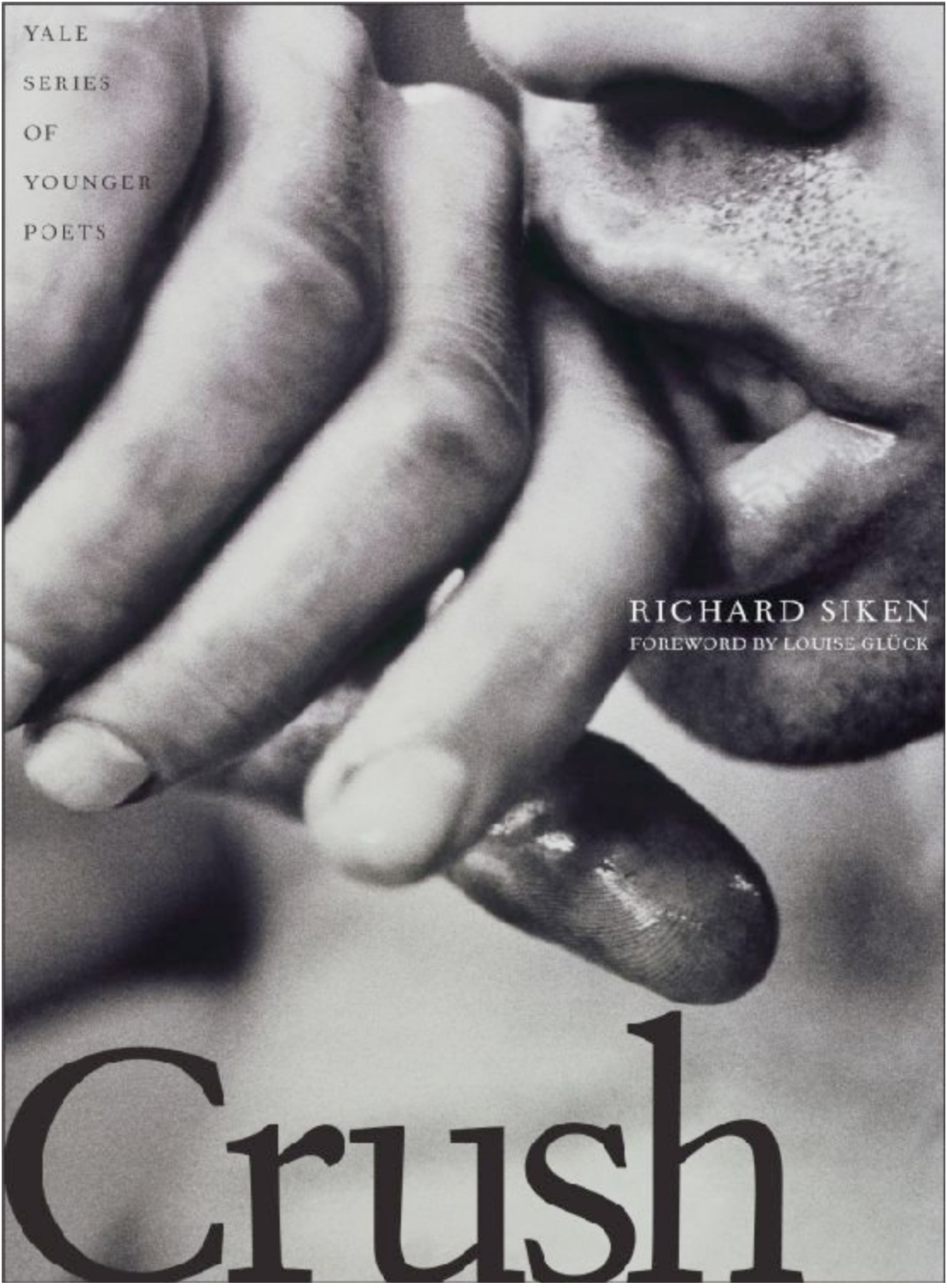


YALE
SERIES
OF
YOUNGER
POETS

RICHARD SIKEN
FOREWORD BY LOUISE GLÜCK

Crush



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as close to the original typeset as possible. Louise Glück's introduction is not included within

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I

Scheherazade

Tell me about the dream where we pull the bodies out of the lake
and dress them in warm clothes again.

How it was late, and no one could sleep, the horses running
until they forget that they are horses.

It's not like a tree where the roots have to end somewhere,
it's more like a song on a policeman's radio,
how we rolled up the carpet so we could dance, and the days
were bright red, and every time we kissed there was another apple
to slice into pieces.

Look at the light through the windowpane. That means it's noon, that means
we're inconsolable.

Tell me how all this, and love too, will ruin us.

These, our bodies, possessed by light.

Tell me we'll never get used to it.

Dirty Valentine

There are so many things I'm not allowed to tell you.

I touch myself, I dream.

Wearing your clothes or standing in the shower for over an hour, pretending
that this skin is your skin, these hands your hands,
these shins, these soapy flanks.

The musicians start the overture while I hide behind the microphone,
trying to match the dubbing
to the big lips shining down from the screen.

We're filming the movie called Planet of Love-
there's sex of course, and ballroom dancing,
fancy clothes and waterlilies in the pond, and half the night you're
a dependable chap, mounting the stairs in lamplight to the bath, but then
the too white teeth all night,
all over the American sky, too much to bear, this constant fingering,
your hands a river gesture, the birds in flight, the birds still singing
outside the greasy window, in the trees.

There's a part in the movie
where you can see right through the acting,

where you can tell that I'm about to burst into tears,
right before I burst into tears
and flee to the slimy moonlit riverbed
canopied with devastated clouds.

We're shooting the scene where I swallow your heart and you make me
spit it up again. I swallow your heart and it crawls
right out of my mouth.

You swallow my heart and flee, but I want it back now, baby. I want it back.
Lying on the sofa with my eyes closed, I didn't want to see it this way,
everything eating everything in the end.

We know how the light works,
we know where the sound is coming from.

Verse. Chorus. Verse.

I'm sorry. We know how it works. The world is no longer mysterious.

Little Beast

1

An all-night barbeque. A dance on the courthouse lawn.

The radio aches a little tune that tells the story of what the night
is thinking. It's thinking of love.

It's thinking of stabbing us to death
and leaving our bodies in a dumpster.

That's a nice touch, stains in the night, whiskey kisses for everyone.

Tonight, by the freeway, a man eating fruit pie with a buckknife
carves the likeness of his lover's face into the motel wall. I like him
and I want to be like him, my hands no longer an afterthought.

2

Someone once told me that explaining is an admission of failure.

I'm sure you remember, I was on the phone with you, sweetheart.

3

History repeats itself. Somebody says this.

History throws its shadow over the beginning, over the desktop,
over the sock drawer with its socks, its hidden letters.

History is a little man in a brown suit

trying to define a room he is outside of.

I know history. There are many names in history

but none of them are ours.

4

He had green eyes,

so I wanted to sleep with him

green eyes flicked with yellow, dried leaves on the surface of a pool--

You could drown in those eyes, I said.

The fact of his pulse,

the way he pulled his body in, out of shyness or shame or a desire

not to disturb the air around him.

Everyone could see the way his muscles worked,

the way we look like animals,

his skin barely keeping him inside.

I wanted to take him home

and rough him up and get my hands inside him, drive my body into his

like a crash test car.

I wanted to be wanted and he was

very beautiful, kissed with his eyes closed, and only felt good while moving.

You could drown in those eyes, I said,

so it's summer, so it's suicide,
so we're helpless in sleep and struggling at the bottom of the pool.

5

It wasn't until we were well past the middle of it
that we realized
the old dull pain, whose stitched wrists and clammy fingers,
far from being subverted,
had only slipped underneath us, freshly scrubbed.
Mirrors and shop windows returned our faces to us,
replete with tight lips and the eyes that remained eyes
and not the doorway we had hoped for.
His wounds healed, the skin a bit thicker than before,
scars like train tracks on his arms and on his body underneath his shirt.

