

I

The Look

You were a tough lower half, firm
from running, your tumultuous hands
reaching at me, hauling me off to the sink.
In a photo of this room, I am balancing
a stuffy on my head, the lights bright
like sucking in a jellyfish
through an electric rod.

How beating it must have been to wash
the dishes again when I was done, all
bubbled and fun, which is why I prefer
the picture—it only implicates you.
You stayed a runner with me so small,
and I'm impressed, but they say that children
stuck in marble are often cared for by flat faces.
Motioning from across the park for me
to hold hands with my best boy,
you would smile behind the camera,
your high cheeks melting down with your
sweat into the bench as soon as
the frame was gone, your hands
reaching into your purse with every
minute as if something was missing.

A look must make the sink more
than clay and paint stretched oblong,
filled almost to the top with molecules
too small to make anything of themselves
if not together in a lap. I stand
in the mirror now and watch my mouth
moving up at the corners as my eyebrows
lift, repeating *interest, intent*. My great love
isn't born yet and it will be
all in the look.

Though I seem more a toy at the corners
of this picture's peeling plastic, and you,
vast back then, fighting the light in hope
of framing pretty shadows, no doubt held
up my weight for me as your minder

did yours, but how did
you look at me?

I Know You Consolidate Like I Do

You, avid daydreaming cheat, sit
holed up in a library shaping the perfect
lover in head from the framework
of someone you can't even call
a close friend while your real lover
lies somewhere so familiar it's lost
its smell. No lover stands a chance
against this floating head; this head
being the only one detailed, as if
it was a criminal's because you
have studied it hotly, although
in a rush, not remembering
what someone else might have,
like being seated at a waited for
painting you must pull a chair
up to—inappropriate always—
sighing, *I get it*. The slackening
of the head's jaw and turning down
of the eyes is how you know
you've got lipstick on your teeth,
and if the latter is paired with
the side pursing of the lips, you
know they know many are watching
because they wouldn't design
to make a play of their lips
if only you were to show.
Your lover's lips are too obvious,
something you've got to kiss
if put in your face like a waiting,
colorless raccoon—not bashful.
But your lover has skin that holds
smooth in early kitchen light,
a walk that shakes the teeth numb,
and so then will they have these things.
In a proud sense you've loved
this head—you've been
alone together, and in those
moments what can you do
but hold a mirror to the other
and talk to yourself about yourself.
The you reflected is a real looker,
flaming lips and eyes that are not

too small, shaped by eyebrows
professionally plucked, now
squinting for details. Your
pores fill with honey and
the sweetness spreads
down your legs. On the bus
ride home, you listen to the same
song on repeat because
if that head isn't for feigning
it can hear the song too— thinking
you're fly for it—then what is a
head for? You're not ashamed
to re-detail both mouths
so long as they may say
only your name.

Daughter

I am old enough to want you, like my mother
— pregnant at 18, patching up vents

in her mother's basement, cigarette smoke
still finding her swollen stomach and laying thick.

I feel down to my own— it is flat where
you've never been and would have to leave

and I pick out a name, Alice—not because I
would want you to be somewhere above

a single woman in Utah, noble, in Pasadena
with your uncle and drinking wine with a partner

that tells you his sea is your sea, as if you had none,
or because I want you to be a blonde in a dress.

You'd be big and small, but never faint—
infirmity can't dream, or stay savvy

in a backyard that's become streaked with time,
a kaleidoscope lain sideways to a heritage

of young mothers. I used to take pills
to stop myself from feeling the lack of trigger

it takes for a new mind's height, but now I
think it could be all in my middle name—*Dree*—

to endure. I often imagine teaching you to dance
in my old ballet slippers, knowing you could find me

on the floor any hour after a lesson in pirouettes
and pumpkin leaves on pancakes with no partner

to deliver you from me, to send you flying amidst
a child's belongings where you'd be safe

away from your foremothers, away
from silly ideas about names, about meaning.

