusk,  
all my hope becomes a husk,  
except for small groups of us  
who love each other and do good.  
I wonder what Sapolsky would  
have made of Jefferson's experiment on Monticello—  
his wife's sister and slave his bedfellow.  
Even baboons don't pretend to own  
their mates and children til they're grown.  
There are no bonobos in Virginia, but  
experiments in sanctuary sometimes make the cut.  
Although with dominance it's easier to explain  
blacks still slaving in prisons, the super-rich  
unsoiled by poverty's stain,  
surveillance of every pre-crime itch.  
Get out of there, man.  
You've made your stand.

“Summer Sailing”

*Strandbad Wannsee*

Empty masts cast white fish-scale skeletons on blue.  
 Small boats nestle into the horizon's arms like me into you.  
 The wind changes every minute, every which way.

But it's gentle with me,  
 like I'm learning from you to be,  
 and we're not going anywhere today.

Still, on the lake, I hit my head—  
 attempted boating, Officer;  
 not dead.

Back in our kitchen, the lake looks like a heart  
 in the aerial photo of Berlin at night that's as much a part  
 of our home as the bed you built  
 with your son, with your hands, luxurious to the hilt.  
 Big enough for five of us, and strong enough for more,  
 to make me feel safe and loved—no longer sleeping on the floor.

It didn't have to float on a bed of light and air.  
 The lights didn't have to change color with a press of the button there.  
 We didn't have to spread our love out over years,  
 sailing back and forth while clouds gather, while sky clears,  
 while I purr and stretch on your sweet-smelling chest,  
 while at night the city glows a little brighter from our place—  
     you can see it from space—  
 our lights a little hotter than the rest.

“Walking to Mauerpark”

Steel supports like blades of grass  
stretch up to crane-cut clouds  
on the old school’s rooftop. They look  
like easel spines between paintings  
like giraffes pointing noses at a changing sky  
and like the steel supports in the field near Mauerpark  
nearby, stretching up and back into history,  
marking where the concrete chunks  
were carried off, for resale or for memory.

Also along the way and easier to miss,  
small bronze tiles break sidewalks  
with names, dates taken, dates killed.  
This was the doctor who built the orphanage.  
That, his infant daughter.  
His wife, her mother.  
His son, her brother.

Elsewhere, such steel spokes and small, marked stones  
smudge under smog and dirt.  
But here they are bare in the biting air  
as if the past were present  
as if the Wall and Die Wende had been a dream  
and as if all rewritten stories are  
and are not what they seem.

Layers of trauma sift like this,  
from the German *träumen*—to dream  
and not know how to remember different times.  
Are you in control?  
Can’t you just wake up?  
The steel spokes in the brain stand up,  
lattices of memories we must stitch stories through to tell,  
and so cannot clear up with simple speech—  
are yet filled in. Marked stones filed and misfiled  
scatter, cannot be secured on crumbling walls.  
In this deconstruction, landmarks can comfort or alarm.

For some, the spokes and stones are solace.  
Remembered deaths were not in vain.  
Remembering helps us rise again  
toward something better—  
the idea of freedom,  
the possibility of better dreams,  
the melting of old into new.  
Not leaving the past to be true.

For others, sadness:  
touching the cold plaques  
caressing the bent shoulder of the past  
with nothing whole there to retrieve  
yet impossible to leave  
as its distance closes in  
as the empire cries sin  
and as we wonder how long their warning will last.

For its part, all this steel and stone  
wishes us neither solace nor sadness;  
it may or may not survive to become another's clues  
to our fatal madness.  
We do not understand.

“Zersetzung”

According to *Richtlinie* Nr. 1/76,  
the Ministry made itself a scientific niche.  
To no longer terrorize through courts, resolved.  
To go after opposition smarter, not harder: evolved  
a new kind of torture to unleash.

I’m not here to argue. It’s my witness to bear.  
What they used to do here, now we do over there.  
Is that why the city took me in?  
Du degraded, decomposed, dissolved—  
we have a home in Berlin.

1.

The long arc of history took thirty-odd years  
to bend toward Aunt Monika getting over her fears  
of the Stasi rediscovering her wearing a dress—  
taking pictures, touching, making her confess.  
To be a woman but have been born a man  
is already more than some people can stand.

If we had a real lie detector,  
could it have helped her?  
It can be so hard to know  
when it’s yes and when it’s no.  
To know what you want requires learning to ask—  
not something we learn as a school or work task.  
(Instead we study sitting still,  
ignoring need, and bending will.)

But they knew it was a ploy,  
an interrogation toy.  
Knew from the Soviets, who had long known  
spies are neither made nor discovered, but grown.  
“The lie detector says you’re a liar”—  
more evidence on the chest-crushing pile.

2.

Although we know it is only a game,  
 in Iraq and Afghanistan just the same,  
 American forces wrote home to complain  
 that lie detectors worked as hammers to send  
 innocent neighborhood swept-up men  
 to be held and tortured at Abu Ghraib.

You could say that they were brave  
 to raise the issue of abuse.  
 Or that they were stupid  
 for believing in the screws  
 they turned, unsuited  
 by standards of science and ethics alike,  
 wanting only to better serve the Reich.

I do not care what you say about them.  
 In their judgment or defense, there is no great wisdom.  
 They lived as pawns—as pawns will die,  
 whether peacefully in their sleep  
 or by revenge, not knowing why.  
 Them to whom judgment was definite and cheap.  
 If there is a hell, someday we'll meet.

I care about the truth—  
 that elusive, strange, and pulsing thing;  
 how just when you think you have it,  
 you pull up an empty string.  
 When I listen to the quiet that is not quiet,  
 in the woods and by the sea,  
 I hear its ring.

I care about Monika's pain  
 that is also yours  
 and my own.  
 And Anna's eyes fixed on the train.  
 And in faraway sands, the unidentifiable bone.

It was their job to pretend to know  
 what perhaps we cannot really know:  
 Who should stay, and who should go.  
 Who will walk free,  
 or not feel the wind blow.  
 To strap life to the chair  
 and tell it: no.



It is my job to touch  
 the curtain of certainty,  
 pulling it away to show  
 what we already know:  
 That behind forms and scores  
 guaranteed objective,  
 there is a scared little man—  
 some sweaty-palmed detective.

He does not see your thoughts.  
 He reads your mail.  
 Do you even care?

3.

What happened is impossible to convey.  
 When I say I can't say,  
 I mean I can't say.  
 Best not try to speak about it to this day.  
 That's part of the way  
 they make you think the gaslights' flickering  
 and the unrelated bickering of single stars  
 are constellations in the sky of your fault.  
 The file says you said...  
 The miscarriage... the assault.

In the famous movie on the actress  
 whom they accidentally killed  
 with one too many no-touch tactic,  
 there is a mole—  
 a man within who has a soul  
 and doesn't want to see hers stilled.  
 He does not save her from the blackness  
 of despair that is the point of his whole practice.

But he tries, and helps a bit to mitigate  
 the damage he did to disintegrate.  
 Sometimes I'm so sure (this is a poem, sometimes)  
 someone saw it happening and helped me get out,  
 that I'm afraid to say so because (look, it rhymes)  
 he could still be inside, acting the lout.

Thank you, stranger.  
 Let my little fiction cause no danger  
 to the lives of others.  
 Know that if I had my druthers,  
 I'd never go back,

nor unmake the choices that led to the attack.  
 I told the truth.  
 I paid a price.  
 Now I get the rest of my life.

Especially not back now or never  
 if you were not helping after all ever,  
 but convincing me that leaving was my only choice  
 because you wanted me gone—one small,  
 troublesome person with a strong, persistent voice  
 removed in a new Palmer Raid  
 where it seems to the subject it's her own idea  
 to get the hey yell out of here—  
 and those doing the hurting, seem to offer aid.

What if I had stayed?  
 (I thought I would be killed.)  
 Or come back  
 after the attack  
 the way the postal attorney and his associates asked?  
 (Perhaps now only again harassed, hacked, and grilled.)  
 I always thought it strange  
 how he never wanted to be named.  
 Shall I draw the tree?  
 If I did, would they come after me?

But you never really know who did what  
 when they did it well.  
 So much was strange,  
 and the soul-eaters' hunt  
 makes it hard to tell.  
 To them it is a game.  
 To me it was life or death.  
 I lost my country,  
 but kept my breath.  
 Or perhaps it was never really mine,  
 who always lip-synched or mumbled at standing flag time.

4.

To be as honest as your average bundle of lies  
 and contradictions, all bustling head and slippery thighs,  
 whether and to whom I owe thanks  
 for helping me leave the targeted ranks  
 doesn't keep me up anymore.  
 The dark bird stalks me nevermore.

What they did to me is done,  
and proof would require someone  
who did it to say so,  
or produce documents to show.  
Otherwise, I just sound mad  
trying to piece together how I was had,  
which was half the point.

The past is a cleared checkpoint.  
It interests me less and less  
than the open road,  
my new home and happiness,  
regaining weight at last to bear the future's (for now) lightening load.

I have also read, heard, and been told  
to wait a lifetime,  
maybe two,  
and then try again to say what happened.  
I am strong,  
but time is stronger.  
Sense takes longer.  
I would wait more.  
It's out of fashion.

People assume they know you,  
and then you're lying again  
without meaning to.  
But I don't know what to say.  
Instead, I listen for what sounds right  
from what others say,  
and then I steal their introductions  
for myself the next day,  
the next night,  
singing along  
with a simpler song.

Mine are not the best deductions,  
but I can find no better way.  
I only know that I was murdered,  
yet am alive, and so never can tell  
when people ask, well,  
where are you from?  
What do you do?  
Who are you?

5.

But if I were to ring out a warning,  
 some eloquent defense of freedom and of living,  
 of decency and forgiveness after mourning  
 what has been done,  
 giving what peace can be given  
 under the irreversible sun—

it would be that we are too late  
 to linger long in despair,  
 too late to abdicate  
 attention to ads and Kabuki,  
 too late to stay and fight when we're not safe there,  
 and far too late to believe in magic boxes and Washington's cherry tree.

We have time for triage  
 because we must,  
 and to love each other well.  
 Time to enjoy the voyage  
 even with no trust  
 in our return,  
 no Athena guiding us through hell,  
 and no certainty that the tides of history will turn.

When everything was dissolving including myself,  
 I left my research in boxes on the shelf.  
 Some was destroyed; some I could save.  
 And so, finally, I'm releasing these tapes.  
 We don't have a word for what kept me from it, yet.  
 I've only told you a story—don't forget.  
 Maybe dead men cannot talk,  
 but they have talked to me.  
 Sometimes even blind men  
 get a second chance to see.

And if I were to ring out a confession,  
 you must excuse my poetic expression.  
 You may have come for my old life,  
 but I am no good Christian wife.  
 Do you know who I am?  
 I have been a lover in your house of spies,  
 and you will not expunge  
 the heat between my thighs.

“In and Out of Memoriam”

Hedy Lamarr fled, and so did I—  
the unlucky ones left, still wondering why:  
Whistleblowers welcome here, not there.  
Refugees starting over, everywhere.

Hedy Lamarr fled, and so did I.  
A bird sings in Berlin, kisses the sky.  
He tells the truth without fear or desire.  
When I try again, I feel a different fire.

Hedy Lamarr fled, and so did I.  
Without a plan, or a kiss goodbye.  
Flitting somewhere new to sing loud and free.  
Will the world listen? To you? To me?

Hedy Lamarr ran right into her life.  
Made new, imperfect love from strife.

“Will it be the year”

that, for better  
and for good,  
I stop praying,  
voting, and wishing  
on eyelashes?

Faith—  
I have some left.  
In the unlikelihood  
of strange noises  
meaning harm.  
In the sun.  
Its insistence on day.  
In the body's,  
on rest.  
And the fate  
of the species.

We, too,  
are an experiment  
in winding down.  
And yet,  
together  
in the darkness,  
all this giving up  
takes on a sweetness  
and a hum  
of going on and on—  
not because we must,  
but because we can.

“Miss My Stork”

Darling, we both know what you're keeping me from.  
But love is not casting. We're having so much fun.  
We're a spoon and a fork, without a knife.  
For what future would one create a life?  
The longing trickles, tugs, sings.  
You say you want to give me everything—  
except this.  
Love is not a checklist.  
There will be no customer satisfaction survey at the end.  
Still, you say you want to give me everything.  
And I, you. So there we are.  
I want to walk with you.

“Sofia Still in Boston”

Her face is perfect. You have to understand.  
When I told her I’ve always wanted to be a mom,  
she said she wished she were a man.  
We rode each other on and on.

She didn’t believe in the Umbrella Revolution,  
said it was all lies.  
She believes in her father back in Beijing,  
who used to give her his fish and kiss her eyes.

She would be a good father, husband, vagabonding company.  
But she won’t leave her job, her new country, the idea of being free.  
It’s wrong, or is it wrong of me?  
to want to help her become who she is, or could be.

Dropping out isn’t for everyone.  
Lying like a cat on my lover’s chest in the sun,  
wondering how to write about the curve of Sofia’s breast,  
giving exactly zero fucks about houses and jobs and all the rest—

I’m happy.  
This is all I need.  
Art, sex, love.  
Tea. The sky above.

Sometimes I wonder if I’ll ever find my way back  
to some straighter path  
like law or medicine,  
or something like that.

Sometimes I think I’ll set a decision rule  
like I did in my deepest depression—  
six months, and then see  
if life is too cruel.  
Although the pressure now’s a different pour:  
I must do more.

But when I try to write it out,  
it’s not about feeling different or bust this time.  
Is it about money, fame, or figuring it all out?  
Making a difference greater than being there with tea and company,  
like no one was there long ago for me?  
What is success? Why not count kindness and happiness?  
When do I give up being me  
and resume being someone less free?



The world is wider and narrower than that.  
We don't need to cut ourselves to fit where we belong.  
We see how we are caught, but not as much  
how we have room to move, as if within a net  
thrown high up against the night sky,  
so high that it stretches out and out into space,  
full of darkness and yet holding nothing,  
and yet holding nothing but light.

Or a crane moving heavily across the blue,  
full of grace and yet not knowing where water begins and air ends,  
but only sensing how the edge grows nearer  
although she was made for this flight.  
How the change grows nearer,  
although she chooses without choosing this fight.  
Like how I love you from afar,  
still needing more than life  
this wandering might.

## *High Art*

“Enjoying My Botticelli Renaissance”

Delicate lines, half-parted smile,  
 I linger by the lady for a while  
 before passing to another row.  
 In the interstices, a window  
 of Plexiglass and visual pause  
 between portraits holds me in awe.  
 There’s nothing more superfluous than me:  
 Poet, painter, tester, testee—  
 Does it work? Wait and see.  
 Yet I belong here, among births of Venus.  
 Part of what’s beautiful, tracing the lines between us.

At Kit-Kat, another version of the classic:  
 Birth of Venus with more cock, more cunt, more color.  
 From one pilgrimage to another.  
 Without chemical assistance, could I hack it?  
 Why try? The painting of your rocket gleams up high  
 on the wall from on board our space-ship bed,  
 pulsing and throbbing, more brush-strokes swaying in my head.  
 Moving has come to feel so right.  
 I used to lay flat on the floor, muscles tight  
 with Charlie horses and stress.  
 Couldn’t move for my daily push-ups, I confess.

Now that I’m at home in my art  
 now that I’m at home in my life  
 now that I’m at home in my love  
 now that I’m at home in my body  
 because you saw me so I could see myself,  
 I don’t care so much about the papers  
 I don’t care so much about the lovers  
 I don’t care so much about the books  
 left behind, missing from the table, bed, and shelf.  
 My angles look softer and kinder in the mirror,  
 like this time at last I have emerged fully-grown from the sea—  
 reaching the shore relaxed, naked, and happy.

Spring wants to cover me up, but I don’t care.  
 I’m still looking at the flowers you carry  
 in the current of the breeze, your beauty with another lover—  
 your sweetness there.

“Painting from Sculpture”

As the sculpture points,  
the lines break down.  
As I stretch my joints,  
light flows all around.  
They say good artists borrow  
and great artists steal.  
I’ll take today over tomorrow,  
cat-thieving over over-thinking zeal.

Rodin made the best porn  
I’ve ever seen.  
I’m painting his kiss  
when I’m not setting the scene.  
For making artsexlove takes getting  
how they’re all never-ending  
stripes on the same picture.  
You know it: the mind-bending Richter.  
Viewed by strangers and friends,  
everything bends  
with more and more passion—  
even when talking about it  
has worn out of fashion.

Then you have to pretend  
your art doesn’t extend  
to life at all.  
It’s only Paolo and Francesca, doll.  
Bathsheba and David—  
Biblical, necessary, basic.  
That Degas’s dancers happened to be fourteen  
couldn’t possibly be obscene  
and acceptable at once.  
Unlike Turner’s (secretly un)burned cunts.

If good artists borrow  
and great artists steal,  
the best are Cheshire kleptomaniacs—  
knowing when to reveal  
what, to whom—  
and what to conceal  
from most of the room.  
When the flow of creation  
leaves the heat of sensation  
and you put on a polished show,  
the truth of making artsexlove  
is that not everybody wants to know.