6

We still groped for each other on the backstairs or in parked cars
as the road around us
grew glossy with ice and our breath softened the view through the glass
already laced with frost,
but more frequently I was finding myself sleepless, and he was running out
of
lullabies.

But damn if there isn't anything sexier
than a slender boy with a handgun,
a fast car, a bottle of pills.

7

What would you like? I'd like my money's worth.
Try explaining a life bundled with episodes of this--
swallowing mud, swallowing glass, the smell of blood
on the first four knuckles.

We pull our boots on with both hands
but we can't punch ourselves awake and all I can do
is stand on the curb and say *Sorry*
about the blood in your mouth. I wish it was mine.

I couldn't get the boy to kill me, but I wore his jacket for the longest time.

Seaside Improvisation

I take off my hands and I give them to you but you don't
want them, so I take them back
and put them on the wrong way, the wrong wrists. The yard is dark,
the tomatoes are next to the whitewashed wall,
the book on the table is about Spain,
the windows are painted shut.

Tonight you're thinking of cities under crowns
of snow and I stare at you like I'm looking through a window,
counting birds.

You wanted happiness, I can't blame you for that,
and maybe a mouth sounds idiotic when it blathers on about joy
but tell me
you love this, tell me you're not miserable.

You do the math, you expect the trouble.

The seaside town. The electric fence.

Draw a circle with a piece of chalk. Imagine standing in a constant cone
of light. Imagine surrender. Imagine being useless.

A stone on the path means the tea's not ready,

a stone in the hand means somebody's angry, the stone inside you still
hasn't hit bottom.

The Torn-Up Road

1

There is no way to make this story interesting.

A pause, a road, the taste of grave in the mouth. The rocks dig into my skin
like arrowheads.

And then the sense of being smothered underneath a sack of lentils
or potatoes, or of a boat at night slamming into the docks again
without navigation, without consideration,
heedless of the plank of wood that are the dock,
that make up the berth itself.

2

I want to tell you this story without having to confess anything,
without having to say that I ran out into the street to prove something,
that he didn't love me,
that I wanted to be thrown over, possessed.

I want to tell you this story without having to be in it:

Max in the wrong clothes. Max at the party, drunk again.

Max in the kitchen, in refrigerator light, his hands around the neck of a beer.

Tell me were dead and I'll love you even more.

I'm surprised that I say it with feeling.

There's a thing in my stomach about this. A simple thing. The last rung.

3

Can you see them there, by the side of the road,

not moving, not wrestling,

making a circle out of the space between the circles? Can you see them
pressed into the gravel, pressed into the dirt, pressing against each other
in an effort to make the minutes stop --

headlights shining in all directions, night spilling over them like
gasoline in all directions, and the dark blue over everything, and them
holding their breath --

4

I want to tell you this story without having to say that I ran out into the
street

to prove something, that he chased after me
and threw me into the gravel.

And he knew it wasn't going to be okay, and he told me
it wasn't going to be okay.

And he wouldn't kiss me, but he covered my body with his body
and held me down until I promised not to run back out into the street again.

But the minutes don't stop. The prayer of going nowhere
going nowhere.

5

His shoulder blots out the stars but the minutes don't stop. He covers my
body

with his body but the minutes

don't stop. The smell of him mixed with creosote, exhaust --

There, on the ground, slipping through the minutes,

trying to notch them. Like taking the same picture over and over, the spaces
in between sealed up --

Knocked hard enough to make the record skip

and change its music, setting the melody on its

forward course again, circling and circling the center hole in the flat black
disk.

And words, little words,

words too small for any hope or promise, not really soothing

but soothing nonetheless.

Litany in Which Certain Things Are Crossed Out

Every morning the maple leaves.

Every morning another chapter where the hero shifts

from one foot to the other. Every morning the same big

and little words all spelling out desire, all spelling out

You will be alone always and then you will die.

So maybe I wanted to give you something more than a catalog
of non-definitive acts,

something other than the desperation.

Dear So-and-So, I'm sorry I couldn't come to your party.

Dear So-and-So, I'm sorry I came to your party
and seduced you

and left you bruised and ruined, you poor sad thing.

Your want a better story. Who wouldn't?

A forest, then. Beautiful trees. And a lady singing.

Love on the water, love underwater, love, love and so on.

What a sweet lady. Sing lady, sing! Of course, she wakes the dragon.

Love always wakes the dragon and suddenly
flames everywhere.

I can tell already you think I'm the dragon,

that would be so like me, but I'm not. I'm not the dragon.

I'm not the princess either.

Who am I? I'm just a writer. I write things down.

I walk through your dreams and invent the future. Sure,

I sink the boat of love, but that comes later. And yes, I swallow
glass, but that comes later.

And the part where I push you
flush against the wall and every part of your body rubs against the bricks,
shut up

I'm getting to it.

For a while I thought I was the dragon.

I guess I can tell you that now. And, for a while, I thought I was
the princess,

cotton candy pink, sitting there in my room, in the tower of the castle,
young and beautiful and in love and waiting for you with
confidence

but the princess looks into her mirror and only sees the princess,
while I'm out here, slogging through the mud, breathing fire,
and getting stabbed to death.

Okay, so I'm the dragon. Bid deal.

You still get to be the hero.

You get the magic gloves! A fish that talks! You get eyes like flashlights!

What more do you want?

I make you pancakes, I take you hunting, I talk to you as if you're

really there.

Are you there, sweetheart? Do you know me? Is this microphone live?

Let me do it right for once,

for the record, let me make a thing of cream and stars that becomes,

you know the story, simply heaven.

Inside your head you hear a phone ringing

and when you open your eyes

only a clearing with deer in it. Hello deer.

Inside your head the sound of glass,

a car crash sound as the trucks roll over and explode in slow motion.

Hello darling, sorry about that.

Sorry about the bony elbows, sorry we

lived here, sorry about the scene at the bottom of the stairwell

and how I ruined everything by saying it out loud.

Especially that, but I should have known.

You see, I take the parts that I remember and stitch them back together

to make a creature that will do what I say

or love me back.

I'm not really sure why I do it, but in this version you are *not*

feeding yourself to a bad man

against a black sky prickled with small lights.

I take it back.

The wooden halls likes caskets. These terms from the lower depths.

I take them back.

Here is the repeated image of the lover destroyed.

Crossed out.

Clumsy hands in a dark room. Crossed out. There is something underneath the floorboards.

Crossed out. And here is the tabernacle reconstructed.

Here is the part where everyone was happy all the time and we were all forgiven,

even though we didn't deserve it.

Inside your head you hear

a phone ringing, and when you open your eyes you're washing up

in a stranger's bathroom,

standing by the window in a yellow towel, only twenty minutes away from the dirtiest thing you know.

All the rooms of the castle except this one, says someone, and suddenly darkness,

suddenly only darkness.

In the living room, in the broken yard,

in the back of the car as the lights go by. In the airport

bathroom's gurgle and flush, bathed in a pharmacy of

unnatural light,

my hands looking weird, my face weird, my feet too far away.

And the the airplane, the window seat over the wing with a view

of the wing and a little foil bag of peanuts.

I arrived in the city and you met me at the station,

smiling in a way

that made me frightened. Down the alley, around the arcade,

up the stairs of the building

to the little room with the broken faucets, your drawings, all your things,

I looked out the window and said

This doesn't look that much different from home,

because it didn't,

but then I noticed the black sky and all those lights.

We walked through the house to the elevated train.

All these buildings, all that glass and the shiny beautiful

mechanical wind.

We were inside the train car when I started to cry. You were crying too,
smiling and crying in a way that made me
even more hysterical. You said I could have anything I wanted, but I
just couldn't say it out loud.

Actually, you said *Love, for you,*
is larger than the usual romantic love. It's like a religion. It's
terrifying. No one
will ever want to sleep with you.

Okay, if you're so great, you do it—

here's the pencil, make it work . . .