Flower Market, 8AM

Conspiring against me on Columbia Road
are lupines that grip my hoodie as I
tilt past, hungover; they are meant

to be purple, but I see a cool blue
crying into the grey of the morning,
so I stand near them, sweating, worried

for their sale. This ground is the grass
a campfire's light reaches— how only
a space is when a little body's senses

are consumed at the hand-held
walk in, the present becoming one fine orb.
And now I remember why blue;

walking into the midland café between
my mother's old apartment and college
there would have been lupines

and my mother's green corduroys—
at just my height then— mix in memory
with the ones cased on every table, turning

the purple of these flowers a stained blue.
I take a photo to control the change, keeping
them as they were pictured in the *Lupine Lady*—

read to me by her at each day's end to remind
us both that our endings could be by placating
waves leading us out into the deep, feet

still touching the bottom in old age, but
this plant is upset—things are sordid between
us beyond that café, a reconstructed memory's

cohesive heat isn't enough to rearrange these
connections that burn with the blue light of an ending,
so I send her the photo, leaning into the lupines.

Purple

is your father's favorite color—the reason
why his brother locked his bedroom door
from the inside and held him under covers
until urine cramped the boy's hot scene;
Purple is the color of a hug to your grown
father met with a light drum on your much
slighter shoulder—the kind of tap
you administer to a bruise on a mother
who's just bused away from the ER and into
a sorbet sky with flamingo clouds
and home with that bruise, deeper
than the orange background to her
getaway. And you swear you'll find
the orderly who hit her and kick his snappy
ass because you have been unlocking doors with
screwdrivers and mixing rice and bananas
for this drunk so late at night that your hearing
improves for the false waterfalls, popcorn ceilings,
and sex dreams crushing your loose body,
and you never once slung back an arm
with the same moles as hers to push
your hardness onto her. Purple is the color
of the floaties you'd slip on to swim inside
a woman's mind and eat the things that happened
to her body without you and eat those men
too, but you're still her kid, so you'll hide
your things and get plenty to eat because
the purple greens are the ones she's taught
you to take, and god damn it if purple
isn't the color of something they make you take.

Our Predilections

Becoming bare is a process I use to understand a cold day when light is opened from the envelope of the sky. This light is mosaic and painful, but the night softens the amorphous shapes around me by taking off the clothing of their lines until the cold is a brave and stark show of blotched points. These points hum together in quiet tones of blue and purple—mine and my father's favorite colors, natural choices. Mine is made by an inclination bent to the sea and the sky, not for romantic reasons of mystery or grandeur but because these places are where others are not stationed every mile to ask something of my body. My father's choice is one for fictional characters that don't share the skin of us humans—Purple Man looking like a white business man in a suit—scary in itself without the verbal control. In the depressive ward I pick up a copy of Daredevil #4 and think of his fiction, his love for what is not, and I wish to be a lasting image for interpretation, one with her own clothes and shoes, one that will remind of the power and strength he still reaches for in bookstores. Instead, refusing to go to dinner but not a labelless white pill, I let myself crash into a pelagic darkness before trying for the lights above me in a blurred waking. I still can't see the light that others move for day after day. Sometimes I catch a glimpse of it shooting out my lover's mouth and into mine or in the way I then try to give this light back to them, my hands flickering, giving up in exhaustion. I wonder if this is because our love depends on the body; In my induced dream my father stands at a shore staring out past the blue, mouth open, eyes fixed on a starless sky. He looks animal and exposed, but I approach, knowing that he too is flesh easily startled.

Brother

I peeled the skin from apples with a quill,
carved them without looking because that thing
was beautiful pressed into golden skin, away
from eyes only seeing rust where rain had gotten
at its tip. My hand carved until one of them
was a likeness of you and damn did it look like you—
it had our mother's eyes and those eyes cried as I stuck
my fingers into where I carved your lids wrong
—grainy tears. Without looking at you, I dreamt
of a fire only I knew of, beneath that childhood bed.
Letting it burn, you atop it, I listened for our mother,
hearing only crude images of gardeners and baby
birds, melting, shells still sticking to their heads,
quilted into my covers, pleading for me, along
with you, where fear laid with me, whimpered
and stayed.

The Salt We Didn't Have

I imagine where those daisy jeans sit,
if someone's dog-eared them across their thigh.
But they wouldn't sit, they'd lay as cool
as the patchwork on my mind in winter
when you folded up your arms in pulchritude
and knew I would follow you across iced sewage.