“Two Surveillance Exhibits at the Museum of Photography”

I don't have anything hide  
     but the drugs and weapons in my revolutionary orgy.  
     And my sexual fantasies that are nothing if not wrong.  
     And the fact that, right now, I'm picturing your wong.

Mark Zuckerberg wants YOU  
     to stop picking your nose  
     be the same person on screen and off, when you wake / when you dose  
     as if being many people were living a lie  
     and nose-picking in public better than buggering on the sly.  
 Or not doing what you want because somebody might see  
 is the path to a better society  
 of free individuals with integrity.  
     Facebook knows a thing or two about small-town tyranny,  
     how other people watching and talking  
     can force you into just one, small “me.”

At the Museum of Photography, they present a historical show  
     along with the new—a double feature on the surveillant gaze  
     old engravings looking at me by  
     new cameras looking at you  
     below satellites newly blocking our view.

    In the new age, an artist is hounded, reduced  
     to photographing every toilet he uses for years  
     and sending it to the feds as if to assuage their terrorist fears.  
 We become our own survivors  
     just as our parents became their own jailers  
     stuck in their old ways that become our own  
     when we don't try on new ones before   and while   we're grown.

In older times, in similar sways,  
     “the field has eyes,  
     the forest, ears”—  
     before a woman naked by the sea  
     is photographed that way.  
     It's not only the Stasi then  
     it's not only the FBI then as now  
 it's the whole village in the woods  
 helping lovers remember the village priest is nigh  
     and if not they'll tell your mother  
     and this  
     will be going  
     in your permanent record.

The watchman is sleeping, but we are each other's keepers.  
 Thus in my wildcat and zebra bones I am an abomination  
 so many different creatures in one  
 but disguises are my honesty  
 masks have always helped us speak  
 my father taught me that  
 and I will show you what you want to see  
 but only  
 when I decide  
 to give you  
 a peek.

Tyranny is other people.  
 Here the church, there the steeple.  
 Past the river, meadows bloom with shit.  
     And a small-town gossip empire  
     made global to experiment  
     as Americans do  
     with who we become  
     when all the world's a stage  
 and all the audience  
 at any time  
 might be the surveillant gaze.

I remember living with my mother through her long illness  
 and never speaking of sex  
     instead going back again and again to my Quasi-ex  
     the married man I first fled then fell for at seventeen  
     who came to come  
     and never introduced me to anyone  
     never let me love his daughters  
     never brought me home  
     holidays always alone

how when she met my girlfriend, she pretended to have not seen  
 but told me  
     “If you decided not to be straight, I wouldn't be mad—  
     just disappointed.”

I didn't love another woman for ten years,  
 worked day and night to keep at bay her fears  
     of the world illness men noise silence health girls boys.

It didn't matter what I wanted, til I thought I'd die  
 and so I left our old glass house  
 and blew my nose  
 and drew Arianna's shapes back on my thigh.

“Erinnerung”

*After Edna St. Vincent Millay's "Recuerdo."*

Happy critters, sore backs, so tight,  
we watched each other frolic and play all night.  
My head was hot and my feet were cold,  
but by the end of the night, I didn't feel so old.  
We danced too long and sang too loud—  
so out of our heads, we didn't think to be proud.

Happy critters, sore backs, so tight,  
we watched each other frolic and play all night.  
It was smoky and loud, with hands everywhere—  
and when the screens flashed with flowers, I held you like a bear.  
We helped down the princesses and crowned the knights,  
and you cleaned my red shoes in the morning lights.

Happy critters, sore backs, so tight,  
we watched each other frolic and play all night.  
And you brought me morning coffee, and I took numbers  
from a dozen new fellow-travelers, friends and lovers.  
Then the sun lit their bodies as they slowly went home,  
and we stretched out in the doorway—ready for another roam.

Happy critters, sore backs, so tight,  
we watched each other frolic and play all night.  
We cried, “Good morning, brother!” to an evening caller,  
and bought him proper dinner. I called home like a good daughter.  
And my mom said, “You sound happy!” for my voice was singing still,  
and I loved her like my heart had finally gotten its fill.

“The Ugly Duckling”

You don't know because you think I've always been  
a black swan, never out but in.  
But when I was an ugly runt,  
I couldn't go outside for want  
of a face and body fair and free,  
or knowing that I looked like... me.

It's the same old story, but  
now that I'm out of that rut,  
it means more to enjoy being free  
because I didn't used to see  
my own beauty.  
Means more to love and live well  
when the same life used to be a hell.

It's a simple story, mine and not mine,  
older than time.  
I needed to be seen  
for what I've always been.  
And to see myself,  
so small and so fine.  
Was it always so?  
How did I not know?

No one told me how things were.  
It took time to see that my own fur  
was not ugly; only feathers.  
That my strange, long neck gave its own  
strange, long pleasures.  
That as I was, I was already grown.  
No need to wait for another body.  
Mine was small, and mine, but not too shoddy.



“New Year’s Resolutions”

More birds, fewer stones.  
Less words, more poems.  
More lovers, fewer drones.

One good line every day.  
Accept Trump isn’t going away.  
Make art, get out of the way.

No liars or cheats or drunks.  
Only necessary funks.  
More sluts, fewer monks.

All of this I wish for me.  
And for you, what would you be?  
I’ll help and cheer you along times three.

Three hips for birds.  
Three hips for words.  
Hip-hooray for your soft lips,  
close enough to be blurred.

“Painting Itsukushima Shrine”

Bring me your despair—but only a bit.  
Resistance is a marathon, not a sprint.  
Pour out what you must and I’ll sweeten it.

Every day I pour myself out—sometimes by pouring in  
the great works of the ages that last thick and thin.  
Time ravages everything else. No one knows what will happen.

Except in the big picture we’re all doomed, and that’s alright.  
Everyone dies. Empires fall. Experts imagine they know what’s right.  
Our brains tell us stories, day and night.

If you had seen Rome crumbling, what would you have done?  
Written a friend, retired to think, sent away your only son?  
Toward the end, it must have been clear to everyone.

That other big blast hit blindly, suddenly destroying all below—  
soft skins, soft cells, soft atoms, mostly hollow.  
Maybe that’s how the shrine not so far out to sea  
from Hiroshima survived the bomb.  
Too much substance in its spirit for the matter to go wrong.

Survivorship bias makes it easy to believe  
we’ll still float on when the lifeboats leave.  
Unlikely.

“Change Your Life”

*After Rilke, Oliver, and Levitt.*

Flip a coin: leave, or join?  
You must change your life—but how?  
More than one decision? Now?

Yellow satin and red butterflies—  
you have a heart that’s worn them out,  
and so do I. No one wants to see you cry.

Except me, perhaps. I’d rather see you try  
and fail than never try at all.  
Put it out there. The draft. The dream. The gall.

“Goals”

Before, I had goals.  
Now life seems too contingent.  
Let go of the controls.  
That iceberg looks refringent.

“Magnetic Resonance Irritability”

They said it would be noisy, but not that they would cage my face  
like Winston for the rat, a too-big plastic mesh faux-holding me in place.  
No panic button but no panic, no nosebleed, no way to see  
the results til the doc wants to give ‘em to me.

Silly to fear so what they’ll find—  
being seen, found out, what’s in my mind.  
I wonder aloud (laughing) if they’ll let me come home,  
but I really do wonder how much I’m alone  
and strange. What have I shown?

Nothing, nearly; except  
how I’d like to be revealed  
so I can see all my nerves,  
show off all my curves,  
without effort  
without pretense  
without losing the sense of it hence.  
Is there no truth serum I could take to tell?  
No psychic X-ray that can see?

It’s just as well:  
there is no test for being me.  
Yet, there are ways of seeing further—in and out.  
I’ll give them tries and time to make me true.  
If you could find the doors,  
would you try too?

“Kit”

Blooming the brain  
in fractal petals  
pointing open and out,  
she numbs the pain.

Happily horizontal—  
numb tongue, tingly toes,  
my looser neck knows  
no pain. But who knows  
if it's just me holding still  
that helps kill the pain.

At last, relief—  
the neat lift-off from this silly leaf  
bothersome body  
swaying oddly  
up and down, but not dizzy,  
rather pulled or pushed inside-out  
as my head goes up, feet go down,  
and soul falls out.

Even with my eyes closed,  
I can still feel the pain,  
see its tunnel vision closing in.  
Then it abates again.  
No reason and I'm flying fine,  
toes tingling,  
down a shattered geometric line.

Reverberations  
as I lie back pulsing—  
sometimes words  
sometimes images  
such fast configurations.

I'm not dumb,  
but I'm no one—  
no doctor saving lives,  
nor lawyer freedoms.

Reset the dial on awe and thanks.  
Look up now at the great Sphinx.  
Up and up, it doesn't hurt to bend—I'm free.  
Hi there, body. I can still use you, and you me.  
But why?  
I'd rather fly.  
See the earth revolve around the sun.  
The cosmos swirl.

The push and pull of black holes  
lapping like peaceful waters,  
their black and bright twirl.

If I could live right as I see fit,  
then I'd still do it—  
go back to school to become a pastry chef-physician,  
no frigid choosing  
or rigid time-losing.  
Rise with the sun  
and my only one  
to go to work at home  
and raise a million happy kids.  
The imagining looks so different  
from this life.  
I would be Gorgias unbound,  
not Circe found.

Yet, this is so right.  
Redness, sweetness, all the colors of my studio  
and all the sweetness of the kitchen  
where in my fitter states  
I make good people tea and cakes.  
But blooming for now  
into such terrible redness,  
the pain that is death, as am I.  
I'm dying; I die.  
It's ok. I'm all there is.  
There is no death in this.  
Only one.  
Everyone.

Back into my body—  
disappointment with the pain.  
Didn't I know  
it would be here for me again?  
Like my life apart from imagining,  
so different day to day  
from what spins in my head as should  
and good;  
but hey,  
you only get one go, this time around.  
You'll get old just staring at the ground.

Closing my eyes, I see  
a beautiful, silver albatross  
glistening and everywhere at once.  
Outside I hear fireworks,  
but can only see them when I close my eyes.

“The Specialists”

The specialists  
are at their work.  
They want me still and slow.

Sleep stretches,  
exhaustion endless.  
It’s all the goal I know.

Meanwhile, inside,  
my cells are killing,  
cleaning, sorting—

yes to life, no to no.  
Theirs is the expertise  
that completes the cure without the fees.



“Tea with Lewis”

Last night I visited Lewis again,  
who my mom always said was not a real friend.  
But he took my hand on the balcony  
and we watched the sunset, feeling free.

Last night I visited Lewis with you,  
and a few other friends we barely knew.  
Looking at the light, feeling the wind,  
I felt healed and said it again.

What would you have with your Lewis and tea?  
Will you put down your screen and walk with me?  
Will you put down your mind and talk with me?  
They say he shaved off his eyebrows in fear  
of bugs, and to smile but not let him too near.

When I was but Alice, he gave me a toy—  
a glazed thing with music, a dancing girl and boy.  
I gave it away like I did everything.  
But I still hope Lewis can teach me to sing.

Let's go visit Lewis again soon.  
He's one of those friends you can't take too much.  
But I know what feels good, and I need his touch.  
I'm happy to hum his friendly tune.  
And drink the sun, and taste the moon.

***Part Two:***  
***Continuity Bites***

## *Back in the Colonies*

“Reporting Live”

*8 November, 2016*

Always the secretary, never the demolitionist,  
I catch the crumbling world's bouquet.  
Perhaps bearing witness is all the mission is.  
Not a fearless leader to check in with today.

“Dear Sir”

I have been in your head  
and found it to be lacking  
in furnishings and provisions.  
The insulation, however,  
is outstanding—  
protecting the inhabitant  
without fail  
from the inconveniences  
of outside weather.

“The Federal Week in Review”

This is a public service announcement.  
There is no cause for alarm. No one is a danger  
to himself or others—therefore, we are insane.

Please proceed to your next life immediately.  
You may pack your own baggage, but it's better to leave it.  
Leave it all behind, and don't look back.  
You'll enjoy the lack of clutter.  
It's just stuff.  
You can make new paintings, read new books.  
You may or may not have new children.  
We are all wishing for more planet and time.

Stop reading the old, new country news,  
and start learning a new language.  
Languages don't make sense either,  
but at least they're useful.  
At least the bread and honey of grammar  
holds from week to week,  
while the other dailies fall apart.  
It was just one fucked-up country  
among many, although by birth it was your home.  
It was just one falling empire, one corrupt regime,  
one person's worth of dashed hope and dream,  
although it was your own.

“This Is Just To Proclaim”

*Something there is that doesn't love a wall.—Robert Frost*

That something  
is a part  
of us all.

But something  
there was  
that loved  
a wall  
after all.  
That something  
survived its fall.

Something else still  
will be  
persisting  
when we think  
we're done resisting  
for as long  
as we're existing.  
Good, too,  
can be banal.

“Just Losers”

*“You are more righteous than I; for you have dealt well with me,  
while I have dealt wickedly with you.”—1 Samuel 24:17, NAS*

In the blindness of  
what is a blindness if you can see and name it?  
how bad can the pain be if you can say where it hurts?

Anger, then. Bleeding like a fire  
in my brain through time, and my heart over-powering  
itself, like the hearts of the powerless outpace the powerful with beating.

Nothing to be done. Everything destroyed  
by evil men who loved the pain they caused.  
Before or after, in the timelessness of panic, I am lost.

Stumbling through darkness, directionless, cold,  
I come to a long line of foreign men with suitcases  
who want to know if I'm looking for work.

I go back the way I came, less and less able to tell right  
from left, to tell right from might, to tell right from  
wrong things have happened so quickly all week,

some of them outside my head. Yesterday the border guards  
told law-makers they were working for the President,  
and hung up. It will do no good to say I tried to tell you.

Besides, the woman sent back from the airport to anywhere else  
even though she had her Congresswoman there  
even though she had her papers  
show me your papers  
stay in the car  
step outside the car  
step outside your body  
this is not your body  
this is not your life  
you are no longer real, you are no longer human  
and I myself should have died long ago,  
so who am I to bear witness?

Sometimes then a silence overtakes me  
in which the whole world seems stilled,  
and all is well, because I am a child of God.



And I wonder, what trick is this? My brain was bathed  
so deeply in anger, and I was lost, as we are lost.  
Do I need like my ancestors to tell stories just to stay alive?

To rest in some kind of certainty that,  
although we lose, we lose with love, or some other superpower?  
In that damn desert in that damn time, there was no other solace

in powerlessness. No comfort on the horizon, no hope for justice, no win to be had,  
only loss on loss in fighting on many fronts with no new world coming to.  
So we made it up. The false peace of faith got us through.

It's a different time. Still, any peace will do.  
Old flame, I feel for you. You clutch your bottle, and I, mine.  
Maybe even sober, you would smile as you cross the line.

“Coveted Assets”

“But if you’re a painter, where’s all your art?”  
Asked an old new lover at the start.

It’s hard to say  
I had to give it all away—  
and not all true.  
I wanted to give some to you.

Yet half my best work was stolen  
after I’d remade and remade,  
because you did not help me.  
You were too afraid.

If you assumed I’d always had  
and would always have a home,  
you were mistaken.  
While you were warm and fed,  
I was cold, hungry, and alone—  
as you knew.

You have done one thing  
the way you do things rarely:  
you lost me, and you lost me fairly.

“Winter is a Refugee”

*To every thing there is a season,  
and a time to every purpose under the heaven...  
—Ecclesiastes 3:1, KJV*

Tell me why  
I was not good enough to be loved  
I was not worth hearing, much less helping.  
    You have human beings and then there is the mass,  
    and I was not one of your people.  
    Or else you were an ass.

Come up with a reason  
it was my fault, it was something  
I did, something I said, or didn't.  
    Go on, take me to task.  
    It had to do with the limits  
    of your capacity and I needed too much.  
Or else I did not properly ask.

At the end of the storm  
at the end of the life  
at the end of the season,  
    everything is different:  
    there is no I  
    there is no you  
    there is no reason.

Sometimes still in spring  
the snow comes back and stays.  
    Even while the sun is shining,  
    it hails for days.

People think it's strange,  
    except some of us understand:  
    Winter is a refugee,  
    rapping gently at spring's fences,  
    hoping and asking, but knowing  
    although there is space enough  
    although she is strong and beautiful  
    although she holds a lot  
    the new season won't hold her  
won't hold her freezing hands in his warm hands  
won't hold her shaking knees in his warm blanket of breeze  
won't hold to warm back to life in his own chest, her chilly breath.  
    For everything, a season.  
    For every season, death.

Didn't you hear my cry? Didn't you see?  
Some strange sweetness defrosts the memory  
of how you showed me you when you showed me the tree.  
    It must have been older than you and bigger than me,  
    the branch you had cut from your childhood trunk  
        before your silent father in his closed coffin of work  
        could climb out to help the men clear the trash away.  
    Silly. I had thought we saw each other that day.  
You said if ever there was another such storm,  
you would be there to hold and to warm.

Lord, let me learn from how it made me colder  
    to remember an offered shoulder  
    when I cried out, and no one was there.  
Let me never feel frozen while acting like I care.