If the window is on your right, you are in your own bed. If the window
is over your heart, and it is painted shut, then we are breathing
river water.

Build me a city and call it Jerusalem. Build me another and call it
Jerusalem.

We have come back from Jerusalem where we found not
what we sought, so do it over, give me another version,
a different room, another hallway, the kitchen painted over
and over,
another bowl of soup.

The entire history of human desire takes about seventy minutes to tell.

Unfortunately, we don't have that kind of time.

Forget the dragon,

leave the gun on the table, this has nothing to do with happiness.

Let's jump ahead to the moment of epiphany,

in gold light, as the camera pans to where

the action is,

lakeside and backlit, and it all falls into frame, close enough to see

the blue rings of my eyes as I say

something ugly.

I never liked that ending either. More love streaming out the wrong way,

and I don't want to be the kind that says *the wrong way*.

But it doesn't work, these erasures, this constant refolding of the pleats.

There were some nice parts, sure,

all lemondrop and mellonball, laughing in silk pajamas

and the grains of sugar

on the toast, *love love* or whatever, take a number. I'm sorry

it's such a lousy story.

Dear Forgiveness, you know that recently

we have had our difficulties and there are many things

I want to ask you.

I tried that one time, high school, second lunch, and then again,
years later, in the chlorinated pool.

I am still talking to you about help. I still do not have
these luxuries.

I have told you where I'm coming from, so put it together.

We clutch our bellies and roll on the floor . . .

When I say this, it should mean laughter,
not poison.

I want more applesauce. I want more seats reserved for heroes.

Dear Forgiveness, I saved a plate for you.

Quit milling around the yard and come inside.

II

Visible World

Sunlight pouring across your skin, your shadow
flat on the wall.

The dawn was breaking the bones of your heart like twigs.

You had not expected this,
the bedroom gone white, the astronomical light
pummeling you in a stream of fists.

You raised your hand to your face as if
to hide it, the pink fingers gone gold as the light
streamed straight to the bone,
as if you were the small room closed in glass
with every speck of dust illuminated.

The light is no mystery,
the mystery is that there is something to keep the light
from passing through.

Boot Theory

A man walks into a bar and says:

Take my wife—please.

So you do.

You take her out into the rain and you fall in love with her
and she leaves you and you're desolate.

You're on your back in your undershirt, a broken man
on an ugly bedspread, staring at the water stains
on the ceiling.

And you can hear the man in the apartment above you
taking off his shoes.

You hear the first boot hit the floor and you're looking up,
you're waiting

because you thought it would follow, you thought there would be
some logic, perhaps, something to pull it all together
but here we are in the weeds again,
here we are

in the bowels of the thing: your world doesn't make sense.

And then the second boot falls.

And then a third, a fourth, a fifth.

A man walks into a bar and says:

Take my wife—please.

But you take him instead.

You take him home, and you make him a cheese sandwich,

and you try to get his shoes off, but he kicks you

and he keeps kicking you.

You swallow a bottle of sleeping pills but they don't work.

Boots continue to fall to the floor

in the apartment above you.

You go to work the next day pretending nothing happened.

Your co-workers ask

if everything's okay and you tell them

you're just tired.

And you're trying to smile. And they're trying to smile.

A man walks into a bar, you this time, and says:

Make it a double.

A man walks into a bar, you this time, and says:

Walk a mile in my shoes.

A man walks into a convenience store, still you, saying:

I only wanted something simple, something generic...

But the clerk tells you to buy something or get out.

A man takes his sadness down to the river and throws it in the river

but then he's still left

with the river. A man takes his sadness and throws it away

but then he's still left with his hands.

A Primer for the Small Weird Loves

1

The blond boy in the red trunks is holding your head underwater

because he is trying to kill you,

and you deserve it, you do, and you know this,

and you are ready to die in this swimming pool

because you wanted to touch his hands and lips and this means

your life is over anyway.

You're in the eighth grade. You know these things.

You know how to ride a dirt bike, and you know how to do

long division,

and you know that a boy who likes boys is a dead boy, unless

he keeps his mouth shut, which is what you

didn't do,

because you are weak and hollow and it doesn't matter anymore.

2

A dark-haired man in a rented bungalow is licking the whiskey
from the back of your wrist.

He feels nothing,

keeps a knife in his pocket,

peels an apple right in front of you

while you tramp around a mustard-colored room

in your underwear

drinking Dutch beer from a green bottle.

After everything that was going to happen has happened

you ask only for the cab fare home

and realize you should have asked for more

because he couldn't care less, either way.

3

The man on top of you is teaching you how to hate, see you

as a piece of real estate,

just another fallow field lying underneath him

like a sacrifice.

He's turning your back into a table so he doesn't have to

eat off the floor, so he can get comfortable,
pressing against you until he fits, until he's made a place for himself
inside you

The clock ticks from five to six. Kissing degenerates into biting.

So you get a kidney punch, a little blood in your urine.

It isn't over yet, it's just begun.

4

Says to himself

The boy's no good. The boy is just no good.

but he takes you in his arms and pushes your flesh around
to see if you could ever be ugly to him.

You, the now familiar whipping boy, but you're beautiful,
he can feel the dogs licking his heart.

Who gets the whip and who gets the hoops of flame?

He hits you and he hits you and he hits you.

Desire driving his hands right into your body.

Hush, my sweet. These tornadoes are for you.

You wanted to think of yourself as someone who did these kinds of things.

You wanted to be in love

and he happened to get in the way.

5

The green-eyed boy in the powder-blue t-shirt standing
next to you in the supermarket recoils as if hit,
repeatedly, by a lot of men, as if he has a history of it.

This is not your problem.

You have your own body to deal with.

The lamp by the bed is broken.

You are feeling things he's no longer in touch with.

And everyone is speaking softly,

so as not to wake one another.

The wind knocks the heads of the flowers together.

Steam rises from every cup at every table at once.

Things happen all the time, things happen every minute
that have nothing to do with us.

6

So you say you want a deathbed scene, the knowledge that comes
before knowledge,

and you want it dirty.

And no one can ever figure out what you want,
and you won't tell them,

and you realize the one person in the world who loves you
isn't the one you thought it would be,
and you don't trust him to love you in a way
you would enjoy.

And the boy who loves you the wrong way is filthy.

And the boy who loves you the wrong way keeps weakening.

You thought if you handed over your body
he'd do something interesting.

7

The stranger says there are no more couches and he will have to
sleep in your bed. You try to warn him, you tell him
you will want to get inside him, and ruin him,
but he doesn't listen.

You do this, you do. You take the things you love
and tear them apart
or you pin them down with your body and pretend they're yours.
So, you kiss him, and he doesn't move, he doesn't
pull away, and you keep on kissing him. And he hasn't moved,
he's frozen, and you've kissed him, and he'll never
forgive you, and maybe now he'll leave you alone.

Unfinished Duet

At first there were too many branches
so he cut them and then it was winter.

He meaning you. Yes. He would look out
the window and stare at the trees that once
had too many branches and now seemed
to have too few. *Is that all?* No, there were
other attempts, breakfasts: plates served,
plates carried away. *He doesn't know*
what to do with his hands. He likes the feel
of the coffeepot. *More than the hacksaw?*
Yes, and he likes flipping the chairs,
watching them fill with people. He likes
the orange juice and toast of it, and waxed
floors in any light. *He wants to be tender*
and merciful. That sounds overly valorous.
Sounds like penance. And his hands?
His hands keep turning into birds and
flying away from him. *Him being you.*

Yes. *Do you love yourself?* I don't have to
answer that. *It should matter.* He has a
body but it doesn't matter, clean sheets
on the bed but it doesn't matter. *This is
where he trots out his sadness. Little black
cloud, little black umbrella.* You miss
the point: the face in the mirror is a little
traitor, the face in the mirror is a pale
and naked hostage and no one can tell
which room he's being held in. *He wants
in, he wants out, he wants the antidote.*
*He stands in front of the mirror with a net,
hoping to catch something.* he wants to
move forward into the afternoon because
there is no other choice. *Everyone in this
room got here somehow and everyone in
this room will have to leave.* So what's left?
Sing a song about the room we're in?
Hammer in the pegs that fix the meaning
to the landscape? *The voice wants to be*

a hand and the hand wants to do something useful. What did you really want? Someone to pass this with me. You wanted more.