I wanted to keep my eyes tracing the white
borders of the daisy, but you had plans, have plans
and so, my mind shakes salt to itself as if
slipping away from you now in an older age
is scarier than the salt we didn't have
for our gashed shoes those days.

Those kid days I would fall through the ice,
your hand clutching my coat, neither pulling
me in nor out, keeping it there until I
made the decision to re-surface. I called you
when my mom found my wet pants, when
I had to hear from someone else

you've been cracking collarbones with citrine
stones, and I wish I believed in protection. If I
did, I would find the jeans, no doubt in the same
thrift store your prudent mother found them, dirty them
as you would do leading me out of tunnels on my knees.

This tunnel is too white for you, too clean,
your windowsill apple cores wouldn't be taken to
here, and as the iv goes in, the bite block in place,
it's the first time I imagine someone else
picking small jeans from your floor, folding
them for your child before you come
to realize the mess of it all.

Reverie of a Pitt Bull

She swallows her baby teeth, her toes
curled to knotty green, and now
I think her name, Ada, after hada,
should be as precocious
as this act; she must know how dirty
the floors get in the winter,
mobbed only by her and her feet.
She's rough today and the phalanx
of teeth popped into my hovering face—
imploing a kiss—means it's not okay
to be vapid with her either—
a kiss needs a purpose too—
and that the dirt from her claws
is not the dirt from the vials I left to rot
with moss and my mother's lupines
in a public hallway; it is here, a revolution
on my home where one wash won't
do it, where tripled painted nails
and sanded down heels won't make
the time passed less pelagic like
the time I spend yelling, *no*, just
to feel a pocket of warmth
against my cold, the reverie
of a love retreating at an inhale.

A Forfeit

Your mother was a doctor in Peru
and says she never gets depressed,
doesn't understand the sour ways
you dress a body so like hers, sloped
like the mountains you can't breathe
to climb. You would stand after her,
an asthmatic plant, a forfeit in her
native land. Hung in a tousled,
black t-shirt, you almost sink into
the veil of a stairwell before rushing
into space with the end of a story—
*and the little girl said, "Dr. Dev,
please don't let me die."* You hang
off a railing, looking past me from
above. You don't find this story
untimely, climbing the steps
to a new doctor for me, your friend.
Instead, you pass a striped mint
and say I still look the same, nothing
in the offer but lucidity and a ruler.
As you turn to start back up the stairs,
I pitch this mint at your head, making
sure it swishes past. You laugh, double back
and grab onto my forearms; for a moment
I let you keep me in place. Now, your
face seems to turn further in on itself.
You say my name in the smallest way,
breathing out the e like your mouth
is dry, full of cotton.

The City at Night

To bitch curl a man who challenges, *you can't*,
is the ripping of intercostals, your suddenly
gregarious mouth yowling, *fuck you!*

To bitch curl is to lift a form from the ground,
their legs pressed against their chest and yours,
an anxiety blanket for a child, "romance"

for a woman. I suppose now I own him.
I always thought meek and meager
meant the same thing— I am one

of those two things, so I put him down,
refusing to yell further at someone after
I've won a game I didn't invent, and I walk.

To walk the street high, the pallid linings blinking,
is the unbuckled head laid down in the backseat—
floats like you're flying, if you squint.

To walk the street ripped is to stop,
chasing the top of your breath, disappearing
with scanty weight into construction,

and you've made the joke, head held high
enough—you'll end up there soon, dumped among
machines bent above you, testing towards ascent.

No Wonder New Romance Underwhelms Me

The wind has stopped, heavy breath
held against the tallness of grass,

tickling the throat of clouds, who hug
around us on this hill where we stand

with cameras, well me without, watching
you and your twisted tooth walking down

to me, your camera's lens oblique.
I look to these clouds, disappointed

in direction, waiting for a bee to need
my sweat, knowing I am salacious too,

and you've tackled me, set your camera
aslope to the ground, your arms plangent

against my back every other turn we take
as we tumble through. Woman, I wish

it was through. This ground hits solid
as the sun moving your face in and out

of shadow as we turn. I don't remember
getting up, just the unloading of the breath,

its stirring and the sudden airborne stillness
that comes when most everything is lifted.