“Dialogue with an Angel”

Years ago, in the darkness of my youth,  
 a brush-fire destroyed everything I owned.  
 The flames licked my home hollow.  
 At first, for the moment that the hollowness felt clean,  
 I thought they were my sisters.  
 Awakening from that moment  
 of false beauty was the hardest part.  
 I ran away and rebuilt.

But another disaster followed  
 swiftly on the last.  
 This time it was a tornado,  
 roaring from the sick, green sky  
     like a train  
     like a lion  
     and like an angel of some terrible judgment.  
 I could not look the angel in the eye and,  
 knowing my home would again soon be hollow, left  
     again  
 to make anew a better life.

The caravans I followed seemed friendly enough,  
 until they disappeared one night  
 as the snows began to fall  
 and the winds began to rip  
 at the fabric of all things.  
 At last, I was alone.  
 It may be peaceful to die like this,  
 I thought, and lay down to sleep.  
 A pack of wild dogs encircled me then,  
     barking their  
     “Now-now, now-now, now-now!”  
     alarms.

Then, I knew it was really time to leave—  
     a greater leaving  
     than I could (yet) imagine.  
     “Go with God,”

my blanket-holding brain suggested,  
 bullied down that plank by pranksters, programmed ecstasy, and force of need.  
 And I did, the ghosts of the brush-fire sisters still licking my skin.  
 Sometimes, at night, their beautiful faces flash back at me  
 with the shock, the stab, and the jolt  
 of realizing the false friendship of their warmth.  
     “Get on,” says the conductor.  
     “Stay back,” says the lion-tamer.

“Now be still,” says the angel,  
as the world I left already broken, burns.

In my new life, I am not a brush-fire victim.  
You are not my beautiful sisters,  
sipping air and letting slip your torn stockings of combustion.  
The storms that grow stronger as the climate grows wronger  
are not trains we can ride into the city  
are not lions we can watch roaming from the car  
are not angels of some terrible judgment.

“Don’t be so sure,” says the angel,  
salting a hole in the sky with his tears  
not of guilt, remorse, or shame,  
but of anger.  
The tide rises  
the tides rise  
the rising tides sighed and sighed.  
“Why,” I ask the silence where the angel last stood,  
“am I being still?”

“Praying to Coca-Cola”

In the cargo cult of African Christianity,  
 with its *God Bless You Bank*,  
       *Jesus Christ is King Laundry*, and  
       *White Smile Dentistry*,  
 the initiated worship with their elect brethren.  
 God judges. Man pities.  
 Every week the power goes out (rations),  
 every month a tourist drowns (natural causes),  
 and every year the politicians visit (sister cities).  
 It's the big city, but it's not a big city.  
 It's the same here as in all the other big towns.

One day the children will read books  
 in air-conditioning, and eat oranges.  
 For now cassava will do. Some already read—  
 with their ears, it's true. One day the library  
 will stand in this grove. Let us pray.  
 Soon enough, all the visitors will go home. Not today.  
 Let us pray for more donations. And more sisterly formations.

When one of the young ones complains, remind her it would look bad  
 for even a black American girl to disrespect her post-colonial dad.  
 Keep on joking about your wives, thrusting in air, drinking your cultural beer.  
 Collecting money to break ground on the same library each year.  
 Putting on a ceremonial show to hunt, but never catch, the sacred deer.

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So what if cargo cult lives just as much there as here?  
 American cargo cult is America First;  
 Napoleon Hill, the best of the worst, with  
*The Seven Habits of Highly Rich Bastards*  
 to get your boots licked just like the Master's.  
 Having faith is one of the greatest hazards.

Keeps you going to work, keeps your head to the grind.  
It's not new to say it's the opiate of the mind.  
But if I can just learn how Carnegie brushed his teeth  
and lie down when Elon goes to bed,  
then I can rest my wealthy head—  
put the knife that cuts me, back in its sheath.

What the more obviously conquered know  
that the precariat will learn, fast or slow,  
is that warplanes made of twigs turn out to bear neither candy nor cigarettes.  
Machine gunfire beats the best warriors sprinkled with the holiest water.  
    Half-coconut headphones,  
    bamboo antennae,  
    runways drawn in unmeasured dirt—  
all the magic papers and words  
bring no more roaring silver birds.  
Only night sweats.  
The secret is never revealed.  
Should we have sacrificed the other daughter?  
That the great delivery never comes is bound to cause a little hurt,  
while we deny defeat and go on digging in the dirt.



“Your Sanity is Boiling”

You are you  
you are telling me  
you don't trust religious experiences

And I'm you  
untrusting the ecstatic that is not mine  
unfeeling the light beyond time  
judging ritual and crutches  
flinching from far-away touches.  
Imagining you imagining me,  
I can see why you wrote me off as crazy.

Who believes in anything like God?  
An intelligent, laughing universe  
no ego, all of us one  
the beauty of the morning sun—  
when things are getting bad and worse  
still looks up, awed?  
Odd; off-kilter.

Who goes off to make art?  
Changes their life with no whole plan, just part  
necessity  
part desire  
part trust in above?  
No filter.

Almost-love, if I had not believed  
if there had been no rush of comforting and light  
if I had not felt led by some force, man-made or divine  
if I had not felt held although I was alone in that awful time  
then I could not have left  
with less than nothing  
with less than I had ever had before  
with a slate overnight  
stained more red than white

after you took my story (or the part that I could say)  
for your week-long party with no pay—  
but radical inclusion (once you're in),  
gifting (for a week of sin),  
leave neither evidence nor trace—  
all this and more, if you can afford the place—  
blowing more on your play  
than I'd spent on food in ninety days?

could not have left  
to find a better life  
to make my home  
to retell the story that is my own.

That is not the most important thing.  
What we make is not what we do  
for each other, as I thought you knew.  
But when people tell me now  
that they need  
the way I told you?  
I make time for tea.  
That's what you do,  
or at least, what one does.

America is a burning man,  
and you are grinning and dancing  
by the flames of your own caravan  
while the torch-wielding Nazis are advancing.

But imagining you  
imagining me  
I can very well see  
why you stayed put  
in the boiling pot  
calling me crazy  
while I hopped out,  
sweet froggie.

For you,  
the water was fine.  
For me,  
thank God,  
it was time.  
My loss is my win.  
I couldn't survive in

## *Back for Forwards*

“The Living Murder”

Something happened in the dark,  
while I was sleeping  
and did not wake.

When I came to,  
I was dead.  
But I startled back  
from Death,  
or from the man who killed me  
in my sleep  
his sickly heat  
his smoky breath  
unbearable weight and moan  
become my own.

Back out in the light, alive and freezing,  
I ran from people  
I ran from sun  
I ran from God who I had promised  
    never again to try to sleep forever  
    never again to give up battling the darkness  
    never again to raise my hand against myself  
unless this happened  
unless one more lead straw fell on the pile  
unless I had to see one more monster smile.

“Snake and Not Snake”

Something dark, glistening, and fast moved through my life.  
I could tell you it was a snake.  
Or describe the shock of making sense of the slither only after it was gone.  
The shock is so much more like the experience  
than a neat story that knows from the start  
who is moving where, and who is cold-blooded at heart.  
The not snake of not knowing what dark thing moves  
wears its own uniform of death, its own fear-brain grooves.

I could focus on the bright city around me now.  
Or remember the dark woods I ran through to get here.  
Sometimes I'm in both places at once.  
The dark branches of night reach out to me in the living room.  
I run back to shiver in your arms,  
where you warm me.  
My shivering melts into purring,  
and although I want to cat you like a radiator until dawn,  
and my body wants to wake your body up to play—  
we go back to sleep  
at least  
until the break of day.

Snake and not snake still come back to me.  
I don't know who to give them to,  
to set myself more free.  
There and not there  
make me here and not here,  
but I won't fly back into the fire,  
won't live in the old fear.  
Will not fly back into the fire  
that calls me still, my dear.

## “Like a Moth to Flame”

1.

We do not know  
why go they go  
into the light  
burning them bright.

It is a cheat  
to call it heat.  
The pheromonal draw  
cannot explain it all—  
not only male moths  
drawn to not only  
infrared lights  
seeking not only  
female mothly delights.

The Mach band, then.  
Bright light, when  
you stare at it,  
gives off a dark hit.  
Moths fly to it,  
circling the light,  
seeking cover of darkness—  
getting reality’s opposite hardness.

2.

You can’t see  
what it means to me.  
Why I must go back  
to the scene of the attack.

I will tell you why  
the hardest things  
call to my wings.  
A far cry  
from self-destruction.  
The moth knows  
the flame is real—  
wants to live, fly, heal.

I do not know  
 if it is courage or cowardice,  
 the opposite will to letting it go.  
 To know the pain of fire,  
 the wounds of its burning,  
 and return to this.  
 You think it does not matter  
 as long as I live.  
 Sometimes I flatter  
 myself that I might have  
 something more than living  
 to give.

3.

It is the moon, they used to say.  
 The moth is navigating by the biggest light.  
 Then is confused by electrics at night.  
 It's nothing to do with heat—  
 just a mistake in navigating flight.

Like a moth to flame,  
 I navigate by pain.  
 Learning again and again  
 that getting back to work  
 doesn't mean doing things that hurt.

Just because it's hard  
 doesn't mean you need to use more force  
 against your own wings that are charred.  
 Although the older moths may have said  
 to navigate by the bright light overhead,  
 you have to listen first to what feels right.  
 Do not fly into painful light.

4.

The modern moth enjoys more equality than ever.  
 The empowered moth is both fashionable and clever.  
 The agile moth reaches her goals with grace and speed.  
 The evolved moth reports high life satisfaction and low need.  
 The balanced moth is successful in career and family.  
 The feminine moth is strong and independent, but not manly.  
 The surviving moth is focused and productive while alive.  
 The ambitious moth flies directly into the flame and dies.

5.

When you're flying, sometimes you can't tell  
 if you're heading up or down.  
 It's how many pilots fell  
 to an accidental ground,  
 or into the ocean and drowned.

When you're doing something hard  
 and perhaps well worth doing,  
 sometimes you can't tell there's heat  
 until you're already charred.  
 A cigarette falls on you, and it's the hole  
 that brings you back to greet  
 the body in your soul.

Sometimes you can't feel it at first,  
 can't tell if you're too hot or cold.  
 At that moment, pulling away is the thirst  
 and every touch too bold;  
 but you can't tell which way is away,  
 and anyway, insisting gets old.

Then I need to be alone with the night.  
 To try to grasp the darkness  
 and beat it with my wings  
 while also dancing in the light.

Mark this:

moths are not delicate things.  
 Moths do not need your protection  
 (though moths enjoy your company).  
 Moths do not exist for your dissection  
 (though moths enjoy showing off when they feel free).  
 Sometimes I lie, but always with the truth.  
 (I only feel safe when your shoulder gives me proof.)  
 There is no animal so full of wonder



as a poet, except a moth.  
None so willing to fight  
existence itself for the light.

“Don’t Think of a Pink Elephant”

Don’t think of a pink elephant  
 with crushed mauve eyeshadow  
 blending into the gray of her knees  
 neon blue powder caking off her back  
 as her daughter nuzzles the back of her leg  
 there in the room with your mother  
 who you will never nuzzle like that again  
 because she cannot face the truth.  
 Not out of principle—motherhood  
 being about raw need, the crush of blood  
 and love, the flickering pulse under  
 thin talk-skin of right and wrong  
 that says only  
 is is is is is—  
 but out of equal and opposite necessity  
 to feel the way you feel  
 to let the real be real.

Don’t think of a polar bear  
 lunging, back arched toward sky,  
 nose aimed at seal, and wet hair freezing  
 in haywire strands descending from his belly  
 so long and low it looks as if he’s floating  
 on a tumbleweed, when really  
 he’s lunging suddenly in another direction  
 eating not the seal but your brother  
 who after all is more terrified of emotions  
 than anything in the world,  
 and so is the best candidate  
 for being eaten by a polar bear.

Don’t think of the black snakes  
 their dark, sharp arrowheads shooting  
 the flowing ribbons of their bodies forward  
 just past instead of into you,  
 don’t think of the black snakes  
 that come back out of dark branches  
 when you are walking by the bushes alone,  
 don’t think of the black snakes  
 that live everywhere  
 in every forest and suburb  
 near every lakebed and basement  
 that seem to press themselves  
 onto and into everything  
 and we were too ashamed to say

but now everyone admits  
the black snakes stroked me too.

You cannot stop the polar bear,  
but you can lead some snakes his way.  
The elephants, having been discussed,  
are no longer your concern. Rest now.  
You are not your brother's bear's keeper.  
Think of the icy sea that takes him back,  
embraces him with a chill he knows as home,  
and how your brother will be warm and safe  
churning in his stomach without fear or intimacy.

Think of the oceans flowing from that sea  
as the icecaps melt and the waters rise  
over Bangladesh, where pink mother and daughter  
elephants carry the poorest family in the world to safety,  
which does not exist and by which is meant  
right up to India's electrified fence.

Think of the man, warm and asleep  
in the floating bed of gossamer and music  
that glows with his welcoming heat  
and how it is a spaceship  
you have tethered to while going for a walk  
where there is no up and down  
to see what aliens you can meet.  
But you find what you have always found—  
dumb rocks and faraway stars,  
too bright to think of anything else  
when you look to the horizons,  
but too far to touch  
as if your hands  
would know how to nuzzle them  
this star is my mother  
this star is my brother  
this star is my man  
smoothing out the covers over my exhaustion  
slowing my racing heart with his smell  
insisting that I rest and let life be sweet  
and hunt for my own happiness as well.

## “Flashback”

Don't disturb  
the thick gray  
slab of cloud  
smashing into  
the lost deer  
of my head  
darting across  
the highway  
of today and  
what didn't happen—  
not this time,  
nor quite this way;  
but the clouds  
are caught  
between mountains,  
a bowl of unreal,  
neither sky nor ground,  
and I am lost  
the more  
that I am found.

“They Too”

1.

Not by pain  
and not by pleasure  
but by reliving  
at your leisure.

So harsh at first,  
and then more gently,  
feel the thirst  
to understand—  
the agony,  
to take no stand.

There is no win  
in crying sin  
to blue bishops with guns  
who murder black sons.  
They rarely believe you.  
More rarely prove what's true  
for the value of proof  
that for us too remains aloof.

Nor in asking a friend  
to bring things to a talking end.  
Monsters rarely apologize,  
can't look you in the eyes,  
and are only men after all.  
You might make them feel small.

If they were to apologize,  
do you imagine the pain dies?  
Words don't undo deeds.  
Pain creates needs.  
From simple cruelty, complex misery.  
But weren't you always jittery?  
No one wants to pay  
for a pre-existing condition,  
or has much to say  
when he knows damn well  
he didn't have permission.  
In a perfect world except for this,  
where you are a rich princess  
and he is a bum,  
it would be dumb

to go after him for some crumb of your worth.  
 So it is that only you have the gold  
 to glue up your own cracks.  
 A powerlessness tax. Old.  
 Sorry. Nothing else to do.  
 Get out your golden glue.  
 Forget him. Do you.

2.

All you can do  
 is reinvent the wheel,  
 puzzling out what you think,  
 how you feel,  
 until you know what's true—  
 and then you know what you have to do.

You are not performing surgery on that scar.  
 Only ripping your own skin ajar.  
 You don't have to do it.  
 Scars don't make you unfit  
 to live among others—  
 scarred sisters, mothers, brothers.

They too are going to need someday  
 to simply put the past away,  
 and fail, and try again.  
 And fail better, worse, and better again.  
 Hit the Beckett button.  
 Quit being a shut-in.

There is no other way to live  
 and no point in dying young.  
 My love, that is the saddest mistake under the sun.  
 Wait awhile, whatever it takes.  
 Time does heal. Put on the breaks.

There is no better way to forgive  
 than accepting there is no win.  
 Those who take what they're not welcome to  
 who sin slipping in  
 to a home not theirs  
 not without tears  
 share this world and we can't change that.  
 We too do wrong;  
 that is a different song.

We are not gods, nor should we wish  
 to wipe the earth of those who miss  
 some steps in how to live  
 among others  
 without always having their druthers.  
 It is no harder than that,  
 although it is not easy.  
 Easier if you can love.  
 No one demands that, below or above.

3.

So wipe your face on the snotty matt,  
 leave your crossed and snarly old black cat,  
 don't beat yourself up for looking back.  
 It happened and it happens.  
 We walk on when we can,  
 and choose to fight when we might win—  
 choose to take a different stand.

Last night I wrote more in my dream  
 that disappeared with morning light.  
 I see you. I hear you. Me too.  
 These defeats are bigger than they seem, I know.  
 It is because your body has this sacred gleam.

Its simple needs and joys can be most you  
 can be most used  
 can cause such fright  
 when so abused.  
 But the same might  
 can help you let it go.

There is no other way  
 to say no  
 than saying yes.  
 It is not said.  
 But you must find a place  
 where it feels right  
 to lift up your dress.  
 Run fast and far  
 until you can run no more  
 and at last rest,  
 quite accidentally,  
 on the right chest.  
 Stop hiding in shame  
 your beautiful hair, your face, your breast.

4.

