



down,  
 fingers dig underneath your ribs  
 as much as I can.

I ask  
 if I can have a little extra,  
 when you take my hand with the  
 marker,  
 to write  
 for me.

## II.

It isn't until after  
 you get home  
 from church on Sunday  
 that we get out the sharp knives,  
 a pack of scalpels you stole from work,  
 we look at each other to make sure  
 as we press knives  
 to the marks  
 we'd made.

## III.

We'll pretend that we never did any of this.  
 We'll pretend that our wounds  
 came from a car crash  
 so when friends come over to see our wedding photos,  
 we can pretend  
 I never took my lips  
 from your Adam's apple.

## IV.

You tell me that I can't bake,  
 if I wanted your opinion  
 I would have asked for it  
 before slicing open  
 our cheeks

to collect fat  
 that I use to make the crust of a pie.  
 I knead the dough by hand,  
 the fat from our cheeks seeps  
 between my fingers,  
 escaping back into the bowl.

I tell you  
 this would be easier if  
 I had  
 a baby's cheek fat  
 because it's richer,  
 but you remind me  
 I can't bake.

## V.

I keep forgetting that I'm making a pie,  
 until I put a hand on the meat in the freezer,  
 until I find a partially rolled out pie crust shoved  
 at the back of our kitchen cupboard.

One afternoon when you  
 are teaching embryology, I find the crust

---

I think that I should try again,  
 but when you get home  
 I'm crying in the kitchen  
 over a black pie,  
 filled with the meat we carved  
 from one another.

## **This Is a Love Song About the Moon and Cardiac Tamponade**

At night after you've finished removing all your teeth,  
 you leave the cuspids, incisors, and molars in a sea-sick-green bowl  
 of blood

so that you can savor each tooth when you  
 put it back in,  
 if you ever bothered to look,  
 you would see the rope  
 hanging  
 from the bottom of the moon.

The rope hangs in my grandfather's garden,  
 where we drink sangrias on hot summer evenings  
 next to the bush of dead JFK roses.

One summer evening,  
 we climb up until my palms touch the dust of the moon.

The dust is fine and smooth as I sift it through my fingers like flour,  
 we take some to make chocolate chip cookies,  
 but when we finish eating  
 we throw up in the tiger lilies,  
 we tell ourselves never again  
 until we run out of flour in my grandfather's kitchen  
 right when we want to make vanilla cupcakes.

Before we eat these,

I give you a root canal in the living room  
 while you slice open my chest  
 to slip your hand through my true ribs  
 so that you can almost feel my heart  
 because you can't feel my actual heart  
 when I won't let you slice open the pericardium.

Even though we spend half the day making love in the shrubs,  
 we don't get sick.

Later that night, while I'm sleeping,  
 you bring me your bowl of teeth,  
 set them on my bedside table,  
 the next morning I tell you,

*I don't want them.*

*I want you to sew up my chest.*

*It's summer and I can't go swimming with my chest like this.*

You say that's not your problem.

I press my lips to one of your cuspids,  
 I feel how it shreds my esophagus on the way down.

When you take the rest of your teeth,  
     you climb the rope back up to the moon,  
     you cut the rope near the top.

As far as I know,  
     you're still up there with a samovar,  
     so that when I dream about you at night,  
         I imagine us playing poker on the moon  
             for the right to slice open my pericardium,  
             for possession of your teeth,  
     except the  
         white, even incisors  
     holding a sugar cube between them.

### **Let's Pretend the Moon Isn't Watching You Have Sex**

Let's pretend one evening when you are thirty-two,  
 you walk into a bar called 'Sack'  
     because you think it's your favorite gay bar,  
 the one where drag queens remind you of bachelor Uncle Tom--  
     Don't you remember he used to make you pancakes with banana slice smiles  
 and chocolate chips?--  
 even though you realize it's not,  
     you stay.  
 At the bar two old men argue,  
 When one asks you about the meaning of life,  
 You say  
 "Double Scotch on the rocks."

Let's pretend you meet a man who is older than you at that bar.  
     His name is Sergei Sergeyevich Sidorov,  
     you will never meet his parents,  
     he will only meet yours at your funeral.  
 The first time he tells you he loves you  
     is when you find out how hard his knuckles are

against your soft lips.

The second time he says it is when the two of you are lying in a field,  
 showing you constellations you never knew existed,  
 while the quarter moon leers crookedly.

The third time is when he presses his lips against yours  
 to lick the blood off your white, even teeth.

Let's pretend that you and Sergei move in together.

Between the two of you it's a nice condo,  
 nice neighborhood,

it is then that you realize you have been together for three years.

After he goes to work the next morning,

you cry while you dab on some concealer,

(your boss is awfully concerned lately)

because you realize

you love him too,

or you don't know what to do without him,

you don't know the difference

--you wonder if the difference is like how smooth vodka goes down  
 compared to how Scotch burns when you take gulps.

Let's pretend that one night Sergei tells you that he wants a child.

A hand will automatically go to your neck,

touch it delicately, let fingers trail over ridges of welts.

You don't answer.

Instead, take his hand and go to the roof,

where you feel the light of the full moon,

you distract him by kissing the thin trail

of black hair

on his belly

that goes into his pants,

slide your fingers under the band of his favorite, red boxer-briefs,

his hands soon have a

painful liberating

hold

on my hair.

You keep your eyes

down

with

every thrust,  
 take every one as a sign  
     as you realize that the moon is watching,  
 enjoying it,  
     has to be enjoying it-- you're covered in the moon's semen.