I want what everyone wants. *He raises the moon on a crane for effect, cue the violins.*

That's what the violins are for. And yes, he raises the moon on a crane and scrubs it until it shines. *So what does it shine on?*

Nothing. *Was there no one else?* Left-handed truth, right-handed truth, there's no pure way to say it. *The wind blows and it makes a noise. Pain makes a noise. We bang on the pipes and it makes a noise. Was there no one else?* His hands keep turning into birds, and his hands keep flying away from him. *Eventually the birds must land.*

I Had a Dream About You

All the cows were falling out of the sky and landing in the mud.

You were drinking sangria and I was throwing oranges at you, but it didn't matter.

I said my arms are very long and your head's on fire.

I said kiss me here and here and here

and you did.

Then you wanted pasta,

so we trampled out into the tomatoes and rolled around to make the sauce.

You were very beautiful.

We were in the Safeway parking lot. I couldn't find my cigarettes.

You said Hurry up! but I was worried there would be a holdup

and we would be stuck in a hostage situation, hiding behind

the frozen meats, with nothing to smoke for hours.

You said *Don't be silly*,

so I followed you into the store.

We were thumping the melons when I heard somebody say *Nobody move!*

I leaned over and whispered in your ear *I told you so*.

There was a show on the television about buried treasure.

You were trying to convince me that we should buy shovels

and go out into the yard

and I was trying to convince you that I was a vampire.

On the way to the hardware store I kept biting your arm

and you said if I really was a vampire I would be biting your neck,

so I started biting your neck

and you said *Cut it out!*

and you bought me an ice cream, and then we saw the UFO.

These are the dreams we should be having. I shouldn't have to
clean them up like this.

You were lying in the middle of the empty highway.

The sky was red and the sand was red and you were wearing a brown coat.

There were flecks of foam in the corners of your mouth.

The birds were watching you.

Your eyes were closed and you were listening to the road and I could
hear your breathing, I could hear your heart beating.

I carried you to the car and drove you home but you
weren't making any sense

I took a shower and tried to catch my breath.

You were lying on top of the bedspread
in boxer shorts, watching cartoons and laughing but not making any sound.

Your skin looked blue in the television light.

Your teeth looked yellow.

Still wet, I lay down next to you. Your arms, your legs, your naked chest,
your ribs delineated like a junkyard dogs.

There's nowhere to go, I thought. There's nowhere to go.

You were sitting in a bathtub at the hospital and you were crying.

You said it hurt.

I mean the buildings that were not the hospital.

I shouldn't have mentioned the hospital.

I don't think I can take this much longer.

In the dream I don't tell anyone, you put your head in my lap.

Let's say you're driving down the road with your eyes closed
but my eyes are also closed.

You're by the side of the road.

You're by the side of the road and you're doing all the talking
while I stare at my shoes.

They're nice shoes, brown and comfortable, and I like your voice.

In the dream I don't tell anyone, I'm afraid to wake you up.

In these dreams it's always you:

the boy in the sweatshirt,

the boy on the bridge, the boy who always keeps me
from jumping off the bridge.

Oh, the things we invent when we are scared
and want to be rescued.

Your jeep. Your teeth. The coffee that you bought me.

The sandwich cut in half on the plate.

I woke up and ate ice cream in the dark,

hunched over on the wooden chair in the kitchen,

listening to the rain.

I borrowed your shoes and didn't put them away.

You were crying and eating rice.

The surface of the water was still and bright.

Your feet were burning so I put my hands on them, but my hands
were burning too.

You had a bottle of pills but I wouldn't let you swallow them.

You said *Will you love me even more when Im dead?*

And I said *No*, and I threw the pills on the sand.

Look at them, you said. *They look like emeralds.*

I put you in the cage with the ocelots. I was trying to fatten you up
with sausage and bacon.

Somehow you escaped and climbed up the branches of a pear tree.

I chopped it down but there was no one in it.

I went to the riverbed to wait for you to show up.

You didn't show up.

I kept waiting.

Straw House, Straw Dog

1

I watched TV. I had a Coke at the bar. I had four dreams in a row
where you were burned, about to burn, or still on fire.

I watched TV. I had a Coke at the bar. I had four Cokes,
four dreams in a row.

Here you are in the straw house, feeding the straw dog. Here you are
in the wrong house, feeding the wrong dog. I had a Coke with ice.

I had four dreams on TV. You have a cold cold smile.

You were burned, you were about to burn, you're still on fire.

Here you are in the straw house, feeding ice to the dog, and you wanted
an adventure, so I said *Have an adventure*.

The straw about to burn, the straw on fire. Here you are on the TV,
saying *Watch me, just watch me*.

2

Four dreams in a row, four dreams in a row, four dreams in a row,
fall down right there. I wanted to fall down right there but I knew
you wouldn't catch me because you're dead. I swallowed crushed ice
pretending it was glass and you're dead. Ashes to ashes.

You wanted to be cremated so we cremated you and you wanted an adventure

so I ran and I knew you wouldn't catch me.

You are a fever I am learning to live with, and everything is happening at the wrong end of a very long tunnel.

3

I woke up in the morning and I didn't want anything, didn't do anything, couldn't do it anyway,

just lay there listening to the blood rush through me and it never made any sense, anything.

And I can't eat, can't sleep, can't sit still or fix things and I wake up and I wake up and you're still dead, you're under the table, you're still feeding the damn dog, you're cutting the room in half.

Whatever. Feed him whatever. Burn the straw house down.

4

I don't really blame you for being dead but you can't have your sweater back.

So, I said, now that we have our dead, what are we going to do with them?

There's a black dog and there's a white dog, depends on which you feed, depends on which damn dog you live with.

5

Here we are

in the wrong tunnel, burn O burn, but it's cold, I have clothes

all over my body, and it's raining, it wasn't supposed to. And there's snow

on the TV, a landscape full of snow, falling from the fire-colored sky.

But thanks, thanks for calling it *the blue sky*

You can sleep now, you said. You can sleep now. You said that.

I had a dream where you said that. Thanks for saying that.

You weren't supposed to.

Saying Your Names

Chemical names, bird names, names of fire
and flight and snow, baby names, paint names,
delicate names like bones in the body,
Rumplestiltskin names that are always changing,
names that no one's ever able to figure out.
Names of spells and names of hexes, names
cursed quietly under the breath, or called out
loudly to fill the yard, calling you inside again,
calling you home. Nicknames and pet names
and baroque French monikers, written in
shorthand, written in longhand, scrawled
illegibly in brown ink on the backs of yellowing
photographs, or embossed on envelopes lined
with gold. Names called out across the water,
names I called you behind your back,
sour and delicious, secret and unrepeatable,
the names of flowers that open only once,
shouted from balconies, shouted from rooftops,

or muffled by pillows, or whispered in sleep,

or caught in the throat like a lump of meat.

I try, I do. I try and try. A happy ending?

Sure enough — *Hello darling, welcome home.*

I'll call you darling, hold you tight. We are

not traitors but the lights go out. It's dark.

Sweetheart, is that you? There are no tears,

no pictures of him squarely. A seaside framed

in glass, and boats, those little boats with

sails aflutter, shining lights upon the water,

lights that splinter when they hit the pier.