It is not popular to say,  
but they too need a way  
forward to live.  
It is not a gift  
you must give.  
Nor one you can withhold.  
You don't have to see him as a child  
to feel part of the same wild.  
Look at the crazed animal's tired eyes.  
Maybe being evil's getting old.  
There is no mending what was done.  
We will wake under the same sun.  
It is not fair.  
Nor rare.  
Look away. Breathe. Move on.



“Start from Starving”

I want to start from starving—  
clean, with no touch of man.  
Foraging for oysters and berries,  
rising with the light,  
drinking lake water and night.  
My skin and bones will shine  
with no softness and no shame.  
And you won’t ever touch me again.

“Doubting Tom”

*Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed;  
blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”—John, 20:29, NIV*

Bagladykiller, shopping cart caddy creeper, glad he  
feels so sure that he can shuffle me out like that—  
make me mentally homeless.

Shuffling along in my tattered thoughts,  
replying to things long said or unsaid but present,  
I would abide by dialogue more pleasant,  
stride less hesitant.

But all the streets  
and all the houses  
are blank when one turns to enter.

The doors don’t open  
and the intersections stop  
at ends of the world.

If there were others here—  
but there are not even cats—  
then maybe we could find a way  
out of the stranded fray.

Ways do not exist here.  
What you want is rest  
what you want is chaos  
what you want—who knows?

What you want is to have known  
before he showed you  
he was one of those.

“Men”

There are some tribes of men  
who show themselves when  
they have a chance to do  
what they want to you.  
And they do.

It is not all of them.  
Their tribe may not be very many.  
I have not counted.  
Oh, I have tried.  
But this realm is always unaccounted.

To face it  
is to forgive and forget  
his moment's whim.  
By which I mean:  
be done with him.

But if there are any left  
who are pretending to be a friend,  
let's skip the violation  
and make our timely end.

“On Harassment”

No where to go  
no one to tell  
this feminism thing  
isn't going so well.

## *One Step Forward*

“The Reasoning Tree”

*After William Blake's "A Poison Tree."*

I had a tangle in my head.  
I had some tea, and went to bed.  
When I awoke, a tree had sprung  
where before, confusion stung.

Its branches flung out pros and cons  
in lattices of rights and wrongs.  
And I rested in its shade,  
my decision all but made.

I had a tangle in my head.  
I wrestled with it, full of dread.  
And ripped out its seeds to sow  
all around my bungalow.

Soon I was walled in by weeds  
from too many idea seeds.  
Reason quickly grows surreal  
unless I first ask how I feel.

“One fish two fish dead fish new fish”

Just when I thought  
there was nothing more to say  
about the past—

that placeless play  
the protagonist of which has no place  
in this world, cannot be located in psychic space—

and that I let fly so many times, far and away,  
like a sedated bird collapsed around my neck,  
come to and hot to migrate—

just then she boomerangs to my heat.  
That must be it.  
If I could just cool down,  
she could get on with it,  
fly on for good,  
instead of coming back to roost—  
just when I felt safe and warm,  
just when my brain could process the harm and move on.

Instead the broken surface of time  
bubbles back out unbidden again—  
not with the old ones, but yet another fish  
hopping up from the water of the past.

And the albatross  
collapsed around my neck  
wakes and flies, ravenous,  
to scoop up again and again—  
one fish two fish dead fish new fish!

Each time the bird of prey  
flashing from dead to starving  
in an instant that insists rest was a lie,  
she was always bird-dogging on the sly,  
now laughing with her happy, hungry cry.

\*\*\*

The cry of gulls calls me outside to see the city  
and the disappearing kiss of a pink half-moon caught in the clouds  
wandering but not lonely above balconies and cranes.  
The bats flit and swoop while cool night falls  
so fast and full of grace.

The men, too, keep combing and swooping, finding unexploded munitions  
near hospitals and train stations,  
the hum of life living again on its face  
so strong  
though it isn't so long  
since the last Great War  
left many a bomb  
not so far from my door.  
I understand more.

Only when there's a forest fire, it's suddenly time to discuss  
what happened sometimes again and not again  
long ago on this terrain.  
It's not weakness to wait,  
to not know what happened where  
til you must look and find the evidence there,  
to live anew til something past makes present abate.  
By morning, the smoke has reached us.

It's the wind but still, I'm sorry for the magnet of misfortune  
that makes the stopped clock of the old sadness seem right twice a day,  
and these old bad brain ruts, with their dead tired boredom.  
The smoke comes home sometimes no matter what I do.  
If I could, I'd keep it far from you.  
We will ride new winds.



“Secrets”

I told a secret  
I thought would explode!  
But nothing much happened;  
it fizzled by the road.

No one much cared,  
or else no one got it.  
Or maybe they were waiting  
for a better secret—not it.

But it gave me a momentum,  
and I kept on telling truths  
that I had hidden in a holster,  
shapeless to eyeing sleuths.

They had taken on my warmth  
from being kept so near my skin.  
They had grown a part of me,  
their hard shapes pushing in.

Taken out, a strange thing happened  
in the cold air and bright light  
of other people looking,  
fearless, at their might.

Hardness melted into has-been—  
puttying their power  
to push in. Perhaps their only power  
was in pressing through my skin.

I kept a secret  
that I was meant to keep.  
It did not weigh me down  
or press into me deep.

I think it might be growing  
in the darkness of my heart,  
where if it should flame or flower,  
it won't tear me apart.

“Courage”

Take the files, pass them on, find a plane, and get on.  
Otherwise, they'll kill us all.  
A complex time. A simple call.  
Snowden and Ellsberg urge you on.

And what of the smaller rays of that form of resistance  
that tends to destroy the resistor's existence—  
shining light on might abused?  
Once I copied my own files  
I never thought could be so used  
and mailed them to the paper,  
never thinking I'd move 4,000 miles  
to walk away from that caper.

I do not think it made a difference.  
The papers ran  
across the land.  
Freeing the information did not touch the ignorance  
that had made injustice king.  
Only reopened the unhealed sting.

If you choose to speak  
although it's hard and hurts,  
first commit to turn the other cheek  
if no one in the crowd converts.

I do not regret trying.  
Only that, as martyrdoms go,  
mine was so unsatisfying.  
I told a truth no one wanted to know.

"Emptiness"

I left with three full back-up drives on me.  
When I got away, they were all empty.  
It's just as well.  
There's no one to tell.  
And perhaps always it is better  
to start a blank letter  
when events interrupt  
in a manner abrupt  
and what you were saying  
is trumped by surveying  
new terrain.  
Let your mind deplane.  
It's a new Old World to join again.

“Mamie”

*For Mamie Brown.*

She corrected him  
until he stopped her  
doing it again,  
and listened then  
from the corner  
while he spoke  
of his innocence  
and death-defying strength.  
Later, he killed her  
in their kitchen.

“Tell-Tale Hair”

Until it's grown out  
so you can order:  
“Cut it here,”  
it seems not your own,  
like dyed and damaged hair.  
You can't see where the lines go,  
like a messy ball of yarn.  
With just a thread and needle,  
it's impossible to darn.

Maybe, you think,  
it's someone else's job to do the work  
of sensing what can go,  
and what is more than just a quirk—  
what to snip off in the sink,  
and what is essential flow.

You know better.  
Now that you can feel  
your own, natural softness again,  
and see your own, brown down;  
now that you can pull it back  
into a tail again at last—  
you can tell the story better,  
and leave it in the past.

“Welcome Home”

*After Mary Oliver's "Members of the Tribe."*

you said when at last I lit my fire  
on the dark planet  
of our tribe.

Shall I name it?  
The name carries a basket of shadows.

Pour them out.

\*\*\*

Look again.  
They are not snakes  
slithering closer and closer  
in the light.  
We are not aliens  
whether or not  
you like our planet.  
There is no asylum  
for the different:  
we cannot be cured.

But most of all  
for me it matters  
that the reason I could not mend  
the reason I failed again and again  
in that good and human work  
was that  
I am me.

And if you persist  
in trying to cure me  
until I am like you,  
you will kill me.

\*\*\*

That time  
I should have died  
someone  
held my hair  
held my hand  
prayed with me  
in bed  
as I waited.

It was Plath  
who preferred  
the library.  
It was Millay  
who wanted all of the fuck  
and none of the fuss.  
It was Dickinson  
who stayed home.

In the study  
a man with no more manhood  
was painting an apple  
with cyanide.

\*\*\*

Later,  
on the level red shore,  
by riverbeds long dry  
of blood and tears,  
the others were waiting;

and when they found me,  
or I them—  
I no longer pretend to know which,  
for it was my own planet,  
but I was wandering and lost—  
there was such dancing.

The beasts,  
they took me in.  
They fed me  
fresh berries and fish,  
the brutes,  
and laid me down  
to rest  
at home at last.

This was the work of being seen.

This had nothing to do with chess  
or memorizing  $\pi$  to 27 digits  
because  $e$  begins so beautifully 2.718...

Meanwhile  
Jefferson, looking away,  
kept revising Monticello;  
Carroll stammered, it is said,  
only with adults,  
preferring Alice's company.

On that other dark planet  
of the past that is an asylum  
locked to us  
and holding  
some  
of our kin  
whether they will or no,  
a young surgeon who couldn't love well and knew it  
was scrubbing the smokey bar  
from his sure and drunken hands  
to save life after precious life  
while forgetting his own family.

You know that  
often when we are very smart,  
we are also very stupid.

\*\*\*

It is not for me to forgive  
the shock therapy,  
the vibrator,  
or the castration.  
But as I grow milder,  
having put down the scissors  
and let my hair grow long again  
to see its natural shapes  
that I was only frightened  
into cutting,

as I grow wilder,  
and the forest grows around me  
along with the fire  
and its shadows,



I forgive  
 what is mine  
 to forgive.

\*\*\*

And Oliver,  
 whom I come behind  
 listening  
 for advice

but who did not know  
 the name

(drop the silly basket, woven full of holes—  
 see its dark shapes spill, the shadows billowing  
 in the great winds of all we do not know)

of Mozart's strange faces,  
 the long-unwanted love of Yeats,  
 or how Michelangelo  
 would finally pull off  
 his own skin  
 along with  
 his dirty dogskin stockings.

She knows many things.  
 How to love the world, for example.  
 How to breathe each day a poem in thanks.

May she live to be a hundred years old.

“The Broken Shell”

Have you ever cut up a sheet of paper  
to see how far its curls, unfurled, could reach?  
The sheet's a canvas,  
but the bits become a ream of ribbon.

Or cracked an egg instead of poking holes  
in the ends to make an ornament?  
The unbroken shell isn't all it's cracked up to be.  
Cracked into little bits, the eggshell reaches farther  
than the whole shell ever could.

You are not broken  
when your life becomes more ribbon than canvas  
you who were not meant to be an ornament  
you who were meant to reach farther unfurled.

“More Death/More Acceptance”

The body turns like seasons—  
winter first, because—  
winter has its reasons.

1.

Brittle branches cracking  
spread their dark crumbs like a sickness.  
All the spreading blackening  
comes inside, taking over with its thickness.  
Unbidden pulsing, bodies disinterred,  
skeletons laid to waste and refrozen in winter.

2.

Every year it comes to this,  
the cycle of dying and reawakening bliss.  
Pinkness bursts inside and out,  
cherry trees and laughing out loud.  
Old love, new love, messing about.  
All the poison turns to flowers—  
all the dead give back their powers.

And now I know what bees are worth,  
their sweetness and their buzzing mirth.  
Flowers and grasses rise up to itch  
and scratch my itch.  
Sweetness explodes me.  
Nothing can hurt.  
Or, at least I'm free  
to feel the blow and still assert—  
spring is here.  
Summer near.  
Winters past  
need not a tear.

3.

Let living soothe the dying.  
Ecstasy heals without  
(so very much failing and) trying.

## *Relations*

“Set A Place”

I set a place for the child with no place to go.  
 Set a place for the unloved lover to know.  
 And a place for the wanderer safer anywhere but home.  
 I set a place for the explorer who names stars alone.  
 Set another for my brother who will deny me til he's dead.  
 And a place for the answer birds circling my head.

They're going to answer any question, whatever I ask.  
 Why no home for some, whether the world is ours, or whose, for what task.  
 “Set a place and time, we'll answer anything.  
 We'll answer anything you ask. But which question?”  
 Yes, yes, I said—  
 which question. Which?

Set a place for the question  
 that rings right and whole  
     has many answers to try  
     lets you see your own face  
     hear your own voice in reply.

“My Granddad’s Coffee”

*For Ely J. Sack.*

Tell me how my granddad took his coffee.  
Not how he was blacklisted—that much, the archive said.  
He fought Franco and Fascism alongside blacks—  
and so to America, he was dead.

Tell me where he went after the war,  
why he came back with a bum leg and no wife.  
Tell me how the Communist freedom-fighter veteran  
cum accountant, had children—four? five?  
How he lived out his quiet life.

Tell me how he talked to my grandma, his only wife.  
Did he treat her like a chair to be used, as is fair  
when you pay her room and board?  
Or did he love her like a songbird  
who brightens up the morning with her free and happy voice?

Tell me how they moved in the kitchen  
when they thought no one could see.  
Tell me why the FBI had “just” destroyed his files—  
if they had existed—  
when they got a records request from me.

The university archive with his papers is all that remains.  
Someone’s government (not mine) destroyed another record of his life—  
where he went, when, with whom; how he talked and moved,  
how he loved; how he took his coffee.

In his archived postcards home, he confessed he was afraid to go—but went.  
He had trained as an accountant first, in night classes—just to pay the rent.  
In Spain, they put him in officer school—quick. But he got bored with classes;  
returned to machine gun fire, friends, and freezing rain’s lashes.

He was their resident optimist as Teruel fell—  
said without their gear, the Fascists couldn’t fight a leaky well.  
He missed haircuts. Pictures show his mane grown out,  
my widow’s peak arching over his smile throughout.

He missed ham, so I guess he wasn’t practicing?  
Loved learning Spanish, filling his notes with scribbling—  
*no hay muchachas—no hay nada—el frente popular—no tengo cambio—  
mucho malo mucho bueno mucho calor mucho hero.*



“Poem for My Father”

How do you survive this year,  
being so long ago and far away?  
Do you steep by night in the same old fear?  
Do you read by stale sunlight in the dragging day?  
Do your sweaters snag with dogears  
like calendars discarded?  
Does your head ignite and plunge  
like a dogfighter bombarded?  
Have your dregs settled into rock formations  
battered by the sea?  
Half the time I’ve thought of you,  
have you thought of me?



“Wearing My Father’s Family Ring”

around my neck every day because my hands  
are too small for a ring that’s a man’s

(or a woman’s, in fact—

I’m as small as that)

makes me feel like I’m loved and accepted

although

I do not really know

if he loves me or not

having met him the once

since I was more than a tot.

I like more that it’s a man’s ring

like that means anything

like I, too, can read the Torah

and therefore know more than a child

like I’d know Jerusalem from the wild.

I like most that my smile has changed

since I could feel unashamed

of existing

although

something sad is still persisting

while he’s doing well

since my mother fell ill

and it never occurs to him to take care of her still.

“Memento Mater”

What does it matter in the end?  
 We have nothing more to say to each other.  
 I meant what I was afraid to hurt you saying  
 and only sang to the upright, my steady mother:  
 I miss you too much to love you.  
 What have you done with my friend?

Still it took time and cruelty  
 first to accept and then to see  
 how the illness took you from yourself, and me.  
 Years of sleeping alone, being a good daughter.  
 Your taking my income as your own, throwing the screaming cat on me nights,  
 pretending to call the police knowing I'd never let you have the frights  
 of losing that fight after trying to explain yourself in the light.  
 (Unless you had some worse plan  
 to deliver me to the man?)

You knew then that I would leave to save you.  
 That I had no will to live, would meet every demand,  
 be too weak and yet too protective to make a stand.  
 You fooled me  
 and it (slowly) made me free.

Did something in you decide to drive me away,  
 so I'd start a better life than if I'd stayed?  
 Or did you know about the insurance, and want me dead?  
 Did you simply go out of your head?  
 The plaque on your brain that causes missteps—  
 does it also cause your unhappiness?  
 Did you never fall in love?  
 Is it too late?  
 Did I only imagine that I knew you, kind-of?  
 I'll lose the chance to ask if I wait.

But I cannot know, and cannot help you go  
 where you don't want to go.  
 So I abandoned you like my father and moved on.  
 No point in trying to sing you your song.  
 I'm too tired of your lies  
 to talk about the weather, your old wounds, your failing eyes.

“The Reverse Antigone”

Given a choice between law and family,  
she chose family and death. What loyalty.  
But I have done the reverse Antigone.

Tho you could say I wanted only  
what she wanted. Lonely birds,  
not leading but leaving our herds.

Everyone must break away.  
With enough strain, no stone can stay.  
The spirit spits, startles its demands:

Breathing justice, not a book of rules.  
Messy story, not stoney stands.  
Faithless rogues, not jealous fools.

Sure, I'd rather have a standing city.  
I'd rather have a standing army.  
Not this choice between truth and home.

But I, too, know the king's decree.  
And I'm going to bury  
who I'm going to bury.

“Of the Surviving Family”

Of my family there were four known survivors,  
only one of whom could be reached for comment.  
Thus I am up all night, writing and rewriting the story.  
I am pained that I cannot change the world.