Body Politics

After the song "Almost Cut My Hair" by Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young

They'll make you feel you owe it
to someone. Like long hair and nails
is something other than a mark
of passed time. Their hate
is so close your legs are shy.
They demand to stay in when
their hair hatches as the boys
play half-naked in the trees.
The laughter from these trees
is shrill as the dirty thoughts
and curses that lay with you
at night. These thoughts grin
rainbow until the day comes,
bringing with it the dichotomy
of pink and blue and the same
fear you feel when your brothers
add you to their animal runs.
They drag you down by the shirt
and proclaim you a dyke.

Not a woman yet, the shame curls
around you like the fog of the first
girl that made your head go
as soft and as loud as boys
usually did. You were confused
that her father saw nothing
wrong with the scene after his
descent into their basement,
same as the descent to all things
low when you roll from the family
bathroom in your Christmas skirt
and they laugh, asking if you've
got a bra on too.

Before your brother's wedding
you tuck away the suspenders,
tie and jacket to your outfit,
still fearing the same laughter.
Though, when with the bride's
party getting your short hair

curled, you wish you had learned
to walk in high heels, envying
the precision of their practice.
Thank passed time when you're
grown, as you will wear all your
hair long except your head's
until it grows out with no notice,
sometimes sporting skirts while
standing fast, other times
pulling loose basketball shorts over
your hips and pirouetting. You will
know why a mixture feels right, and
you will owe it to someone.

I imagine your body as mine and his

The quilts you send me wrap my breath
in only their space, their ashy smell,
the stitched- on gardeners, all of us
curling low to meet baby birds as if

to ask them of smoke. Distracting
from my breath, your covers follow
the dark, something to follow when
the night becomes the plummet before

flying with control, and never mind
about asphyxiation, mom doesn't have
money, and all three of us kids need
comforters every year to stretch along

with our new feet. I don't smoke, but
I could— the inside of my lungs would be
your mountains in Utah, steaming
from above on winter mornings, the same

as winter in unsaturated portraits with still
figures, always thin and waiting like her—
my mother testing your locked front door,
leaning against it when her skinny legs

buckle, her eyes lapping up the final breath
between trees she doesn't know yet
to have tops. You're a grandmother
now, knowing only what you hear—

that I take Red Vines over Twizzlers, but
not that to hold me after a hot bath, would
be to hold that little girl, limp and still waiting,
only resting against your body. I imagine

that body is as my lover's, in his wasted
hands picking at the frills of unfinished
edges on one of your quilts, and like you
he has no regard for weak airways,

his cologne is heavy, racy as if it's the first time
and like you he's not met me during the day
when singular smells are shooed away by light.

Clean in Their Choice

My clawfoot tub leaks rust and water,
so half of me is lodged beneath
it for hours, scrubbing until my hands
blister from the chemicals and the metaphor
between the bathroom and what
I wish I could do for my body
becomes so plain that I stop. I wonder
if the nerve inflammation
is irony between my brain
and spinal cord because I never once
spoke about a loved one with the same
unflattened affect and prolific
speech as I did when I spoke about
neuroscience, about any event
objectively wondered at, like when
my lover would rest their hand on the part
of my head that would ache until
I slept. I would feel the electrical
and chemical lines stretching sticky
and biting between their brain and body,
their body and my body, and I would try
to find the block, to find why I
couldn't feel them, knowing full well
what the body offers when an origin
is wondered at. Now when my lover
extends a hand in need of my health,
I try to focus on the basic touch
of them, smell that they are clean
and feel clean in their choice
of touching me, though I still ache
in time with the fan as it turns from side
to side, bringing a repeated cold.

Paxil

Round dissociative clump, easily
swept from my tongue by cool water
with a boil warning. Sleek and
small, you join the tide of air
that sweeps through us all as we
open our mouths to necessity.

My pupils are deep, panther-
black pools. They wait thick and
tenuous as this cat's muscles while
it lies balancing from a tree limb on
its back, half-aware of the prey
nearby, the languid tail deciding
not to quicken its rhythmic slapping.