His voice on tape, his name on the envelope,

the soft sound of a body falling off a bridge

behind you, the body hardly even makes

a sound. The waters of the dead, a clear road,

every lover in the form of stars, the road

blocked. All night I stretched my arms across

him, rivers of blood, the dark woods, singing

with all my skin and bone *Please keep him safe.*

Let him lay his head on my chest and we will be

like sailors, swimming in the sound of it, dashed
to pieces. Makes a cathedral, him pressing against
me, his lips at my neck, and yes, I do believe
his mouth is heaven, his kisses falling over me
like stars. Names of heat and names of light,
names of collision in the dark, on the side of the
bus, in the bark of the tree, in ballpoint pen
on jeans and hands and the backs of matchbooks
that then get lost. Names like pain cries, names
like tombstones, names forgotten and reinvented,
names forbidden or overused. Your name like
a song I sing to myself, your name like a box
where I keep my love, your name like a nest
in the tree of love, your name like a boat in the
sea of love — O now we're in the sea of love!
Your name like detergent in the washing machine.
Your name like two X's like punched-in eyes,
like a drunk cartoon passed out in the gutter,
your name with two X's to mark the spots,
to hold the place, to keep the treasure from

becoming ever lost. I'm saying your name
in the grocery store, I'm saying your name on
the bridge at dawn. Your name like an animal
covered with frost, your name like a music that's
been transposed, a suit of fur, a coat of mud,
a kick in the pants, a lungful of glass, the sails
in wind and the slap of waves on the hull
of a boat that's sinking to the sound of mermaids
singing songs of love, and the tug of a simple
profound sadness when it sounds so far away.
Here is a map with a your name for a capital,
here is an arrow to prove a point: we laugh
and it pits the world against us, we laugh,
and we've got nothing left to lose, and our hearts
turn red, and the river rises like a barn on fire.
I came to tell you, we'll swim in the water, we'll
swim like something sparkling underneath
the waves. Our bodies shivering, and the sound
of our breathing, and the shore so far away.
I'll use my body like a ladder, climbing

to the thing behind it, saying farewell to flesh,
farewell to everything caught underfoot
and flattened. Names of poisons, names of
handguns, names of places we've been
together, names of people we'd be together,
Names of endurance, names of devotion,
street names and place names and all the names
of our dark heaven crackling in their pan.
It's a bed of straw, darling. It sure as shit is.

*If there was one thing I could save from the fire,
he said, the broken arms of the sycamore,
the eucalyptus still trying to climb out of the yard —
your breath on my neck like a music that holds
my hands down, kisses as they burn their way
along my spine — or rain, our bodies wet,
clothes clinging arm to elbow, clothes clinging
nipple to groin — I'll be right here. I'm waiting.*

Say hallelujah, say goodnight, say it over
the canned music and your feet won't stumble,
his face getting larger, the rest blurring

on every side. And angels, about twelve angels,
angels knocking on your head right now, hello
hello, a flash in the sky, would you like to
meet him there, in Heaven? Imagine a room,
a sudden glow. Here is my hand, my heart,
my throat, my wrist. Here are the illuminated
cities at the center of me, and here is the center
of me, which is a lake, which is a well that we
can drink from, but I can't go through with it.
I just don't want to die anymore.

III

Planet of Love

Imagine this:

You're driving.

The sky's bright. You look great.

In a word, in a phrase, it's a movie,

you're the star.

so smile for the camera, it's your big scene,

you know your lines.

I'm the director. I'm in a helicopter.

I have a megaphone and you play along,

because you want to die for love,

you always have.

Imagine this:

You're pulling the car over. Somebody's waiting.

You're going to die

in your best friend's arms.

And you play along because it's funny, because it's written down,

you've memorized it,

it's all you know.

I say the phrases that keep it all going,
and everybody plays along.

Imagine:

Someone's pulling a gun, and you're jumping into the middle of it.

You didn't think you'd feel this way.

There's a gun in your hand.

It feels hot. It feels oily.

I'm the director

and i'm screaming at you,

I'm waving my arms in the sky,

and everyone's watching, everyone's

curious, everyone's

holding their breath.

Wishbone

You saved my life he says. *I owe you everything.*

You don't, I say, you don't owe me squat, let's just get going, let's just get gone, but he's relentless,

keeps saying *I owe you*, says *Your shoes are filling with your own damn blood, you must want something, just tell me, and it's yours.*

But I can't look at him, can hardly speak,

I took the bullet for all the wrong reasons, I'd just as soon kill you myself,

I say. You keep saying *I owe you, I owe...* but you say the same thing every time. Let's not talk about it, let's just not talk.

Not because I don't believe it, not because I want it any different, but I'm always saving and you're always owing and I'm tired of asking to settle the debt. Don't bother. You never mean it

anyway, not really, and it only makes me that much more ashamed.

There's only one thing I want, don't make me say it, just get me bandages, I'm bleeding, I'm not just making conversation.

There's smashed glass glittering everywhere like stars. It's a Western, Henry. It's a downright shoot-em-up. We've made a graveyard out of the bone white afternoon.

It's another wrong-man-dies scenario and we keep doing it, Henry,
keep saying *until we get it right...* but we always win and we never quit.
See, we've won again,
here we are at the place where I get to beg for it where I get to say *Please,*
for just one night, will you lay down next to me, we can leave our clothes
on,
we can stay all buttoned up?

But we both know how it goes—I say *I want you inside me* and you hold
my head underwater, I say *I want you inside me* and you split me open
with a knife.

I'm battling monsters, I'm pulling you out of the burning buildings
and you say *I'll give you anything* but you never come through.

Even when you're standing up
you look like you're lying down, but will you let me kiss your neck, baby?
Do I have to tie your arms down? Do I have to stick my tongue in your
mouth like the hand of a thief,

like a burglary, like it's just another petty theft? It makes me tired,
Henry. Do you see what I mean? Do you see what I'm getting at?

I swear, I end up
feeling empty, like you've taken something out of me, and I have to search
my body for the scars, thinking *Did he find that one last tender place to*

sink his teeth in?

I know you want me to say it, Henry, it's in the script, you want me to say

Lie down on the bed, you're all I ever wanted and worth dying for too...

but I think I'd rather keep the bullet.

It's mine, see, I'm not giving it up. This way you still owe me, and that's

as good as anything. You can't get out of this one, Henry, you can't get it

out of me, and with this bullet lodged in my chest,

covered with your name, I will turn myself into a gun, because I'm hungry

and hollow and just want something to call my own. I'll be your

slaughterhouse, your killing floor, your morgue

and final resting, walking around with this bullet inside me like the bullet

was already there, like it's been waiting inside me the whole time.

Do you want it? Do you want anything I have?

Will you throw me to the ground like you mean it, reach inside and wrestle

it out with your bare hands? If you love me, Henry, you don't love me

in a way I understand.

Do you know how it ends? Do you feel lucky? Do you want to go home

now? There's a bottle of whiskey in the trunk of the Chevy and a

dead man at our feet

staring up at us like we're something interesting. This is where the evening

splits in half, Henry, love or death. Grab an end, pull hard,
and make a wish.

Driving, Not Washing

It starts with bloodshed, always bloodshed, always the same
running from something larger than yourself story,
shoving money into the jaws of a suitcase, cutting your hair
with a steak knife at a rest stop,
and you're off, you're on the run, a fugitive driving away from
something shameful and half-remembered.

They're hurling their bodies down the freeway
to the smell of gasoline,
which is the sound of a voice saying I told you so.

Yes, you did dear.

Every story has its chapter in the desert, the long slide from kingdom
to kingdom through the wilderness,
where you learn things, where you're left to your own devices.

Henry's driving,
and Theodore's bleeding shotgun into the upholstery.

It's a road movie,
a double-feature, two boys striking out across America, while desire,

like a monster, crawls up out of the lake
with all of us watching, with all of us wondering if these two boys will
find a way to figure it out.

Here is the black box, the shut eye,
the bullet pearling in his living skin. This boy, half-destroyed,
screaming *Drive into that tree, drive off the embankment.*

Henry, make something happen.

But angels are pouring out of the farmland, angels are swarming
over the grassland,

Angels rising from their little dens, arms swinging, wings aflutter,
dropping their white-hot bombs of love.