Scientists say the wind events were unlike any they'd ever seen,  
but may be or become the new normal. In my motherland, other scientists say  
the winds are fine, but the fuel is dry: blame the forest for its burning.  
The house where I grew up until the fire is still standing.

Insurance brokers projected the sea level rise decades ago,  
and refused to underwrite the marriage. Other salesmen claimed  
the market is absolutely stable and responsive to demand.  
My mother still keeps the waterlogged ring and name she never liked.

Stronger storms come every year—hurricanes, rains, and floods.  
My father who I met again after a lifetime, a smart and funny man,  
could not withstand them. Turned into a tree and was broken.  
One of his arms smashed into the attic and was thrown away.

At night I think of the world in flames, whether a weird new wind blows,  
why my father builds a new house on the most-doomed coast,  
inviting with his remaining arm wide open a newly normal storm.  
My brother and I both changed our names and blew away.

We have survived each other, but only as ourselves.  
Not as a family. My brother became a feather, light and easy to flight.  
My mother became a mouse, stealing crumbs and ready to bite.  
My father who was a laughing tree became an acorn; and, for now, a tree again.

I became what I have always been. A wolf hunting for prey and kin.

“Silver Tarp”

*For Arjen.*

When we first heard you were missing, I lit a candle like we used to do,  
and prayed and tried to talk to you. In my daydream that sleepless night,  
you comforted me. You were resting, you said, on a soft bed  
under a starry sky beneath a shimmering silver tarp.

And I thought leaves, thought we'd find you  
half-buried in late summer silver and green,  
a sharp hiking stick or something metal jutting up like a flag  
shining through some non-lethal muck,  
with two broken legs and only just out of water.  
Then they said you had bought a folding kayak.  
Later a fisherman found your things washed out to sea—  
boat, paddle, ID. We do not know what happened.

But now I think the shimmering silver tarp with which you comforted me,  
its warm blanket enveloping your warm embrace and steady face  
when I cried out shaking your shoulder to know where you were and come,  
must be not water and its grave,  
but only time rippling over—  
time that shines, warming, even in Nordic nights.  
Time that you will take to come clearer,  
to fight and fly through some awful danger, cold as death,  
and finally then come nearer again to the friends  
who would have wanted to wrap you warm and dry  
in our arms, in our homes, in our hearts  
if ever you should have fallen.  
We believe in you.

*Nuremberg, 2027*

“Witness:           Testimony”

Ink:                blot  
human:           error  
true:              lies?

What was is not what is, not  
the same order  
the same breath  
the same terror.  
I can tell you,  
but you won't hear the same cries.  
I can't make you believe me.  
Can't make you look me in the eyes.

What:              if  
confusion:        proved  
verity?           Verified  
facts—            authenticity?

Any account, video, email is a riff  
on one side of the full facts grooved  
into some holy carbon of who lied, who died.  
Traumatic stress is not a synchronicity.

Go:                slow.  
Know:             most  
can't be the ones  
won't be the ones  
won't even try  
to bear witness that way.  
Not because they'd lie.  
Nor because they saw no guns  
heard no shots  
found no casings in the sand.  
But because the scales of justice weigh  
against reliving death  
against wasting your breath  
against taking the stand.  
You cannot take another strafe.  
We're going somewhere safe.  
Take my hand.

“where’s Olaf?”

*after e.e. cummings’ “i sing of Olaf glad and big”/on the CIA’s silencing of daniel jones and the torture report during President Obama’s war on whistleblowers.*

i search for Olaf who has balls  
whose clearest call rang out the truth:  
a whistleblowing inside sleuth

his dearest colleagues heard his calls  
(we tortured folks, and now must pay)  
and hid his work from light of day;  
but—though a snowglobe full of shit  
did fall(first waking him with threats  
and then his coms directing slant),  
gaslit so ask for help he can’t  
and everyone who knew him jets  
to get out of the way the hit  
and further under buses throw,  
while courts and scammers steal his dough  
to keep him locked into some grind—  
Olaf (seeing his country find  
the greater part of justice won  
in push and kick from up above)  
responds, without returning shove  
“I will not hide what you have done”

White House Chief of Staff and all his ilk  
cursed and steamed the lines out of their silk

but—though all kinds of special force  
(and pride in showing no remorse)  
interrogated, hacked, and showed  
him pictures of his own brains blown  
until his family were sure  
the man they loved had died before  
this puzzled person who sings on—  
“the truth is its own clarion”;  
but everyone who lives has lied  
and so they drove into his side  
a thousand shivs of his own fibs with taunt  
“no one believes a liar’s song”  
our hero, feeling himself trapped  
although by the humanity  
that led him first alone to see  
what’s right from wrong, felt his spine snapped



Christ(if you kept a copy safe)  
i pray to hear;and Olaf,too

come out into the light and tell  
the story of your living hell  
unless you died:like troubles do.

“Epitaph for Climate Change Deniers”

*After Paul Celan’s “Death Fugue.”*

This is an epitaph for Dubya and Blair,  
who croaked over here after killing over there.

This is the spot  
where Trump  
was shot.

The Kochs got away.  
What did you expect?  
Another day,  
we’re trying  
Exxon’s chief exec.

Til then we’re in a slump.  
Done with spectacular lying  
and live firings where no one is crying.

Black milk of morning, Paris—  
he strove to embarrass  
the world into climate inaction,  
got an equal and opposite reaction.

Tens of millions dead,  
hundreds displaced.  
Chopped off his own head—  
clan and country disgraced.

A moment of silence for the old world order  
where interests meant barons and barbing the border.

“The Poet’s Prayer—Nuremberg, 2027”

*Our Father who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name.*  
Although time is said to lessen  
pain, war crimes make enduring shame.

*Thy kingdom come.  
Thine will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.*  
Was it 30,000 at Dachau? Reckon  
with the uncertainty:  
God knows, but not you or me.

*Give us this day our daily bread,  
and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.*  
You’re either with or against us,  
the President said.  
Two hundred thousand wound up dead.  
Iraqis—so they get free passes,  
whose lies and insistence sped  
the world to war?  
And what for?

*And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.*  
What should be the shame of a nation—  
a war of aggression, torture, rendition—  
barely leads to upheaval,  
while the powers that be  
are still the powers that were.  
Four hundred thousand dead Syrians,  
and you voted for Her?  
What rule of law means is a blur.

*For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power; and the glory,  
for ever and ever.*  
*Amen.*  
War criminals’ kingdom  
is the whole church and state.  
They’re teaching the story  
of “we *had to*”—prostrate  
to whichever interest is paying.

Now and then,  
one can see straight  
through to where the long arc  
of history has bent, is bending, breaks  
the unbending loyalty of the clan.  
Justice has coaxed the wild animal of man  
into pawing two feet up to stand, roaring in the darkness:  
I am your own voice crying in the wilderness  
I am your only choice.

In the moment it takes  
to cry out, all the world is praying.  
It is a hopeful thing, how we wish  
for someone more powerful than this,  
more just than us.  
Though many have died thus.

“Sympathy for God”

I warned you.  
 I let Hitler do it.  
 How much clearer could I get?  
 Six millions Jews, the whole Me-damned schtick.  
 An order of magnitude or worse comes next, and quick—  
     between melting ice-caps and this new fascist shit.

I’m not angry—just disappointed.  
 I’ll always be your Father—that’s anointed.  
 When I asked Cain where Abel was, he pointed  
     at the murderer asking, “Am I my brother’s keeper?”—broken, disjointed,  
     feeling himself both seen and unseen: marked.  
     That’s why I had him live: to feel known again, remarked.

War started then.  
 You’ve been at it since.  
 You’re only human.  
 You’re only as human as I made you, and My love for you is  
     lose and win  
     wash and rinse  
     Mengele und von Neumann.  
 You’re only as human as I gave you, and My gift to you was  
     the living world  
     the kitten curled  
     the die tossed, never hurled.

I could have sent more angels,  
     but you hunt everything with wings.  
 I could have leaked more cables,  
     but you didn’t read most of those things.  
 I so loved the world, I sent My only begotten Son.  
 You killed Him, as expected—but now, everyone?

And yes, I expect you to keep faith if you’ve got it, and keep on.  
     Even as the last dying pairs stumble blindly for an ark that won’t float.  
     As the last billionaires restock their cellar, range, and moat.  
     As the unfaithful and unkind point at history and gloat.

They also serve who only  
     stand and witness  
     stay outside  
     walk on.

Be glad (but not too glad) I only give you so many suns.  
 Be glad (but be not proud) I made you love flowers and hate guns.  
 Be glad (be very glad) I was never fond of nuns.

“Dilemma”

*After Linda Pastan and Peter Singer.*

You’ve heard the riddle:  
An old lady and a Rembrandt, trapped in the middle  
of a museum fire. You can only save one.  
Situation: dire. Which?

Or the one about trollies:  
One will hit a larger number of people  
if you do nothing but look on,  
and a smaller number if you act.  
Will you flip the switch?

What neither set-up tells you is this:  
If you do nothing, the old lady, the painting,  
and all the people on all the tracks  
will probably never like your art anyway.  
Their tolerance for you is waning.  
Just as you feared,  
they think your clothes are weird,  
you have too much (or too little) to say,  
your hair sits too dirty or stands too wild,  
your choice far too selfish for (not) having a child,  
and your taste in men (and women)  
scandalous. At worst they hate,  
at best they judge—everything you are.

Don’t let the dilemma frustrate  
your natural faculty for eating life’s lemons.  
Switch or no, the trollies don’t take you far  
enough. None of these people  
and no painting on the wall  
will talk you off the mat,  
walk you through changing a flat,  
or be there for you at all.  
Only you can save yourself,  
which is really the question:  
How will you go on, having made  
unforgivable mistakes  
like any human being off the shelf?  
Who will you have faith in,  
when faith is not an artefact of your fates?  
Cut the crap. Save the cat.

“Bad American Dreams”

I have bad dreams of America.  
 Mine are bad American dreams.  
 You might wonder if it's hysteria,  
 but compare it to other regimes—  
 where war criminals at least have to hide.

In my bad dreams of America,  
 I'm telling someone who might care  
 everything that has happened—as if they're unaware  
 that America is not America.

It was a crime  
 every time.  
 But the victim  
 of the system  
 should have worked harder,  
 popped pills for more ardor,  
 taken night classes,  
 rejected the masses,  
 flossed more like Oprah,  
 learnt underwater yoga,  
 prayed to a harsher God,  
 been dispatched a kinder squad.

Kindness is not the law anywhere.  
 It is the regime children learn  
 to put on like their underwear,  
 one leg at a time and every day.

Last night I dreamt  
 I had pulled out my right eyebrow in my sleep.  
 My tongue discovered I was missing teeth.  
 “The war is getting to you,” you said.  
 “What war, and how did you know?”  
 I smiled and smoothed over what was left.

There are bad dreams of America,  
 and then there are bad American dreams.  
 Though I've had both many times now,  
 bad American dreams are the worse, it seems,  
 cos when you wake up  
 you ain't overthrown the worse regimes.

“Two More Sides of Silence”

*After Linton Kwesi Johnson's "Two Sides of Silence."  
On Jeronimo Yanez's murder of Philando Castile.*

You won't hear from the good cops, because  
carrying a gun makes you afraid, and fear makes you dumb.  
Don't think Jeronimo Yanez was the only one  
to fear the fearful citizen who said he had a gun.  
Although Philando followed instructions to the letter of the law,  
the color of his skin outweighed whatever jurors saw.  
Things do not speak for themselves—people speak.  
*Res ipsa loquitur*: black life didn't matter to a lone juror.

You won't see the good cops marching in the streets  
against racist police, because most Captains are still whiter than their beats.  
You won't notice the good cops eating jerk chicken  
on the corner with neighbors getting to know each other,  
because a program is telling them where to stand  
as a supervisor gives his monthly arrests demand.  
The front-seat side of silence matters,  
but the back-seat matters more.

You won't hear from the little girl in the back-seat  
when she finishes screaming after years  
of nights spent up in terror and in tears  
in the dream where sound explodes up front  
while her own sound does not come,  
her own legs do not move on command,  
and her own life flashes, so small and quick,  
before her tight-clenched eyes  
opening to greet  
the killers' unignorable demand  
to join the world outside  
the childhood that has just died.

The little girl who's already spoken, her witness undisputed:  
“Mom, please stop cussing and screaming 'cause I don't want you to get shot.”  
A screaming mother muted by her baby's love, undiluted;  
a child who's just seen a man executed.



“The Shock Doctrine”

The shock  
is not  
what got  
the block,  
but how  
the flock,  
distraught  
—or not—  
looks on  
and on now.  
We feel  
the coming  
blow, but  
steel as if  
numbing.  
No. What?  
This can't be,  
—isn't yet—  
happening.  
When it comes,  
shock still numbs.  
Power's spree  
collects the debt  
of our disbelief  
that evil can be  
as bad  
maddening  
saddening  
pain-happy  
advantage-snappy  
and as glad  
for evil  
as it seems.

“It Takes A Flock”

*After Lucille Clifton and Walter Benjamin.*

It takes a flock to feed the monstrous child of history.  
 It takes a wild bird of breast to nurse her, wings beating  
 the air above the smoldering ashes  
 flower buds of fingers springing up as she grows  
 as if clasping her tiny shoulder with its dead oceans  
 as if the world now could hold her  
 as if one dead mother could nurse another's ghost.

It takes a warming world to move the flock.  
 Migration on migration swarms ever more wetland  
 of what was once frozen shut  
 to all but the harshest wilds,  
 although the droughts are harsher  
 although the fires will grow  
 although, if they live, our grandchildren  
 won't believe it possible that we—  
     we who could act—  
     we know.

It takes a village to heat the world.  
 The whole organism of mankind  
 that must so much make  
 and longs to live—  
 that has wanted also always to die, destroy, be destroyed.

And the great world bonfire of our mistakes,  
 gathering like a single holocaust at the feet of the angel  
 whose face is turned forever to the past  
 as he hurtles toward the future—  
 what of it

when the smoke  
 of our debris  
 rises above his head,  
 and the great wings  
   fixed open  
   in the wind  
   blowing  
   violently  
   from  
     Paradise

can

hold

no

more?

“The Ten Commandments of Loss”

An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind.  
A boot on the face takes care of your kind.  
Same starting gun for starting from difference places?  
Or a more complex machine for making fair and equal races?  
Death penalties for murder aren't proven to deter.  
Damages for violence can't repair what you were.  
The Angel of History cannot awaken the dead  
    and make whole what's been smashed.  
The blindest justice of amnesia denies  
    what's been slashed, has been slashed.  
If you find and tell the truth, alone—  
    what good's a sleuth who speaks to no one?  
Nothing left for justice but going on?  
    Accept justice as injustice—and you've “won”?

“What if there were poetic justice?”

Would there still be police to address mere crime,  
if we could get at the real thing all of the time?  
Would blacklists even need to be found  
for their authors to rot underground?  
Would eagles descend like for Telemachus  
to scratch out the faces of those who mock us?  
Or would the world look much like this,  
except some people just wouldn't exist?

“Yearning for the Birth of Athena”

You know how it is when  
you lay with the goddess  
of lulz and wisdom,  
and have second thoughts.

So you swallow the bitch—  
the available plan B being murder.  
But instead of dying,  
she’s in there splitting your skull.

Or it feels that way.  
So you have your closest friends  
open your head with an axe.  
We’ve all been there.

The fully armored, battle-crying  
goddess leaping out. The mind of god  
becoming woman  
with a shout.

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Now where’s preggo Zeus  
when we need him most?  
Why are the fighting, fucking, meddling gods  
waiting to jump in and save the coast?

Did they get distracted  
by their social media stats?  
Are they working their second jobs?  
Are they busy watching cats?

Or did we anger them so much  
that they left for good this time?  
Never again to grant a foolish wish for golden touch?  
Nor to settle injustice itself—instead of crime?

Stop waiting for your hero  
to pop out of some pompous dude.  
Or the chances will be zero  
that we’re anything but screwed.

***Part Three:***  
***This New Life of Love***

## *Vagabonding Anew*



“Prelude”

It will not do  
to speak of the black shoe  
without any mention  
of the foot's intention.

It will not be enough  
to get tough  
on other people  
under your story's steeple.

But the bare foot  
offends some.  
The busy world's soot  
blocks the righteous sun.

There were so many to fight  
in the fog of war  
we forgot  
it doesn't feel good to be right  
when you can't fix things anymore.

But you've got  
some new shoes,  
your good old feet,  
make-up over the blues,  
and a chance  
to make a new romance.  
That's a story, too.

If we're going to tell the bitter,  
then we have to tell the sweet.  
It's not all calculation, nor pain  
when power and desire meet.  
We must speak of love again.

“Take This Life”

The prior owner barely used it,  
only took it weekly to the grocery store for years.  
It will run for miles; all the records are legit.  
The upholstery is clean, and undamaged by tears.  
The windshield-wipers stick a little, just a little bit.  
It runs a little hot when you tank up unleaded fears.  
But it will run for miles more, with drivers' hands that fit.  
And take the turns that come—bends and brakes and veers.