Circular thoughts rise and fall
away in patterns of the midnight blue
created by dark memories brought
back to an earthly color with denotations
of the simplicity of need.

A sleepy child is lost in a line of bodies
waiting to be fed, some pressing
their fingers against glass that warns,
"Do Not Touch." A familiar black
tweed coat surfaces and the child grabs
one of the hands jutting
from its sleeves just as the real
mother rushes in apologizing,
pressing the child to her with one hand.

This hand falls away, and I am guiltless
in my blood connections, the white
dust absorbing through the walls
of me as I boil water for dinner,
the bubbles expanding and rolling into
bursts without their usual quickness.

The familiar coat says it's alright,
that it feels nice to be held,
especially on a cold day.

Woods

As girls, they would push their way
through a small opening behind
a condo, crossing into woods,
stepping over wooden planks
said by the neighborhood boys
to house hidden fire ants.

In the summer, they didn't go there;
the sun blaring through to the end
of the woods reminded them how small
that world was. Instead, lounging
on a queen-sized bed, they watched
Pan's Labyrinth, laughing at the cookies hid,
melted in their pockets, wishing twisted
tree roots would pull them beneath
that suburban land so Oreos
could taste of pastissets.

When the leaves turned orange and
a mother, fretting, stuffed gloves over
both their hands, they would race
to the woods, tearing off gloves and coats
at the opening, leaving them with ants
to prove they were brave, before stepping
through shadows enlarging the edges of the woods.

Alone, together building, bulky hands
Becoming puffy in the cold, slender ones
becoming dusted in rouge, they used
the mortar and pestle, stolen from shelves
of their homes, to ground Dogwood and
White Ash leaves together, hoping
to catch whoever tore down their old fortress,
to squelch the shiny magic from their bodies,
jealous of either one of them seeing something
alone and small but with power first.

After gathering their magic just before
dark, the leaving light would guide them
to a white patch of flowers, where they read,
their hands grown together over a dragon
spell book, chanting, waiting for the orange
and purple clouds to roll into fire.

Wildly
-To Women

The loose clippings of nails by the couch
make us laugh because they are our own—
anyone else's still not perverse, a funny
distinction between us and those on TV. We
are dirty. We wear our jeans every work day
come winter and then a sixth day when
the washer's forgotten them, flung wildly
beside the clothes basket.

I massage your scalp even when it feels damp
with grease, and rest my chin atop it when
I'm mad at the way nothing has changed outside
our screen doors since morning. I might get a pimple
from the grease, and you might smile and rub
toothpaste on it—the same remedy for bug bites
in houses that can't afford repellents.

She braids your hair before school, so you
can call out a leader's call at recess, no
hair rubbing across your eyes as if she
is the director of keeping extra employees
in line because they know their work
doesn't matter, and she would never
imply your hair had to be long, but still calls
you out separate from your brothers, her eyes
sorry—she is thinking of scissors and strength,
but when she kisses your intricately framed scalp
she is not sorry, and calls your brothers over
for ponytails made of only bangs.

You are a kind of person that restarts attention, reading
every historical description in the art gallery. You
are a collection of beanie bears in the family—
your value will rise with your grime, secretly
or maybe loudly because you and I rake the streets
outside of our apartment for traces of a schoolyard
sisterhood we've always known, tugging at each
other, yelling at the pavement.

I have brothers and you have sons and she
has a father, but could we remember them there
on afternoons of sneaking chicken into the house
past our *No Meat Allowed* signs drawn with blood
we then felt on our tongues? Maybe we could,
but when they were gone, maybe you did as I,

and would open their doors and sit on the edges
of beds smelling wholly of them and not our house—
traces of dinner in the disposal, scented shampoos.

We stay the night at our lovers' in search
of their smells, I imagine, but I don't know why
we've preferred their goneness, the cold air buzzing
off carefully chosen applications, when our rooms
have always been the same temperature,
our books more thoughtfully arranged with age.
They've eaten our crumby chicken with no thoughts
of us having changed for the day, reaching
for what's left for them, reaching for us one
at a time, calling us their kind of woman.