We are not dirty, he keeps saying. *We are not dirty...*

They want you to love the whole damn world but you won't,
you want it all narrowed down to one fleshy man in the bath,
who knows what to do with his body, with his hands.

It should follow,
you know this, like the panels of a comic strip,
we should be belted in, but you still can't get beyond your skin,
and they're trying to drive you into the ground, to see if anything
walks away.

Road Music

1

The eye stretches to the horizon and then must continue up.

Anything past the horizon

is invisible, it can only be imagined. You want to see the future but
you only see the sky. Fluffy clouds.

Look—white fluffy clouds.

Looking back is easy for a while and then looking back gets
murky. There is the road, and there is the story of where the road goes,
and then more road,

the roar of the freeway, the roar of the city sheening across the city.

There should be a place.

At the rest stop, in the restaurant, the overpass, the water's edge . . .

2

He was not dead yet, not exactly—

parts of him were dead already, certainly other parts were still only waiting
for something to happen, something grand, but it isn't
always about me,

he keeps saying, though he's talking about the only heart he knows—

He could build a city. Has a certain capacity. There's a niche in his chest
where a heart would fit perfectly
and he thinks if he could just maneuver one into place—
well then, game over.

3

You wonder what he's thinking when he shivers like that.

What can you tell me, what could you possibly

tell me? Sure, it's good to feel things, and if it hurts, we're doing it

to ourselves, or so the saying goes, but there should be

a different music here. There should be just one safe place

in the world, I mean

this world. People get hurt here. People fall down and stay down and I don't
like

the way the song goes.

You, the moon. You, the road. You, the little flowers

by the side of the road. You keep singing along to that song I hate. Stop
singing.

The Dislocated Room

It was night for many miles and then the real stars in the purple sky,
like little boats rowed out too far,
begin to disappear.

And there, in the distance, not the promised land,
but a Holiday Inn,
with bougainvillea growing through the chain link by the pool.
The door swung wide: twin beds, twin lamps, twin plastic cups
wrapped up in cellophane
and he says *No Henry, let's not do this.*

Can you see the plot like dotted lines across the room?

Here is the sink to wash away the blood,
here's the whiskey, the ripped-up shirt, the tile of the bathroom floor,
the disk of the drain
punched through with holes.

Here's the boy like a sack of meat, here are the engines, the little room
that is not a room,
the Henry that is not a Henry, the Henry with a needle and thread,
hovering over the hollow boy passed out

on the universal bedspread.

Here he is again, being sewn up.

So now we have come to a great battlefield, the warmth of the fire,
the fire still burning,
the heat escaping like a broken promise.

This is the part where you wake up in your clothes again,
this is the part where you're trying to stay inside the building.

*Stay in the room for now, he says. Stay in the room
for now.*

This is the place, you say to yourself, this is the place where everything
starts to begin,

the wounds reveal a thicker skin and suddenly there is no floor.

Meanwhile,

there is something underneath the building that is trying very hard
to get your attention---

a man with almond eyes and a zipper that runs the length
of his spine.

You can see the shadow that the man is throwing across
the linoleum,

how it resembles a boat, how it crosses the tiles just so,

the masts of his arms rasping against the windows.

He's pointing at you with a glass of milk

as if he's trying to tell you that there is

some sort of shining star now buried deep inside you and he has to
dig it out with a knife.

The bell rings, the dog growls,

and then the wind picking up, and the light falling, and his mouth
flickering, and the dog

howling, and the window closing tight against the dirty rain.

Here is the hallway and here are the doors and here is the fear of the
other thing, the relentless

thing, your body drowning in gravity.

This is the in-between, the waiting that happens in the
space between

one note and the next, the place where you confuse

his hands with the room, the dog

with the man, the blood

with the ripped-up sky.

He puts his hands all over you to keep you in the room.

It's night. It's noon. He's driving. It's happening

all over again.

It's love or it isn't. It isn't over.

You're in a car. You're in the weeds again. You're on a bumpy road
and there are criminals everywhere,
longing for danger.

Henry, he's saying. Who is it that's talking?

I thought I heard the clink

of ice to teeth. I thought I heard the clink of teeth to glass.

Open the door and the light falls in. Open your mouth and it falls
right out again.

He's on top of you. He's next to you, right next to you in fact.

He has the softest skin wrapped entirely around him.

It isn't him.

It isn't you. You're falling now. You're swimming. This is not
harmless. You are not

breathing. You're climbing out of the chlorinated pool again.

We have not been given all the words necessary.

We have not been given anything at all.

We've been driving all night.

We've been driving a long time.

We want to stop. We can't.

Is there an acceptable result? Do we mean something when we talk?

Is it enough that we are shuddering
from the sound?

Left hand raising the fork to the mouth, feeling the meat slide down
your throat, thinking

My throat. Mine. Everything in this cone of light is mine.

The ashtray and the broken lamp, the filthy orange curtains and his
ruined shirt.

I've been in your body, baby, and it was paradise.

I've been in your body and it was a carnival ride.

They want to stop but they can't stop. They don't know what
they're doing.

This is not harmless, the *how to touch it*, we do not want the screen
completely

lifted from our eyes, just lifted long enough to see the holes.

Tired and sore and rubbed the wrong way,
rubbed raw and throbbing in the light.

They want to stop but they don't stop. They cannot get the bullet out.

Cut me open and the light streams out.

*Stitch me up and the light keeps streaming out between
the stitches.*

He cannot get the bullet out, he thinks, he can't, and then he does.

A little piece of grit to build a pearl around.

Midnight June. Midnight July. They've been going at it for days now.

Getting the bullet out.

Digging out the bullet and holding it up to the light, the light.

Digging out the bullet and holding it up to the light.

You Are Jeff

1

There are two twins on motorbikes but one is farther up the road, beyond the hairpin turn, or just before it, depending on which twin you are in love with at the time. Do not choose sides yet. It is still to your advantage to remain impartial. Both motorbikes are shiny red and both boys have perfect teeth, dark hair, soft hands. The one in front will want to take you apart, and slowly. His deft and stubby fingers searching every shank and lock for weaknesses. You could love this boy with all your heart. The other brother only wants to stitch you back together. The sun shines down. It's a beautiful day. Consider the hairpin turn. Do not choose sides yet.

2

There are two twins on motorbikes but one is farther up the road. Let's call them Jeff. And because the first Jeff is in front we'll consider him the older, and therefore responsible for lending money and the occasional punch in the shoulder. World-wise, world-weary, and not his mother's favorite, this Jeff will always win when it all comes down to fisticuffs. Unfortunately for him, it doesn't always all come down to

fisticuffs. Jeff is thinking about his brother down the winding road behind him. He is thinking that if only he could cut him open and peel him back and crawl inside this second skin, then he could relive that last mile again: reborn, wild-eyed, free.

3

There are two twins on motorbikes but one is farther up the road, beyond the hairpin turn, or just before it, depending on which Jeff you are. It could have been so beautiful—you scout out the road ahead and I will watch your back, how it was and how it will be, memory and fantasy—but each Jeff wants to be the other one. My name is Jeff and I'm tired of looking at the back of your head. My name is Jeff and I'm tired of seeing my hand me down clothes. Look, Jeff, I'm telling you, for the last time, I mean it, etcetera. They are the same and they are not the same. They are the same and they hate each other for it.

4

Your name is Jeff and somewhere up ahead of you your brother has pulled to the side of the road and he is waiting for you with a lug wrench clutched in his greasy fist. O how he loves you, darling boy. O how, like always, he invents the monsters underneath the bed to get you to sleep next to him, chest to chest or chest to back, the covers drawn around

you in an act of faith against the night. When he throws the wrench into the air it will catch the light as it spins toward you. Look—it looks like a star. You had expected something else, anything else, but the wrench never reaches you. It hangs in the air like that, spinning in the air like that. It's beautiful.

5

Let's say God in his High Heaven is hungry and has decided to make himself some tuna fish sandwiches. He's already finished making two of them, on sourdough, before he realizes that the fish is bad. What is he going to do with these sandwiches? They're already made, but he doesn't want to eat them.