Take this life and drive it hard, coast to shining coast.  
Take it on the ferry, and to the furthest desert outpost.  
Share it with a friend in need, but always take it back.  
Paint it anyway you want—polka-dotted, rainbow, black.  
Just use it well, without reserve; that's what it needs the most.  
To be driven all it can, to be moved to the utmost.  
Not to rust in a garage, or idle on one boring track.  
But to be used for all it can, despite a little clunk and clack.

“Three Sisters”

*After Adrienne Rich and Anton Chekhov.*

My three sisters sit on a warm city curb  
in shards of summer sun.  
They could chase it with us, but they'll never come.

They stretch out in their desires for more, for some foreign shore—  
then draw back in fear from what they want to be,  
as if not believing they have a right to be, much less to be happy.

One wears black, seeks light and love, confesses all, cries easily,  
longs but does not: act, hope, pray to some great director above.  
She is drinking away Moscow, has not the gall to go, makes her heart measly.

Another wears red, but feels her young blood already faded, marriage jaded.  
She is giving away the wardrobe and the rooms, keeping papers graded.  
She is too practical for Moscow, feels her time already traded.

My third sister is a yellow flame, pale and bright.  
Her happy animal body knows how to dance in the light.  
But she plans to refuse its demands, force herself farther from delight.

As if to get to Moscow, we must only work, denying sleep and play—  
instead of tanking up the camper van and taking off one day.  
Or climbing aboard a ship and reveling in the spray.

Knowing when to say what we want and take what we need.  
Knowing that pressing on doesn't have to cut and bleed.  
Knowing that when our own shores have grown wrong,

then our own shores are no longer ours.  
So at last leaving for Moscow becomes within our powers.

“Behind the moon and under the sea”

Behind the moon and under the sea,  
the seasons change quite differently.  
The currents run quick with no light to bend.  
The leaves don't fall and the blooms don't end.  
How does the rose know when it's been a year?  
Or the hunter when it's time to seek the deer?

Under the sea and behind the moon,  
the dish runs away with the fork and its spoon.  
Some things are different, but some are the same.  
Dishes and forks still play their old game.  
Singers drink songs from the water, and sing.  
Artists take in and pour out everything.

Builders build houses and homes and walls.  
Farmers grow food, and make crow-scaring dolls.  
People make friends and babies and foes.  
Friends share friends and stories and woes.  
Behind the moon and under the sea,  
when we choose we can live quite happily.

“We were paradise”

We were olive trees  
we were stark blue seas  
we were nearer to Greece than I’ve ever been  
and you tasted the olives and said it’s a sin  
how empires have changed so much since then.

We were rosemary breeze  
we were soft pink flowers  
we were walking on blisters and talking for hours.  
And I bought you apricots like you had at your aunt’s,  
and no one on the beach could be bothered with pants.

What was the world while we were paradise?  
What glaciers melted while we were fresh ice?  
What forests burned down while we played nice?  
What cities flooded? What droughts drilled what dirt?

Though we missed many train-wrecks—  
failed to feel all the hurt—  
we were trees and seas and needed breeze.  
We were flowers and hours and apricots on the beach.  
When we meet again, in peacetime or in breach,  
I’ll call up this you if you call up this me.

“Pula, Istria”

*Croatia*

Here is pink!  
and there is purple!  
Begonia bound  
and gate crepe myrtle.  
Olive upon olive tree  
to cook and lather you and me.  
Vineyards for the sweetest wine—  
and of the ending, not a sign  
but these stone ruins on the hill.

(No reason, either, crossing this  
pagan blue sky they touch and kiss.)  
This morning, we can build them still.  
The Roman bridge, the Gothic arch,  
and its devout and sure démarche.

But we had better write it down  
in some form other than a town,  
before that old collective rot  
starts in  
and we forget again  
how it had been  
to build  
(and be fulfilled  
by) what they built  
(with trig, not guilt),  
after we lose  
the muse  
of what  
we got.

“Outside Bologna”

Chocolate goats, the littlest one  
frolicking just outside the fencing—  
plush donkeys intermingling with  
fat white geese and black chickens—  
fresh milk and eggs for the restaurant  
next door. A gray and white cat smiles  
out from the open-air kitchen.  
Summer feeds him, the grill fire,  
the fields of lemon verbena  
flowering on and on across the hills.  
It’s rustic to city folk like us,  
but this is civilization—  
feeding so much.

“Weitur”

From the undulating Elba  
to the port-pocked Rhine,  
we ferry our camper  
down to the sea  
in no time.

We find the dunes  
just as we left them,  
swirling soft under the moon.  
And lie down in summer grasses,  
and float on soon.

Where we'll be next time we wake,  
neither of us knows.  
Free in love and time and place,  
to go where the wind blows.

So soft the curling dunes at night,  
so sweet your pillow-chest.  
I've never played so long and hard,  
or gotten so much rest.



“Road like Fire”

What is it about the road that is so like fire?  
Staring into it, watching the landscapes flicker,  
I fall into the trance of night  
like a cat’s liquid pounce into a lap.  
Like a hunter caught in a larger cat’s trap—  
happy, hot, swaying lap.

“Bathing in the River”

*Nature Reserve of Mas Larrieu, Argelès-sur-Mer*

The water was cold, but I had to wash my hair.  
We'd been driving for days, though we weren't going anywhere.  
It was green and sandy with a reedy forest by the sea  
where a passerby could giggle, and squat down for a pee.  
You coaxed me in with kisses and the current swept us out.  
And it looked the same to you as when your father caught a trout.

The water was cold, but I had to wash my hair.  
We'd been driving for days, though we weren't going anywhere.  
Then we lay in the sun shivering, and dried—went right back in.  
And a stranger with his dog teased us that he saw a fin.  
All that stillness, all that gleam! The water felt like home.  
But when we reached the outlet, we couldn't hold our own.

The water was cold, but I had to wash my hair.  
We'd been driving for days, though we weren't going anywhere.  
Next time we'll sleep right by the river, blanketed on the shore.  
And I'll ask the handsome stranger with his dog to stay some more.  
The water was so cold, I could barely wash my hair,  
and the river swept us both out to sea right there.

# *Sweet Home*

## “Bicycling”

My flying Dutchman is a happy little boy  
riding his bike with no hands, pure joy.  
Flapping his arms to fly higher and higher.  
The man is steel, down, and flickering fire.  
I eat his flame and breathe his current.  
Anyone asks if we were here—we weren't.  
He laughs at me, keeping up but still holding on,  
and I love him for it—my mocking swan.

“Home”

Sweet, soft, clean, and hot—  
too tired to remember what I’ve washed,  
too happy to care. This is how we get there.  
Home, into each other, every night.  
Home, still inside you, you still inside me,  
every sweet morning in the early light.

I want to live where this peace flows  
over you from inside me  
and over me from within—  
over and around us like rushing water,  
the impossible stream gushing from the stone.

Sleeping and waking in the rhythms of your breath  
in the rhythms of my breath  
in the flow of our dreams—  
never bursting the seams of time with rush and such.  
Free to be at home together,  
free to follow the sun, making our own warming weather.  
You feed my gentleness, and my fire  
with a love so listening, my savage squire.

“Home Again”

Your chest holds my face  
like a tub of tea—sweet, calming, and craved  
like a hot shower—warming my wearied wake  
and like a favorite poem,  
the cadence of your breath saying again and again  
how beautiful the world is and how it is my home.

“What You Did”

Love has been good for my face.  
My sister admires the softness you put into place.

Love has been good for my breasts  
that only felt shame before your caress.

Love has been good for my lips—  
no longer chapped and bleeding: fixed.

Your love is a long walk freeing my mind.  
We go on and on, easy, feeling sublime.

Your love is a warm nest hatching my heart.  
I want to flock together, whole with your part.

Your love is like    air, water, light, sweet sky blue.  
Perhaps I could live without it                      but why would I want to?

## “How”

What a beautiful and well-loved face of mine,  
that you have softened—given time.  
How clear my eyes that laugh at you.  
How sweet the mouth that opens, too.  
Lips parting to smile, kiss, sing.  
Arms opening to you, to life, to everything.



“In your office, far away”

I hear you whistling,  
that’s all it takes—  
my body smiles  
in its warming ways.

## “Ripple”

I ripple around you  
like a stone skipping into a bay.  
A small, smooth stone  
that makes sparks rise from the water.  
A restful bay that erodes little,  
wrestles not with the stormy sea.  
Except when it does,  
pulsing you into me.

“Earthquakes”

or shake shock aches I have known and made  
 or been made in our light, our shade—  
 something with wood and flowers  
 carved by hand, the sweetest of your powers.

I’d like to be up on a stage in an exhibit  
 showing how intricate  
 painstaking  
 thorough  
 and complete  
 the shattering  
 spurting  
 spouting  
 replete  
 but hungry work of art—the bursting flowers.

But I need you to show the best  
 and I’m more showy than the rest  
 so my fantasy, a fantasy remains  
 although I practice showing you  
 my wings in flight  
 over bursting liquid and light  
 in the exploding atmosphere around your rocket’s gains  
 through my wild and wilder refrains.

“Evening Nap I”

You flutter me there,  
in the butterfly of my cocoon.  
You’re stretching the walls—take care!  
Something will burst out, surely, soon.

What are you, a current?  
Rippling me through and through  
like you do, and do, and do.  
Or new storms brewing—  
though part of me is spent?

My storms never relent.  
The shore is cleared of trees.  
The butterfly flaps its wings,  
correlating with or causing tsunamis.  
(Scientists don’t know  
what why how the flow.)

Wind brings rain brings wind brings—  
wings, wings, so many wings,  
and flames, and laughter. And eyes?  
I think mine were closed. What brings

the spirits over me with such surprise?  
Flowing water streams and gushes.  
My song covers up its sound—  
it pulses life, argues laughter, rushes.

But oh, I sing. Oh yes, oh no, oh no bounds.  
And the sweet, curious, insistent animal of you  
pounces, nudges, nuzzles, presses, insists—  
stretching into the sweet, hungry, pressing animal of me.

Persists past animal limits, into the wild blue of only humanity—  
and perhaps only us among those alive today—  
this happy, hooked, and free.

“Evening Nap II”

“Let us take a nap,” she said,  
yawning and leading him to bed.  
She laid him down and covered him  
with nuzzle-spread o’er pillow-grin.  
They did not sleep.  
He made her weep.  
“With rest like this,  
who needs bliss?”  
she said, out of her head.

“Let us take a nap,” he said,  
yawning and leading her to bed.  
He laid her down and held her tight.  
His sweet breath nestled into night.  
He fell asleep.  
It made her weep.  
“I prefer my type of nap,”  
she whispered to her sleeping chap.

“Is It Allowed”

to be so happy without working for it?  
 I am not suffering anymore.  
 I made no great success, settled no great score.  
 I am just me at last, without performance.

You get it, who have struggled with conformance.  
 If you can keep the yoke, you can have some prizes.  
 But they all require you to keep up their disguises.  
 Father, if masks free men to tell the truth,  
 why did they cage me in my youth?

I hardly knew myself when I was acting,  
 replacing every wretched role with new refracting.  
 All one wants at that age is to see,  
 to speak and move invisibly,  
 observing, not unnerving—  
 to become deserving.

It's shocking when I hear younger friends now,  
 how much their insecurities were mine. They don't allow,  
 without devout insistence, that this too is age—  
 the role you can't leave though you move about the stage.

That it is always the case  
 that we think we are lost  
 and must pay a heavy cost  
 just to live  
 till Time fluffs his feathers, taps with an olive-branch  
 on the screen-door of the soul  
 saying “You must let me in now. You are whole.”

“Today”

For example, the soft light in the winter sky has moved too quickly to describe,  
as dawns do.

Spread itself more and more evenly with clouds across the freezing blue.

And what is to be done? What are you going to do?

About beauty and its restlessness,

about the soft but harshly cold expanse,

about the flock of thoughts and happenings that trekked across and vanished—  
no longer native to this season—

like migrants under waves?

Tell me, witness. First your own heart's rhythms, all that you can hear.

Then out of the fabric of your body in the world, the rest of life pulsing,  
pressing itself into you, purring, pulling you near.

## “Stones”

*Some sorrows are like stones, and they never melt,  
though our tears rain and groove them.—Derek Walcott*

Yes, I have carried many stones.  
Sometimes the weight has made me stronger.  
Sometimes I could not walk any longer.  
What is it to you if I cannot put them down?

Meanwhile the man who loves me sleeps.  
I cannot injure what he owns.  
I would like to lie like water in his ridges,  
grooving so softly the canyon of his chest.

What I love best  
is the bridges  
that over water and stones  
stretch solid, straight, and kind.  
They are beautiful without rains and troubled water.  
They are also beautiful when spring storms blind.

When the storms have passed,  
sometimes the high waters have swept away  
stones that seemed they couldn't be moved,  
and the bridges themselves may be grooved  
like stones  
that last  
and last.



“It’s Time”

When are we going to talk about the weather?  
 I know how you like your lightening,  
 and you my thunder.  
 Still we never talk about the weather,  
 even as sweet summer rainstorms drench us  
 and the white-hot sun burns fresh white spots into your golden hands.

Are we afraid of jinxing what we danced for?  
 I for one long prayed for rain.  
 I know you were thirsty, too.  
 Dying in the desert,  
 surrounded by mirages  
 and ignorant friends with guarded flasks.

But I think we are not spooked, only occupied  
 with so much hot and shiver—wet and windweary,  
 and sleepy from the warming climate of good company.  
 You’ll have water as long as you’re with me,  
 though I don’t know how to stay dry.

We know there will be time to talk of rising waters  
 once the splashing’s done.  
 For now I love our spurting clouds, the rays of dazzle and of dew,  
 the coming darkness and its damp, cool might.  
 The shine of you.  
 The morning light.

## *Sweet Roam*

“Imaginary Bliss”

With my imaginary friends,  
I do imaginary things  
no one dares to talk about—  
no one even sings.  
Sings the song of our love  
with its playful melody.  
Hums the hum of our bodies  
being happy, hot, and free.

“Playing in the woods with friends”

When I was a little girl, my mother told me  
that every time you went out into the woods to dance  
at night around the fire with someone new,  
you lost a little piece of your soul.

But she forgot to mention  
how the loss makes a very tight hole.

The goal of staying whole has gotten old.

\*\*\*

Together we stumble, laughing, getting dirty  
and sometimes hurt—brambles, poison ivy, strange bites.  
My mother warned of worse, but she was wrong.

Every time I run into the woods with friends,  
instead of losing a piece of my soul, I gain—  
maybe it is a hollow after all, this place  
where love grows,  
laughter echoes,  
something is lost  
to make room  
for yet more joy.

Fine. I hope to lose it all  
exploring these woods.

More and more sober  
more and more myself  
and outside myself  
and laughing at myself,  
drinking  
their seeping quiet  
while it steepens into my spine.

It makes me stronger  
as its amber deepens,  
hardening within and without.

To be alive  
and show the living  
is no loss  
and no transaction.  
To love, not a distraction.  
Why else would we be here?

If anything, it is I who harm these sacred woods  
with my trampling

but feel forgiven every time—  
stealing and making their music my own  
as I crack their precious branches  
leaning on the rusty fence,  
breathing the woodland wild green and purple flower feast,  
its rainbow bent to bursting all around,  
my lungs growing into volcanoes  
drawing out with oxygen  
drawing up closer to the sky  
taking up more and more space,  
empty of must  
full of lust  
muddy with calm clay and easy trust,  
all that pressure at last giving way to release  
in the world where I belong.  
Singing—out loud—my dirty song.

## “Love Wild”

Love wild  
love true  
love red  
love blue  
love me  
love you.

Free heart  
free mind  
free time  
free spine  
free cock  
free cunt  
free mouth  
free blunt.

Deep dark  
deep sleep  
deep walk  
deep meet  
deep love  
deep free  
deep deep  
deep sea.

Bright sky  
bright light  
bright flesh  
bright night  
bright days  
bright seasons  
bright life  
bright reasons.

True try  
true make  
true see  
true take  
true give  
true be  
true you

true me.

“The tree of desire grows out of her chest”

The tree of desire grows out of her chest.  
The door of light overflows without rest.  
The well of healing draws you better and best.  
And I am just learning to laugh and let laugh.

The shadows of mountains grow out of the sea.  
The honey wafts out from the buzz of the bee.  
The length of the days from the earth whirling free.  
And I am still picking the paths off the path.

The fire of love is consuming the moon.  
Dawn's own birds are still singing at noon.  
The radio of now is still searching for a tune.  
And I'm sinking and smiling with friends in the tub.

Where there is no planning, only now.  
When you cannot sow, only plow on and plow.  
For what season comes next? Aye, there's the rub.  
All will die, but not live. So join the club.

## “Wild Animals”

1.

How now, brown brow  
which I have furrowed—  
then, now.

They say you are like a wild dog,  
young and hungry,  
with the bark of one who’s always fed  
when she asks, and yet must celebrate  
the hunger and its feeding.

I say you are like a young dog  
who doesn’t yet know  
that no means no.

But I haven’t had the heart to tell you,  
because you are also a glistening shell  
opening out into the ocean  
where no means crash and go  
means spin around  
means launch and ground  
and where many a soul has been lost  
    (the ocean does not listen;  
    not listening has a cost)  
and found.  
Would you hear  
if I told you so?