For twice more,  
     let's pretend.

Let's pretend that three months later  
 you finish putting your signature on adoption paperwork with Sergei,  
     he smiles at me,  
 the moon makes a cross shaped shadow on his face  
 from where it peeks in between curtains,  
 when you blink the cross is gone,  
     so is his smile.

Let's pretend that two months later  
     the clocks are melting.  
         (cerebral hemorrhage is an awful sounding word, isn't it, sweetheart?)  
 Sergei finds you at the bottom of the shower.  
     --the last thing you see is his face,  
         he pulls chunks of hair  
             from his goatee,  
             starts screaming,  
             --  
 in a single, exhilarating moment  
     every individual hair is illuminated  
         by the sunlight--  
     you wonder if you burned his coffee again.

## Dead Children Will Stay Married Forever

### I.

When we're growing up



Aunt Millie's house,  
 we made it our place,  
 where our official country policy was:

No Ruiners Allowed.  
Se Prohibiten Adultos  
Quien Ruinar.

### III.

When we're eleven, we play basketball with the boys down the street  
 because our dad approves of those boys  
 with their bright knuckles and hard eyes and chipped teeth,  
 one Wednesday evening in October  
 Scotty knocks the ball out of our hands,  
 we run into the street to get it again,  
 our older brother yells.

Before we see the face of our brother,

we see  
 a spatter of blood  
 across the bright orange basketball  
 we're clutching,  
 the silhouette just like the outline of a bouquet of carnations  
 we saw once in a Valentine's Day display.

And when we don't get it, he looks at us

*Like*

*we're*

*the ones who*

*did wrong and*

*That's when we realize we did.*

We didn't bring our Sunday best.

## I Won't Talk About The Part Where We Visit The Cerebral Cortex

I tell Anton after he sleeps

we will travel through the openings in his wounds.



Just behind us, I hear  
     a bacteria loudly exclaim  
 that he finally got lucky,  
     now he is resistant to vancomycin.

But when we do leave,  
     I don't know how to get home,  
     he says  
         we will get home the same way we came--  
 except the wound  
                                     is sealed up.

Anton takes out a scalpel  
     from his waistcoat,  
     feels along the inside of his rib cage,  
 with a long, steady stroke  
     the skin is separated,  
 he pulls himself through,            reaches down for me  
     and I tell him  
     I don't want to.

He says  
     it's too late for that  
     as he takes my hand and  
         pulls me through  
     the layers of muscle and fat.

### **He Uses Yellow Thread and My Fingers Heal By Morning**

I don't start breaking  
     my fingers  
 until you ask that  
 I stay out of your writing shed  
     when you catch me  
     rifling through  
     carefully organized papers,

whose ink glints from Cyrillic  
 letters,  
       Antoshkin, I say,  
 I cannot read Russian.

I broke my left pinkie  
 and index finger  
 the night we emerged  
 from your chest,  
       I reached for a needle and thread  
           to sew you  
       back up--

*Let's pretend that you let me  
       use gray thread  
       that complements the color  
       of your eyes when  
 you talk about           your father.*

*You let me sew you back up,  
       everything is fine.*

*We'll let the rain wash  
 your blood from our bodies  
       as we stand nude behind  
       your writing shed,  
 when we lie together in your garden,  
       it won't matter whether or not  
 we make love  
       because it will be enough  
       to know that we could,*

*but,*

however,

while we should be talking  
       about when my father's ghost  
 will visit  
       underneath a bush of lilacs,  
 I'm sitting in the kitchen,  
       waiting for you to finish,  
 keeping the samovar just  
       the temperature  
       you like                   and

you are sitting in the bathroom,  
 struggling to keep the needle  
 between your fingers as you  
 cough  
 blood on  
 your image in the mirror.

### **The Ballad of Using Small Bones As Toothpicks**

You're the only one who notices that the dog is dead.

The dog is from your childhood,  
 a former Irish Setter you named Simone  
 after your mean grandma,  
 she'd been everything a dog should be  
 except she's dead  
 and you know this  
 because she's only a skeleton  
 with a purple and white polka-dotted collar.

But when you tell your father  
 he asks,  
 "Did I raise this idiot?"

You want to say

No.  
 No you didn't raise me.  
 I met you the one time,  
 when you were in room 248  
 I walked in  
 you had red and yellow mucus  
 dripping down your stubbled chin,  
 giving you  
 an elegant,  
 striped hospital gown.

You were raised by your father.

You know this isn't your father

--because your father  
would never wear  
that shade of mucus.

He asks you to make a bicycle out of the dog's bones  
as you press your fingers on the dog's vertebrae  
and then your father's,  
they feel just the same.

So you make a bike out of the dead dog,  
intestines for tires, femurs for the frame,  
clip a card of Cal Ripken on,  
you'll hear it click on the spokes made of ribs.

You ride the bike to the hospital,  
make your way to room 842.  
You meet your father,  
he has green and black mucus  
merrily streaming down his chin  
as you peel the skin on his fingers like bananas.

Because he *would*  
wear that shade of mucus  
you cry while you peel.  
It doesn't suit his skin tone  
at all.

You ask him if the dog is dead,  
he asks,  
"Did I raise this idiot?"

Yes.  
Yes you raised me  
we met that one time,  
shared a Cherry Coke  
while playing poker  
over a coffin we filled with  
childhood dreams and Chivas Regal  
-- and I helped you

put your skin on.