Cradling your head up after birth, keeping
hold of you in the grease of illness, I see you,
woman, are neither whole nor fractured,
beautiful nor animal.

To the Sick Ones

You will lose forty percent of your function before you take pleasure in your own buoyancy, prostrate in the bathtub. That makes you D rate, and D raters do not stand with others to pray; they stay home with their knees on either side of the head until their father's vanity lights brighten at their industry— self-healing has got your ass up, but like the slideshow in your head titled, *Facts I ignore because my mother gave voice to them but feel furtive shame about*, enjoined you, it is too late.

Somewhere in your body lies points of necrosis, and it is your gig to find the first of these bundles so they can help you, but it is your history, your blushing bundles lapping at your sensitive tissues. You do this, you see every doctor, and you rethink the word, mine. Surely, your body would not keep you alive and breathing only because someone holds you in daydreams.

Strength permitting you would dip this someone below the dance floor, where underground they would admit of being just a body too. Your lover knows these things, and as long as you still work in a wet way they will lay down beside a sick one who still prefers the shallow contract of the limbs, like the quieting fever that you have both come to love.

Blonde

I worry that my dreams are too long,
the balloon of memory threatening just

beneath the skull. I am leading an escape
into black pines always at the feet

of carved-out mountains, open
to those looking to be buried. Years later
I am dug up, swearing that I was different before,

my developing cortex a tethered shield
from madness. How can I explain this

when my blonde hair has dirtied, the shamelessness
of childhood not even follicle deep.

Never Before

I am with a woman in a dream,
as I've never been before. Her
legs a tightened demand beneath

mine as we lay in public, spires,
bleachers and tunnels filled
with smeared faces, no one watching

or pretending not to. I am not afraid
of any piece of her—motivation, judgment,
worship of me or lack thereof. And then

alone in a metal maze, the dim
doorways spaced every foot,
I drop what I know

is a gun. Someone is applauding,
a brackish sound amidst many walls.
In looking for her the bullets

of heavy-footed gossip tell me
she isn't here, a halo of empty
heat taking my stomach.

Awake, close brain waves
having pulled the metal from beneath
me, I've won nothing.

Sugar Lily Pink

Pink duets with brown eyes—
I've been learned, and I'm telling you,
but you still ask what I've done
when you see the contrast
in the mirror. I've called you pretty
before, my sugar, for sure a flower
given in devotion. But never have I seen
a labor closer to that of a worm
when our matching lids meet
in that mirror and I grin it—my
affection deeper for you— a man
who could bare the process of pretty.

This warmth is rid out the downturned
corners of my mouth when you
ask me to wipe it away. As you
pull out a stool, I wonder if makeup
remover would do or if soap on tissue,
the burning, is something you need
to feel. You wait, drowning at the concept
of a color's opulence, which made you
sigh in bed moments before.

When I look in the mirror
I see only my blue eyes, too light
for the framing done in hopes of matching
yours, not pink's connotations: hair length,
sex aggression, laced body adornment.
I wipe away at you, and I see a million eyes,
bare and begging to be considered
above the leg, catechizing,
what replaced the affection?

Meadow

I think of staying here, mud
taking my white sneakers. They
share turns peering from a gazebo,
a family of adults maybe, each face
covered and uncovered by swirls
of dandelions cowering in and out
of my vision, sticking to my body
where rain has discovered me first,
slicking me with a new skin
until I am a plucked chicken.
They want to know why I'm here
on the only afternoon with storm
predictions, no fishing rod
for after the lightening ends.
A sinus infection stops
my breathing— not their beauty—
and I want them to run through
short, flooded grass and press
my stinging eyes against their shoulders.
Surely, their house must be warm
and smelling of Pink Chiffon or a flush
high heel made of cotton candy, cheese
and crackers set out and a DVD player set up,
whirring next to the ear of the only
little one at the grown ups' party,
now asleep after weaving through
big bodies with just feet— their knees
being something to reach for. These people
aren't the same as the people who have
held me; they have no dirt beneath
fingernails or bitten pieces of skin hanging from
the edges of fingers. They don't let
that little one lay awake all night, straight,
on a stranger's couch, so pale and still
when they find her—a real doll—
that she's gone silent. I am squatting
now, down to add my hands to the dirt.
The grass has grown since I've bent
down, and black bugs bang themselves
from strand to strand ushering me
out, but I've remembered why I only

come out when clouds promise me
my own dim meadow. I want
to shout out to them
so that they know too.