2.

How I love your growl  
 when you are moving inside,  
 your face close behind,  
 so close you are growling inside me,  
 almost.

The first time I heard it,  
 you could have been twenty  
 you told me you were twenty  
 and I believed—  
 beached stranger learning your tongue,  
     kissed the truth in your young sweet sun  
     held the truth in your long smooth shore  
     pressed the truth from your long hard oar.

But you also told me  
 your name was Paul,  
 and you loved your work  
 digging graves—  
 the widows so young and so pretty.  
 Because ours is not yet a time of war at home,  
 I thought you were giving me a line.

You still insist  
 that digging graves is what you do  
 with your non-growling time,  
 but that you are forty  
 you love me  
 and your real name sounds like a cat.

I believe you still  
 your growl demands it  
 aging works like that sometimes,  
 everything catching up at once.  
 I learned that when I was forty  
 at twenty.

Yet how strange  
 with your wildcat growl  
 and your prowling of a name  
 that you hate cats.  
 Will you guide me into your ground?  
 What else should I ask?  
 But you're buried in your solemn task.

## 3.

White bird with such shining eyes  
 and your falconer laughing as you alight.  
 They shine like mirrors, seeing mine.  
 He lets you soar, watches you dine.  
 You can hunt me anytime.

When I first saw you standing there  
 in black lace and shock of bright blonde hair,  
 I had been ready to call it a night.  
 But in the sparkle of your eyes  
 and the angle of your chin,  
 I knew you at a glance.  
 In some ways we have a great romance  
 and in others, I can simply see  
 that you're a wild bird of prey like me.

That's part of our affinity.  
 Neither gender nor marriage  
 could begin to disparage  
 the bond of seeing and feeling seen.  
 It does not demean  
 the way I love your expression  
 in body, face, and art; how you let in  
 warmth when it's given—  
 or the way I love the same power  
 when it's given over to a glove  
 that can help you fly higher up above.  
 Never seen a wild bird so much like me.

And yet, sometimes we're tentative—  
 waiting, listening.  
 I wonder what you need to hear, and what I need to say.  
 I need to hear the great expanse of wilderness big enough for us  
 and watch and listen all night and day  
 and feel our rhythms overlap  
 and feel your hunger in my lap.  
 To be alone in the aching, huge sky with you,  
 hunting, feasting, and gulping the blue.  
 I like the most to watch your face  
 when a great hand releases you there  
 and you take off with a cry.  
 If we had not our falconers,  
 I wonder how long we'd fly.  
 We do not need them.

Without them, though,  
 we would be less—

if only in our happiness.  
 The wild bird loves  
 what she does not need—  
 not just enough sky to get by,  
 but the whole sparkling expanse,  
 the harshness of high wind,  
 the cold, bright flares of flying  
 almost too close to the sun,  
 the rush of rain hitting her  
 and rolling back off the slick outside,  
 weeping when she won't let it in.

Not just the rabbits and larks  
 she needs to stay alive—  
 but the freedom to hunt  
 far above the glove.  
 The rush of her man watching her  
 gliding above.

4.

And the man who merely  
 tried to feed me—  
 not too much,  
 two mice a day—  
 and keep me warm  
 enough, but not too hot;  
 who said I was a pretty girl  
 although he hid me away  
 from all his dear ones night and day;  
 and only hit or kicked  
 that never (now he says) time  
 when he was mad  
 when he was in a hurry  
 and when he demanded fidelity  
 to someone else's nature  
 and instead I was faithful to mine?  
 Said himself it was inexcusable  
 then sorry oops an accident  
 growing into the old never happened,  
 clearly I was unusable.

And could never understand why  
 at last  
 I flew fast  
 and far away.

Wild animals are funny that way.

“Know No”

It is your exuberance  
     hug kiss lick bump  
 your joy in meeting me  
     sparkle open leap touch  
 and how little needs saying  
     are you ok?  
     how are things?  
     how have you been feeling?  
 that makes you warm kind simple  
     like a happy dog  
     like a wild dog  
     and like a deaf and blind dog who doesn't know no.

I like it when you see and feel me  
     inside out through thorough although.  
 I like it when you come after a long absence  
     it feels good to see you again  
     it feels warm to hear how you've been  
     it feels right to make you your rose tea, talk, and listen.  
 I like it when you take your own space  
     needing as I need to take it all in  
     needing as I need to be mad with pleasure  
         greeting bursting raw wild  
     needing as I need to go replay, or put away,  
     reflect and distance, sort and say

what could not be said  
 even in my head  
     words stuck or unformed in feelings  
 what can be said only to myself as yet—  
     (there is red      yellow      green  
     read the light, or it's      obscene).  
 What cannot be said because of how it may go unheard  
     (no please no)  
     (stop)  
     (hold it)  
     (wait)  
     (really)  
     (enough).

I am trying to think of a set of phrases to try, practice, learn.  
 But so much of what you give me, I could never ask for.  
 It is a miracle how I see you,  
 and you me  
     how you know just what to do  
     how your body listens and talks to mine.

Where the miracle of your thrust meets the miracle of my ass  
there are no eyes, but we see each other  
there are no words, but you know what to do—sometimes  
there is such happiness here, such home for a while.

It is not enough.  
I tried to tell you.  
You didn't hear me.  
So we're through.

## “Love Poem”

You are a dog  
and I am a cat.  
You do not understand  
my reticence,  
and I do not care.

“Do What You Do”

Hold my hand and look into my eyes  
like you did while the stranger filled me,  
holding your beautiful thick cock,  
jacking off and off.

Fill me like you do in the morning  
when I know I'm with you  
but can't yet open my eyes,  
squeeze without squeezing  
my sleep-heated thighs.

Warm me with your body when you can.  
Carry me to the tub like a child  
when I'm too cold—and too tired to know.  
Drug me with warm water and kindness.  
Melt me when I'm frozen  
from something behind us.

Make it mean no when it's no.  
If neither of us can, then I can't go.  
But I like hunting with you,  
the miracle of unplanned touch,  
the sometimes-stumbling love atop lust.

Sometimes I need even more  
to smell your smell, nuzzle in,  
sleep my soft dog sleep undisturbed,  
and I'm through with language  
but I can heel, sit, down.

Only you can say what you say  
when you call me what I am then.  
Or slap me so hard I come rivers,  
Goddamn.  
Because you read my mind.

Or because my body and face  
do the talking sometimes,  
and you do the listening.  
Sometimes strangers do, too.  
Sometimes they miss their cue.  
Sometimes friends do.  
Oh, be true.

It's a joy  
when it works.  
When I'm at home in my body  
that speaks for my mind,  
and can say what I want  
in life, bump, and grind.

It's a joy  
when I don't have to  
say what I mean,  
put words or force to  
(or failing, sometimes, mourn)  
what I want  
all day, every day, every night,  
glowing and held in your loving light.



“Monday Afternoon”

In the morning that is afternoon,  
my whole womb shines in bloom  
with great pink heat and light in one—  
opening, unfolding, caressing the sun.

My cunt is a cat—  
all stretch and purr,  
feeling the perfection of its fur,  
licking itself on a cleaned mat.  
Well-filled.

Its clinch and ripple  
is a river after rain.  
Slows from torrent to dribble—  
still moving, again  
hungry and fast;  
yet again more relaxed.  
Still rushing around  
searching for a stillness  
that never comes to ground.  
Its own banks found and found.

“With brown hair flowing and big eyes laughing”

“Please take the position, then,” she smiled,  
pointing to the pillow juxtaposing  
the straight line of their bodies.

So I lay and opened, lily-blooming  
with my pretty smelly flower,  
rubbing pollen on her smile,  
delicate petals pressing fold to fold,  
chrysanthemum but for the moans  
and murmurs that orchid

that iris

that rose

like smoke from my dark cavern  
like baby’s breath around the arrangement’s center  
and like dreams seeding waking life  
with more hunger  
with more joy  
with more wonder for the happy muse and her musical boy.

“What Works”

Your face works for me,  
and your cock and body.  
I like how you are good at sex,  
like some people are good at driving in third-world cities—  
where lanes aren’t real, you honk therefore you exist,  
and all you can do is go with the flow.

Move fast and surely.  
Watch, listen, feel one with the organism  
of many people with many destinations,  
all helping each other while pushing on  
to get where they’re going.

And yet, there is more sweetness and slowness in this.  
The fullness of your warm lips when we kiss.  
The way you said (when we first met) of your wife,  
“She is the one.” How, in your way, you’re true.  
The way, although you could be done,  
instead you hold back and back  
until finally letting go,  
a restless epiphany coursing through your being—  
a wild and uncalculated yes against the no.

“Love and Let Love”

You have the best smell,  
that animal thing  
among other animal things  
that for us work so well.  
The sweetness of it shocks  
and covers me, chiming with a thousand clocks  
that this is right  
the time is now  
my body cries out,  
the opening shell.

You have the best chest  
that fits me just right,  
where I lie down  
and turn into a kitten,  
day or night.  
Like it or not,  
calm envelops me,  
within and around.  
I'm not sure if I sleep  
so much as turn off.

Of course I'm also addicted  
to your cock.  
The sparkling laugh  
in your hunting eyes.  
The way you like to watch  
what I like to show—  
the fast-weighing head,  
the ready thighs.

And how we share  
a love of others'  
full and well-filled cries.

“Love Story”

Before my first club  
 before our first threesome  
 before I broke my silly fast  
 of praying with two fingers in—  
 liquifying on your thigh in the sun  
 like rock candy on a smoking gun,  
 before you took me somewhere safe  
 where I let close the so small space  
 between first kiss and full embrace—  
 you told me to my face when I was wrong.  
 Truth is the come-on I can't resist.

1.

I was wrong about myself,  
 I was wrong about my life,  
 and I was wrong about the world  
 in which I didn't see how I could stay long.  
 One of the first times you told me,  
 I ran away and cried like a girl—  
 which is to say, with potential.  
 There was womb in my wimpiness.  
 A fertile mess.

The kitchen couldn't keep me long.  
 I came back to you straightaway.  
 I needed to argue with you  
 more than I needed to pray.  
 (And I needed to pray a lot, that way.)  
 Couldn't keep away for a day.

2.

I did not come back  
 because you made me happy.  
 I hope you aren't too disappointed.  
 I know you get off on making me happy,  
 because you do it all the time  
 and, I'm beginning to suspect, on purpose.  
 That came much later, in fact.  
 (A whole month, perhaps.)

I could no sooner have been happy then,  
 than a frozen hand can feel warm.  
 First it has to hurt, to feel anything at all.  
 That's how much I needed your heat,  
 your gentleness, the love you gave  
 without hesitation, so simple and true,  
 the first time I melted, pounced, and lay with you.  
 But first, the way you made me suffer—  
 I needed to suffer in that way.

3.

We were not lovers  
 until we were,  
 but we were first partners in thinking,  
 and you changed me  
 not for better  
 not for worse  
 but for myself—  
 arguing until the scales fell away,  
 sometimes with simple questions  
 and sometimes with a bit more force.

You were not always right  
 but you were mostly right,  
 and entirely right to push me  
 to think again  
 to think against myself  
 to think against my self-deceptions,  
 as I had known before terror  
 put my better thinking for a while on a shelf.  
 You knew me when I didn't know myself.

4.

It was the same  
 when we finally went for a walk alone,  
 and you discovered (as, somehow,  
 you had always known)  
 that I was not tame.

And because I asked for him  
 with sweetness and starvation,  
 the lion was upon me then  
 with his great and roaring head.

How did you know to show me how skin works?  
 How did you know to choke me?  
 How did you know to read my hand  
 going up to say, before you gave me language,  
 “Stop right there but keep going—go”?

It was never “no,”  
 but often—almost—  
 too much.  
 I had to stretch out for you—  
 sorely—  
 all the while screaming  
 like I’ve never heard  
 human screams before.  
 You pushed me over the edge  
 again and again,  
 and I never wanted you to stop  
 (still don’t).

You had seen so much of wild you  
 in wild me, and seen it true.  
 You had laughed and said I couldn’t be  
 a born-again  
 and, much later,  
 to never leave.  
 (I won’t.)

5.

You wanted to make me happy  
 before I wanted that myself.  
 And bit by bit, convinced me—  
 thawed me, joint by joint;  
 stretched me, jolt by screaming jolt,  
 until I could fit your heat  
 and the happiness of having been wrong  
 and yes, the happiness of my heat  
 into a new life.

No longer denying  
 my libertine smile  
 shows more me in two minutes  
 than all that talk of right and planning all the while.  
 No longer running headlong  
 into being a mother and wife.

You still make me suffer  
 by denying those dreams.  
 Some days it is a siren.  
 Some days I wonder if it is what it seems.  
 Maybe I need that suffering, too.  
 Or maybe you're right—  
 being tied down would make me blue.  
 I can't run the experiment both ways,  
 and life is short.

I want to drive into the sun with you  
 to somewhere we can feel its rays  
 on our bare skins  
 and hold adult court.



6.

I loved you first  
 although (or so) you said it before me,  
 even in my mind.  
 Said it after leading me,  
 liquid, to your van—  
 just in time.

Some must have seen a wicked man,  
 or else a desperate woman  
 alone in an unfriendly world.  
 But they don't have a clue  
 about me and you.

Before you gave me a palace full of light and friends,  
 before the first-class one-way ticket to share your single room,  
 before the first home-like place,  
 the rental with blue walls where we woke up high—  
 although there was not a single drug—  
 and thank God you don't drink  
 (you could've been a drunk!  
 but instead your sober face  
 laughs steady in my face,  
 by the grace),  
 because I was sunk  
 from the very first hug.

We may be  
 the freest of the free—  
 vagabonding, you and me—  
 but we are virgins  
 every time  
 we fall in love,  
 children falling over dumb  
 in the face of the sublime.

*Further*

“Coffee with Two Men”

*Gruissan, Languedoc*

In the photo, you still have your hair  
and you're smoking a cigarette  
looking away and down.  
Your lips look like they're gently kissing  
your middle finger  
as if to murmur  
yes, this is what  
I have to give  
the world,  
and you're welcome.  
But you are neither posing  
nor insulting—  
only French.

1.

First, my love drove me  
across two countries  
to the sunny coast  
of the windy city  
over such bumps  
on the road near the sea  
that the car scritchd and scratched underneath  
like we will see again later  
only in Albania,  
and I worried for the van  
for our home in the world  
that I had instigated naming  
and since been  
too protective of  
to drive myself.

Even later,  
at the hotel in Cairo  
when I had not driven  
for years,  
not since selling my car  
and crossing the ocean  
with a backpack and a ghost,  
he will tease me  
that we should not have named him,  
since I could drive the rental car  
straight out of the airport at night

with no practice and no plan  
in the most dangerous driving city in the world  
just fine.

Back outside Narbonne,  
the bumps in the road  
were so big,  
I worried we would get stuck  
worried we would have to turn around  
worried our home would break.  
But closed my eyes  
and sucked on ginger candy,  
releasing the doorframe  
only when I saw  
that I had turned my fingers white  
with clutching.

2.

And then we were there,  
in a lot so close to the sea  
that we could see it  
we could smell it  
and I could make at last my hot, white coffee,  
and walk the beach with it  
so hot  
and so sweet.

My toes touched the waves  
before the first cup was half-gone.  
It was like the first morning coffee,  
although it was afternoon.  
So hot  
so sweet  
and gone so soon.  
Days with him  
are like that.  
We walked back  
on the beach toward  
the broken hourglasses  
of sands swirling off dunes in straight lines,  
streaming curtains  
off their vertical cliff-edges,  
lifting the grainy fabric  
to bite our faces into squint.  
The wind was cool  
but we were warm in the sun

and kept on getting wet,  
 and kept on getting dry,  
 and wiping off the sand  
 until we tired of wiping it off  
 and lay happily like wagging dogs,  
 making sand angels for each other.

Further up, it looked like warm snow.  
 But no,  
 white salt crystals crunched underfoot  
 just as satisfying  
 if not more  
 if not more beautiful  
 if not more beautiful and fun to destroy.

Their solid puddles—  
 salt drifts?—  
 look also like waves in photos,  
 where you can't tell what is still  
 and what is moving;  
 not even what glistens  
 is clear from what's white,  
 the shocks of it set off  
 by the purple algae, ochre grass, and sky-blue lake  
 of leftover sea water from an overflowed tide.

3.

You came as quickly as you could,  
 which was not quickly.  
 Came inside  
 and let me make you—  
 coffee  
 eggs and rice  
 warm and comfortable.

You made it warmer  
 there at home  
 for the three of us.

We had already had  
 what you were having,  
 but your warmth  
 made us hungry again,  
 and we had more.

4.

Later, in the van bed  
still warm from company,  
we watched you smoking outside,  
the downward glance  
still of hunger  
and the resignation  
of sentient youth.  
Stay, my friend,  
in the world awhile.

Even later,  
still recovering  
from our exertions,  
we woke up in the middle of the night  
to watch the Perseids  
in chairs behind the van.  
It was too cold  
to stay long,  
but the meteors seemed to come  
when we asked with our eyes,  
following the blackness  
to make it jump—  
pressing in silently  
asking sweetly  
listening completely.