Let's say the Devil is played by two men. We'll call them Jeff. Dark hair, green eyes, white teeth, pink tongues—they're twins. The one on the left has gone bad in the middle, and the other one on the left is about to. As they wrestle, you can tell that they have forgotten about God, and they are very hungry.

6

You are playing cards with three men named Jeff. Two of the Jeffs seem somewhat familiar, but the Jeff across from you keeps staring at your hands, your mouth, and you're certain that you've never seen this Jeff

before. But he's on your team, and you're ahead, you're winning big, and yet the other Jeffs keep smiling at you like there's no tomorrow. They all have perfect teeth: white, square, clean, even. And, for some reason, the lighting in the room makes their teeth seem closer than they should be, as if each mouth was a place, a living room with pink carpet and the window's open. *Come back from the window, Jefferson. Take off those wet clothes and come over here, by the fire.*

7

You are playing cards with three Jeffs. One is your father, one is your brother, and the other is your current boyfriend. All of them have seen you naked and heard you talking in your sleep. Your boyfriend Jeff gets up to answer the phone. To them he is a mirror, but to you he is a room. *Phone's for you*, Jeff says. Hey! It's Uncle Jeff, who isn't really your uncle, but you can't talk right now, one of the Jeffs has put his tongue in your mouth. Please let it be the right one.

8

Two brothers are fighting by the side of the road. Two motorbikes have fallen over on the shoulder, leaking oil into the dirt, while the interlocking brothers grapple and swing. You see them through the backseat window as you and your parents drive past. You are twelve years old.

You do not have a brother. You have never experienced anything this ferocious or intentional with another person. Your mother is pretending that she hasn't seen anything. Your father is fiddling with the knobs of the radio. There is an empty space next to you in the backseat of the station wagon. Make it the shape of everything you need. Now say hello.

9

You are in an ordinary suburban bedroom with bunk beds, a bookshelf, two wooden desks and chairs. You are lying on your back, on the top bunk, very close to the textured ceiling, staring straight at it in fact, and the room is still dark except for a wedge of powdery light that spills in from the adjoining bathroom. The bathroom is covered in mint green tile and someone is in there, singing very softly. Is he singing to you? For you? Black cherries in chocolate, the ring around the moon, a beetle underneath a glass—you cannot make out all the words, but you're sure he knows you're in there, and he's singing to you, even though you don't know who he is.

10

You see it as a room, a tabernacle, the dark hotel. You're in the hallway again, and you open the door, and if you're ready you'll see it, but

maybe one part of your mind decides that the other parts aren't ready,
and then you don't remember where you've been, and you find yourself
down the hall again, the lights gone dim as the left hand sings the right
hand back to sleep. It's a puzzle: each piece, each room, each time you
put your hand to the knob, your mouth to the hand, your ear to the
wound that whispers.

You're in the hallway again. The radio is playing your favorite song.

You're in the hallway. Open the door again. Open the door.

11

Suppose for a moment that the heart has two heads, that the heart has
been chained and dunked in a glass booth filled with river water. The
heart is monologing about hesitation and fulfillment while behind the
red brocade the heart is drowning. Can the heart escape? Does love
even care? Snow falls as we dump the booth in the bay.

Suppose for a moment we are crowded around a pier, waiting for something
to ripple the water. *We believe in you. There is no danger. It is not
getting dark,* we want to say.

12

Consider the hairpin turn. It is waiting for you like a red door or the
broken leg of a dog. The sun is shining, O how the sun shines down!

Your speedometer and your handgrips and the feel of the road below you, how it knows you, the black ribbon spread out on the greens between these lines that suddenly don't reach to the horizon. It is waiting, like a broken door, like the red dog that chases its tail and eats your rose-bushes and then must be forgiven. Who do you love, Jeff? Who do you love? You were driving toward something and then, well, then you found yourself driving the other way. The dog is asleep. The road is behind you. O how the sun shines down.

13

This time everyone has the best intentions. You have cancer. Let's say you have cancer. Let's say you've swallowed a bad thing and now it's got its hands inside you. This is the essence of love and failure. You see what I mean but you're happy anyway, and that's okay, it's a love story after all, a lasting love, a wonderful adventure with lots of action, where the mirror says mirror and the hand says hand and the front door never says Sorry Charlie. So the doctor says you need more stitches and the bruise cream isn't working. So much for the facts. Let's say you're still completely in the dark but we love you anyway. We love you. We really do.

14

After work you go to the grocery store to get some milk and a carton of cigarettes. Where did you get those bruises? You don't remember.

Work was boring. You find a jar of bruise cream and a can of stewed tomatoes. Maybe a salad? Spinach, walnuts, blue cheese, apples, and you can't decide between the Extra Large or Jumbo black olives. Which is bigger anyway? Extra Large has a blue label, Jumbo has a purple label. Both cans cost \$1.29. While you're deciding, the afternoon light is streaming through the windows behind the bank of checkout counters. Take the light inside you like a blessing, like a knee in the chest, holding onto it and not letting it go. Now let it go.

15

Like sandpaper, the light, or a blessing, or a bruise. Blood everywhere, he said, the red light hemorrhaging from everywhere at once. The train station blue, your lips blue, hands cold and the blue wind. Or a horse, your favorite horse now raised up again out of the mud and galloping galloping always toward you. In your ruined shirt, on the last day, while the bruise won't heal, and the stain stays put, the red light streaming in from everywhere at once. Your broken ribs, the back of your head, your hand to mouth or hand to now, right now, like you mean it, like it's splitting you in two. Now look at the lights, the lights.

16

You and your lover are making out in the corner booth of a seedy bar. The booths are plush and the drinks are cheap and in this dim and smoky light you can barely tell whose hands are whose. Someone raises their glass for a toast. Is that the Hand of Judgment or the Hand of Mercy? The bartender smiles, running a rag across the burnished wood of the bar. The drink in front of you has already been paid for. Drink it, the bartender says. *It's yours, you deserve it. It's already been paid for. Somebody's paid for it already. There's no mistake, he says. It's your drink, the one you asked for, just the way you like it. How can you refuse* Hands of fire, hands of air, hands of water, hands of dirt. Someone's doing all the talking but no one's lips move. Consider the hairpin turn.

17

The motorbikes are neck and neck but where's the checkered flag we all expected, waving in the distance, telling you you're home again, home? He's next to you, right next to you in fact, so close, or. . . he isn't. Imagine a room. Yes, imagine a room: two chairs facing the window but nobody moves. Don't move. Keep staring straight into my eyes. It feels like you're not moving, the way when, dancing, the room will suddenly fall away. You're dancing: you're neck and neck or cheek to cheek, he's

there or he isn't, the open road. Imagine a room. Imagine you're dancing. Imagine the room now falling away. Don't move.

18

Two brothers: one of them wants to take you apart. Two brothers: one of them wants to put you back together. It's time to choose sides now. The stitches or the devouring mouth? You want an alibi? You don't get an alibi, you get two brothers. Here are two Jeffs. Pick one. This is how you make the meaning, you take two things and try to define the space between them. Jeff or Jeff? Who do you want to be? You just wanted to play in your own backyard, but you don't know where your own yard is, exactly. You just wanted to prove there was one safe place, just one safe place where you could love him. You have not found that place yet. You have not made that place yet. You are here. You are here. You're still right here.

19

Here are your names and here is the list and here are the things you left behind: The mark on the floor from pushing your chair back, your underwear, one half brick of cheese, the kind I don't like, wrapped up, and poorly, and abandoned on the second shelf next to the poppyseed dressing, which is also yours. Here's the champagne on the floor, and here

are your house keys, and here are the curtains that your cat peed on.
And here is your cat, who keeps eating grass and vomiting in the hallway. Here is the list with all of your names, Jeff. They're not the same name, Jeff. They're not the same at all.

20

There are two twins on motorbikes but they are not on motorbikes, they're in a garden where the flowers are as big as thumbs. Imagine you are in a field of daisies. What are you doing in a field of daisies? Get up! Let's say you're not in the field anymore. Let's say they're not brothers anymore. That's right, they're not brothers, they're just one guy, and he knows you, and he's talking to you, but you're in pain and you cannot understand him. What are you still doing in this field? Get out of the field! You should be in the hotel room! You should, at least, be trying to get back into the hotel room. Ah! Now the field is empty.

21

Hold onto your voice. Hold onto your breath. Don't make a noise, don't leave the room until I come back from the dead for you. I will come back from the dead for you. This could be a city. This could be a graveyard. This could be the basket of a big balloon. Leave the lights on. Leave a trail of letters like those little knots of bread we used to

dream about. We used to dream about them. We used to do a lot of things. Put your hand to the knob, your mouth to the hand, pick up the bread and devour it. I'm in the hallway again, I'm in the hallway. The radio's playing my favorite song. Leave the lights on. Keep talking. I'll keep walking toward the sound of your voice.

22

Someone had a party while you were sleeping but you weren't really sleeping, you were sick, and parts of you were burning, and you couldn't move. Perhaps the party was in your honor. You can't remember. It seems the phone was ringing in the dream you were having but there's no proof. A dish in the sink that might be yours, some clothes on the floor that might belong to someone else. When was the last time you found yourself looking out of this window. Hey! This is a beautiful window! This is a beautiful view! 1 hose trees lined up like that, and the way the stars are spinning over them like that, spinning in the air like that, like wrenches.

23

Let's say that God is the space between two men and the Devil is the space between two men. Here: I'll be all of them-Jeff and Jeff and Jeff and Jeff are standing on the shoulder of the highway, four motorbikes

knocked over, two wrenches spinning in the ordinary air. Two of these Jeffs are windows, and two of these Jeffs are doors, and all of these Jeffs are trying to tell you something. Come closer. We'll whisper it in your ear. It's like seeing your face in a bowl of soup, cream of potato, and the eyes shining back like spoons. If we wanted to tell you everything, we would leave more footprints in the snow or kiss you harder. One thing. Come closer. Listen . . .

24

You're in a car with a beautiful boy, and he won't tell you that he loves you, but he loves you. And you feel like you've done something terrible, like robbed a liquor store, or swallowed pills, or shoveled yourself a grave in the dirt, and you're tired. You're in a car with a beautiful boy, and you're trying not to tell him that you love him, and you're trying to choke down the feeling, and you're trembling, but he reaches over and he touches you, like a prayer for which no words exist, and you feel your heart taking root in your body, like you've discovered something you don't even have a name for.

Meanwhile

Driving, dogs barking, how you get used to it, how you make
the new street yours.

Trees outside the window and a big band sound that makes you feel like
everything's okay,

a feeling that lasts for one song maybe,
the parentheses all clicking shut behind you.

The way we move through time and space, or only time.

The way it's night for many miles, and then suddenly
it's not, it's breakfast

and you're standing in the shower for over an hour,
holding the bar of soap up to the light.

I will keep watch. I will water the yard.

Knot the tie and go to work. Unknot the tie and go to sleep.

I sleep. I dream. I make up things
that I would never say. I say them very quietly.

The trees in wind, the streetlights on,
the click and flash of cigarettes

being smoked on the lawn, and just a little kiss before we say goodnight.

It spins like a wheel inside you: green yellow, green blue,
green beautiful green.

It's simple: it isn't over, it's just begun. It's green. It's still green.

Snow and Dirty Rain

Close your eyes. A lover is standing too close
to focus on. Leave me blurry and fall toward me
with your entire body. Lie under the covers, pretending
to sleep, while I'm in the other room. Imagine
my legs crossed, my hair combed, the shine of my boots
in the slatted light. I'm thinking *My plant, his chair,*
the ashtray that we bought together. I'm thinking *This is where*
we live. When we were little we made houses out of
cardboard boxes. We can do anything. It's not because
our hearts are large, they're not, it's what we
struggle with. The attempt to say *Come over. Bring*
your friends. It's a potluck, I'm making pork chops, I'm making
those long noodles you love so much. My dragonfly,
my black-eyed fire, the knives in the kitchen are singing
for blood, but we are the crossroads, my little outlaw,
and this is the map of my heart, the landscape
after cruelty which is, of course, a garden, which is
a tenderness, which is a room, a lover saying *Hold me*

tight, it's getting cold. We have not touched the stars,
nor are we forgiven, which brings us back
to the hero's shoulders and the gentleness that comes,
not from the absence of violence, but despite
the abundance of it. The lawn drowned, the sky on fire,
the gold light falling backward through the glass
of every room. I'll give you my heart to make a place
for it to happen, evidence of a love that transcends hunger.
Is that too much to expect? That I would name the stars
for you? That I would take you there? The splash
of my tongue melting you like a sugar cube? We've read
the back of the book, we know what's going to happen.
The fields burned, the land destroyed, the lovers left
broken in the brown dirt. And then it's gone.
Makes you sad. All your friends are gone. Goodbye
Goodbye. No more tears. I would like to meet you all
in Heaven. But there's a litany of dreams that happens
somewhere in the middle. Moonlight spilling
on the bathroom floor. A page of the book where we
transcend the story of our lives, past the taco stands

and record stores. Moonlight making crosses
on your body, and me putting my mouth on every one.
We have been very brave, we have wanted to know
the worst, wanted the curtain to be lifted from our eyes.
This dream going on with all of us in it. Penciling in
the bighearted slob. Penciling in his outstretched arms.
*Our father who art in Heaven. Our father who art buried
in the yard.* Someone is digging your grave right now.
Someone is drawing a bath to wash you clean, he said,
so think of the wind, so happy, so warm. It's a fairy tale,
the story underneath the story, sliding down the polished
halls, lightning here and gone. We make these
ridiculous idols so we can to what's behind them,
but what happens after we get up the ladder?
Do we simply stare at what's horrible and forgive it?
Here is the river, and here is the box, and here are
the monsters we put in the box to test our strength
against. Here is the cake, and here is the fork, and here's
the desire to put it inside us, and then the question
behind every question: *What happens next?*

The way you slam your body into mine reminds me
I'm alive, but monsters are always hungry, darling,
and they're only a few steps behind you, finding
the flaw, the poor weld, the place where we weren't
stitched up quite right, the place they could almost
slip right into through if the skin wasn't trying to
keep them out, to keep them here, on the other side
of the theater where the curtain keeps rising.

I crawled out the window and ran into the woods.

I had to make up all the words myself. The way
they taste, the way they sound in the air. I passed
through the narrow gate, stumbled in, stumbled
around for a while, and stumbled back out. I made
this place for you. A place for to love me.

If this isn't a kingdom then I don't know what is.

So how would you catalog it? Dawn in the fields?

Snow and dirty rain? Light brought in in buckets?

I was trying to describe the kingdom, but the letters
kept smudging as I wrote them: the hunter's heart,
the hunter's mouth, the trees and the trees and the

space between the trees, swimming in gold. The words
frozen. The creatures frozen. The plum sauce
leaking out of the bag. Explaining will get us nowhere.
I was away, I don't know where, lying on the floor,
pretending I was dead. I wanted to hurt you
but the victory is that I could not stomach it. *We have
swallowed him up*, they said. *It's beautiful. It really is.*
I had a dream about you. We were in the gold room
where everyone finally gets what they want.
You said *Tell me about your books, your visions made
of flesh and light* and I said *This is the Moon. This is
the Sun. Let me name the stars for you. Let me take you
there. The splash of my tongue melting you like a sugar
cube...* We were in the gold room where everyone
finally gets what they want, so I said *What do you
want, sweetheart?* and you said *Kiss me.* Here I am
leaving you clues. I am singing now while Rome
burns. We are all just trying to be holy. My applejack,
my silent night, just mash your lips against me.
We are all going forward. None of us are going back.

FIN



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