5.

In the morning light, the leftover saltwater lakes  
 between seaside parking lot and bumpy road,  
 smaller than a soccer field,  
 looked as beautiful as the sea itself.  
 As beautiful as a Turner,  
 algae and stones rising up underneath like sandbars or islands.  
 Narbonne looked far away over that expanse of water,  
 and we were wandering husbands eyeing the next shore, and the next.

The sight of land to long-lost eyes  
 sometimes is no longer shelter.  
 Sometimes we want to get to the next shore,  
 and it doesn't matter which,  
 since we know it's not the last.

We drove on.  
 That city's call was not as strong  
 as the next, unknown one.

A few hours away, I crunched stones underfoot  
 down a sunny path with false-ending bend after bend.  
 It was no where, it was on no map,  
 and finally I gave up on my wandering and looking  
 farther and farther  
 before seeing the end,  
 contenting myself with admiring  
 moving painting after painting  
 of white clouds spreading themselves across the bright blue sky  
 like young gods  
 whose end no one needs to see.  
 I wish you many journeys.

## “Addiction”

At a gas station  
between Plitvice and Split,  
a double-wide man  
plays on two slot machines  
at once.



“Travelers at Rest”

*Split, Croatia*

The bright orange finches  
have followed us out  
into the city  
and are homesick  
for the falls;  
try to kill themselves  
repeatedly  
on the terrace.

The cats, kindly,  
are here to assist  
in all their mortal coil-shuffling needs.  
Also to eat bread,  
chase each other, brutally,  
and regard dogs with suspicion,  
people with apathy.

Geography does not change nature,  
human or otherwise.  
They, too, are homesick,  
but for Egypt, and the days  
when people better knew their place.

We are all longing  
for somewhere else,  
except while in motion.  
Here on the road,  
we are home.

“Hateful Signs”

*Mokošica*

When we stow the van and take the clean  
 (inside and out, for passengers and breathers about) bus  
 into the old town that already I can no longer remember,  
 I resist taking pictures of the hateful wall art.  
 I will be eyes and ears, not screens and jeers.  
 Still, it is so strange to see Old Faithful here,  
 near a black and white mural  
 that reads “Stand Your Ground”  
 not far from graffitied swastikas.

I have nothing poetic to say  
 about any of this.  
 I can barely believe it exists.  
 A delicate flower from Dixie might have thought  
 that those who fought this beast not long ago  
 would remember better and not paint so.  
 It always throws me. It’s always a shock  
 that it takes time to see and say,  
 which does not change who rules the day.

Hatred is a brightly-colored bird  
 appearing always out of place  
 but finding enough crumbs  
 and wind to live everywhere.  
 Hunting him does not kill the flock,  
 does not turn back their warming clock.  
 South they fly and nest—and nest.  
 Breeding, it seems, more than the rest.

Are we doomed to extinction,  
 to be beaten by violence and hate?  
 Evolution does not find ethicists distinct.  
 Intelligence counter-selects.  
 But humanity is small.  
 The world is strong. Life will go on.  
 There’s the comfort in our sentence:  
 we do not matter much at all.  
 No one cares once we are gone.

“Driver’s Itch”

*The Bay of Kotor, Montenegro*

Was it first here,  
or in Andorra—  
that we drove through the clouds,  
low in their morning mountain bowl,  
and it was not fog?

Nor was it a fairy tale  
as you drove, steady and safe,  
from the impossibly high stone slab  
on one side of the softly rippling bay  
to the greener, hilly side across the way.

The Croatian cats remained,  
unafraid of heights.  
But I felt so sick,  
felt the rise of panic  
battering my eyes shut  
although it was so beautiful,  
the view,  
and the turns  
so tight.

Sometimes  
I need  
to hold  
the wheel.

“The Embassy”

*Podgorica*

Walking downtown for food at night,  
we stumble across its ugly light.  
Guards with semis and machine guns pace  
outside the fencing around its face.

Projected up against a wall,  
red, white, and blue enthrall  
with missing stars and wrong-numbered stripes.  
At least you cannot see the pipes.

But the half-empty bookshelves are plain to see  
through open curtains. It occurs to me  
this, too, is a display of power.  
Some would hide their ignorance.

Never a country known to cower,  
the bloated Merkan embassy  
displays its dumb indifference.

“Peak Agreement”

*Mount Dajti—Tirana, Albania*

All the way up and at the top, you see  
the trash fires no one tries to hide  
that choke the city air.

With them there,  
along the mountainside,  
autumn leaves combust in their colorful pride.

The people and the trees  
have mutually agreed  
to continue continuing trying to breathe.

“Irony”

*Macedonia*

The long arc of history bends black.  
Austrian police are here where country ends  
to help keep brown people back.

“Looking for Land”

*Serbia*

The painted waves surprise me  
every time  
with their steady pink and purple brush-strokes,  
unmoving lakes of turquoise, yellow-green, and peach,  
fields of water-lily likeness.

I look closer, quicker, out the window  
as they fly by between wet wheat  
and damp beige houses—  
cabbage patches.

“Manners”

*Czech Republic*

We drove—  
or you drove, but I agreed  
we would drive through lawns  
pretending they were fields  
to find a place to park  
and give in to sleep  
on purpose.



“Immortal Work”

*Giza*

The soul cannot walk alone.  
When death comes  
for the body that has been its kin,  
flesh freezes in the desert night—  
stopping soul from slipping into the light.  
It wants to walk free in the sun.

And so the priests devised a plan  
to make the first immortal man  
with prayers and potions,  
and mummifying motions.  
Bright drawings on stone walls remain.

What did the slaves who built them gain?  
The greatest one no greater than a dam  
to the gawking eye—but in exchange  
for the latter human sacrifice,  
the builder’s families at least got literal power.

The official line is that  
we shouldn’t pity those who died  
for this big bunch of rocks.  
Their lands had flooded anyway.  
They had nothing better to do.

They came of their own free will,  
of a sort,  
because they truly believed  
in the worthy project  
of conquering death.  
That’s what they say.

But isn’t the whole point  
of all the sweeping wind and sands  
rushing up against  
these somewhat ageless things  
that we can’t do that?  
The world always wins.  
The journey always ends.  
It’s other people who live on—  
neither their dead rulers  
nor the slaves’ fathers they ruled.  
There is no escaping death.

Yet, later religions stole the idea  
 and democratized the deal:  
 you, too, can be immortal—for a price.  
 Special deal! Your soul demands indulgence.  
 It's not just for Pharaohs anymore.

But they were the first  
 to bravely explore  
 that comfortable self-deception  
 of continuing perception  
 as if blind stones would help them see beyond  
 where seeing ends.  
 Fear made culture  
 to answer fear.

In the cab back to the city,  
 a Quran on the dashboard  
 sits like a good luck charm  
 for people who don't believe in luck—  
 only the inscrutable will of God  
 that you can still game  
 if you flash the right symbol  
 to the people who believe it.  
 Then it's lucky after all.

Other than such self-fulfilling prophecies as  
 social signaling and psychological first-aid  
 when you just need to feel safe,  
 belief is such a waste of life and time.  
 But I know the feeling,  
 having wasted some of mine.  
 I was no slave, but now that I'm free,  
 it's harder to get honest work out of me.

“Let Sleeping Policemen Lie”

*Cairo—Luxor*

1.

Speed bumps—  
not speed signs, traffic lights, stops, or cops—  
protect fruit stands, donkeys, and the happy boy  
of fifteen or so,  
singing and pointing his index fingers  
in the air at no one,  
as he walks down the side  
not of the road  
but of the highway.  
He is, I hope, as safe as he feels.

If it's real, this safety was cheap—  
the big asphalt blocks  
slowing down everyone, night and day,  
ensuring vehicle and flesh don't meet,  
requiring no employees checking no clocks.  
Let sleeping policemen lie;  
without these bumps, that boy would die.

It's too easy  
it's almost cheap  
to make meaning  
from the flying-by heap  
of images—  
to pull away  
from the yoke  
of submission  
and screaming children,  
feeling the hijab choke.  
It's not my way.  
The hiding,  
constriction,  
magnifying heat;  
the choice  
without choosing  
to go on this way.

Let sleeping policemen lie;  
don't judge when you're just passing by.

2.

Much as I prefer my freedom,  
 I can see this does not work.  
 Not everyone can throw away the veil  
 her whole society expects her to wear.  
 I'm crazy enough, sometimes—  
 chasing my odd, poetic sublimes.  
 But having crazy dreams can be its own, new burden.

My great-grandmother left her whole world  
 (that was falling apart for a Jew)  
 to rejoin a man she barely new.  
 He angered quickly, mellowed slow,  
 but after many years and kids  
 built her a new house  
 exactly how she wanted it.

She got her crazy dream,  
 and then was too exhausted  
 from cleaning it, and going up and the stairs  
 with far too many unbidden babes—  
 before children were a choice—  
 to clear her husband's dinner dishes in the days  
 before women could have a (tired) voice.

So he convinced her  
 gently, for once,  
 to listen to her own voice  
 to make a different choice  
 to dream a different dream—  
 because that one hurt her too much to live,  
 like dying from lack of water  
 because you wanted to have tea in middle of the Sahara  
 and boiled your water away.

Some dreams seem simple,  
 but aren't simple enough.  
 Sometimes, slowing down  
 is the only way to survive.  
 Let sleeping policemen lie;  
 sometimes, it's slow down or die.

3.

Every civilization has wanted to cheat death,  
 to deny somehow that our dead are gone—  
 until we made science with that ache  
 to find  
 (along with the sublime)  
 something lasting to celebrate.

We had something like it before.  
 But we wanted more.  
 More than the greatest wonders of the world.  
 More than serving masters of the known universe.  
 More than catching babies as they come.  
 More (even) than caring for everyone.  
 Let sleeping policemen lie;  
 might as well, since we all fucking die.

The one-eyed cats in Croatia (I thought yesterday)  
 were better-kept than the starving ones here,  
 and the dogs more loved in Dubrovnik.  
 But here you don't see hungry children on the street  
 like in Bogotá, Colombia—or Athens, Georgia.  
 One of the guides preempts  
 our whole group later,  
*"Leave our kids alone.*  
 We want them to work."

And I think sometimes slowing down  
 is a matter of neither having the fuel  
 to go faster, nor the food  
 to care for more cats or children.  
 If there is a Great Dying coming  
 in our lifetimes, as they say,  
 many more of us  
 will see many more of them  
 hungering on the streets that way.  
 It is not their fault.

But when in Luxor, listen.  
 The world will slow us down at its own pace.  
 Ours is not the only race  
 and we can't survive long  
 where everything is dying.  
 Let sleeping policemen lie;  
 you can't drink from a well that's dry.

4.

Suddenly, the traffic all around  
is far too loud for me; the sound  
of sooty trucks and beaten horses  
much too much. But out here  
there is no place, it would seem,  
to rest my eyes and hands,  
and hold you, seam to tired seam.

You've been telling me all the while  
where to turn, and suddenly  
we're there. A next hotel—a shock of  
stillness    softness    luxury.

You keep doing this to me.  
I nearly cry, hold back (just) til parking.  
Let sleeping policemen lie;  
give me this day, my happy cry.

“balloon!”

*Luxor, Egypt*

so much of the color is white.  
so much of the darkness is light.  
still too early for anything  
except this  
just once  
whole city kiss:  
a great, roaring fire;  
the right wind;  
a team of thirteen struggling men.  
and we are up!  
among the stars,

and then the one rises  
that brightens ours.  
shows scraped there  
in the sand—  
by bulldozers and winds,  
or some great hand?  
the tree of life;  
the snake rising up  
towards its key  
in the god-king's headdress;  
and yes, there at last the face  
of the undamaged Sphinx.

“What I Want”

*After Alice Fulton's "What I Like."*

Kin —your shock of white-blond hair  
 reflected in ripples of cloud on the Nile.  
 Beautiful, small breasts like mine  
 with tiny, rock-hard nipples  
 standing up on your taut body  
 tight as a statue, as a kitten, and as a seal  
 on the fire I can feel coming from your eyes,  
 and hear in your cries.

*Kin* —did you always know  
 that lovers would love you so?  
 Here there is no strategy, no posture—  
 you can see exactly what you do to me.  
 Even the word contains an in—  
 open like your face, like your body, and like your heart.  
 We are only walking together from time to time.  
 But it's such a pleasure to feel that you are mine.  
 Where the summer sun meets winter water,  
 my man and I have flown to rest and to explore.  
 But I see the blue and think of you,  
 wanting to walk together more.

We were here first, sisters cradling  
 boat and building, plow and priest.  
 Civilization springs where warmth and wild meet.  
 In your eyes there is such knowing laughter,  
 liquid, and a silence of intensity  
 that makes me want to say  
 something important that I don't quite know,  
 as if to show you more of me  
 and hold you closer before you go.  
 Can I say something just for you, not hers and his?  
 What I want to say to you is



“Love in a Dangerous Land”

I could love you equally well here as there.  
Except I cannot show it here,  
could not be seen admiring—  
your face, your breasts, your hair.

“Blood, wine, ticking time”

*Hurghada*

The Red Sea is not red.  
The hope here is not dead.  
It probably used to be,  
from coral and algae,  
dead kings and dead books.

But the reefs are dying everywhere  
along with tourism here and there  
where terror scares people away.  
We saw it last summer in France,  
the lavender fields swaying a yellow-brown dance  
from too much rain,  
and what if a truck should come again?

The wine-dark Mediterranean, too,  
is no longer wine-dark,  
though we couldn't see through.  
It was more like thyme honey  
in how it looked darker, far away.

The world has no less blood in it now than then,  
no less life. There are no fewer stories to write.  
But we see differently as the waters change.  
As we change them, and are changed.  
Time now means disruption.

“Dinner for One”

*Cairo*

When you were sick in bed  
and I had vomited  
my heart out writing,  
I wandered into the hotel restaurant  
for dinner alone.  
I needed to eat,  
though you couldn't.

In the elevators,  
you had said,  
the women wouldn't look at you,  
and got out when you were there alone.  
I had my version of this  
only then.

Before there had been men  
who wouldn't look at me,  
looked behind me  
or away instead  
while we talked  
and my eyes sought theirs,  
accidentally unforgiving  
from force of habit.

But this was the first time  
I felt myself to be dangerous—  
when the waiter asked  
from halfway across  
the huge, cold, and empty room:  
“How is your soup,  
Madam?” And, later,  
“Do you need  
anything?”  
I am a woman  
of many needs.

“Stray Kitten”

*Alexandria, Egypt*

The tiny orange and white thing  
meandering near waves  
    crashing violently  
    on chunky concrete barriers  
        by the coastal road  
        that will not last  
        the rising seas  
refuses food.

Although she is too small  
even for her small frame,  
she head-butts for pets  
instead of bread  
and follows us,  
mewing,  
for a block  
after we stop,  
and start, and stop.

We came very close  
that day  
to getting a cat.  
You fell in love  
with me like that.  
More hungry for love  
than for food,  
too thin  
from having not enough  
of either  
of my own  
of just the right and best stuff  
for too long.  
You gave me a home  
in your arms.

And we like to find  
the others  
the other weird ones  
the others of our tribes.  
Still I'm glad  
when we resist  
bringing home new friends  
who are too mangy.

Once you tell them  
that you love them,  
the strays who hunger  
more for your talk  
more for your touch  
and more for kindness  
than for bread—  
they never leave.

“Shall we get married some more?”

My director said to “Always do it for the first time.”  
But we’ve been married since you’ve been mine.  
Those early nights at Lloyd’s Hotel—  
the festival lights—that swinging bell.

I married you when I got on that train  
straight to you, never to go back again.  
You married me when I was lost.  
Loved me for me, despite the cost.

So shall we get married some more, my dear?  
In sickness and health, I just want you near.  
Shall we get married some more, my dear?  
It’s your face I see; it’s your voice I hear in my dreams.

I feel your love shine down like sun.  
Feel your need answering my need like rain.  
Happy wolves in our pack, yet you’re my chosen one.  
I just want to hold you again and again.

Let’s run away to Denmark,  
and not tell anyone.  
Walk entangled in the park,  
checking out the girls for fun.

You’ve married so many me  
as you’ve helped me grow more free.  
I want to marry so many you  
over the years—I do, I do.

### About the Author

Vera Wilde is a Berlin-based poet and painter. Born in Charlottesville, Virginia and raised by books in Alabama, at 16 she ran away to college where—sadly—she had no other option but to obtain a Ph.D., as she was young and needed the money. She completed National Science Foundation-funded dissertation and postdoctoral research on bias, technology, and police violence at the University of Virginia Department of Politics, University of California—Los Angeles Department of Psychology, and Harvard Kennedy School of Government. Her scientific research, Freedom of Information Act requests and lawsuits, and transparency activism resulted in releases and publications of documents and data from sources including the CIA, FBI, DOD, Office of Personnel Management, and others that were used in her own scholarship as well as multiple national newspaper and magazine articles. All the while she was publishing (poetry, humor, fiction, and non-fiction) in dozens of venues and exhibiting paintings wherever she got the chance. When America went from bad to worse, she left and lived happily ever after—finishing and publishing her first poetry book, *Push Coasts*, and then writing this one.