New Fur

Her new poodle died in the backyard, shitting.
My first time in the house, gated since my father
married her, a show dog stood ready, little
perfume bursts following her as she flounced
and dug filed nails into stained carpet left by mutts
before her. In my childhood bed that night, flinging
curly, white tufts of what felt like pubic hair off
of my covers, feeling scabs form around my nose
where allergy met digging, I wished that dog dead.
Now I look out screen doors, and imagine my father
calling her in at the beginning of rain, standing over
her quiet body, wondering how this—
his— thousand dollars bit it. A twisted snout, crusted
blood, damp fur, those suburban white fences smeared
with brown until the neighbors can smell who we are,
and an air of waste—a dull thumping with the morning
light, where visible dust swims, leaving behind a headache.
I think of her owner's green eyes, where a drop off
sits at the backs, same as the end of the red, clay roads
she came from, and how they too sit on an edge,
straining your eyes until they jump out like bugs
from somewhere far away. I tell my father, standing
beside me, *overbreeding one kind of dog*, but stop
as my eyes follow after his finger, now pointed out
through the doors at his wife's pregnant stomach—
a white dream about to explode—and I feel that dull
thump inside me now, as she weeds around where
her dog had lay and hums, *You are My Sunshine*.

Mother

You told me once, lolling by a pool,
that your dirty fingernails reminded you
of how bad you were and how bad
you were shouldn't be pointed out
by a kid like me, or at least
I wish you'd said this. Instead,
when I pointed them out, wanting
badly for you to smile and say
you'd been digging your hands down
into the roots of thyme plants— just
moisturizing—your body hemmed in front
of my eyes, escaping them as if I
was your father grabbing your breasts
from behind at a carnival. I looked up
memory retrieval and how our brain
reconstructs to save us, but only to save
us time, same as when you remember
things that red wine can only tell you
because you were a lonely child,
doing backflips for the neighbor
in his yard, his small mouth moving
along with you. I looked up muscle
degeneration— athletes like you
break down before 40, so you stayed
in bed for seven years with those gold
medals from your closet, cradling
a concept, a hardness that chips.
Today, I sit in a daycare nursery and rock
a baby, of whom I don't know the name,
to sleep. A song is playing about
reassurance of love and it tells me
that love will only ever crash through
blue skies, leaving us space to be,
and I remember that pool and I can't bear
to hold this child, her onesie stitched
with a heart and a dog—
promising her protection is someone
who isn't here now. If she could ever
look the way you did, hands curled,
eyes fastened, lips gentle and apologizing,
body slim and sick and frightened of me,
of him, of anyone, then I'd let her fall
asleep alone. But I remember a photo
of you in the newspaper from that closet
and love does crash. Your hands hold
up the number seven in front of your freckled

smile, happy and wiry—you were born
on 7/7/70, a statistical anomaly in Utah,
and I'm absolved from holding her
and not you, with my nails cut clean,
as they'll always have to stay
for one so small.

Violent Probabilities

Mom tells me you're in Juvey—I imagine
it's like the shed I told the other kids
housed a blue-collar man, as we stood
around pampered ponds. He copies
license plates during the day, loiters
in our backyards, scheming in miles
of woods with other undesirables, selling
us all on the black market. This is what
the other white families here roll the dice
on happening— silent theft of letters and numbers—
so I thought what is more useless, but vivid
to their fantasy than public figures
hanging about.

Yesterday, I helped mom paint
your room three shades of stripes—black, gray,
and white, so that when you come home
you know we know your favorite colors.
I sit just inside the woods, and think
if these were the right colors, isolating
and perfectly separate, as I wonder
how many are afraid of my silly lie, though I
see the top corners of the shed now,
likely keeping only used tools.

Are the greasy sounds I hear at night
a boy choking mom over the notion
of no seconds on waffles, or is it you,
knocking your head against bars as if
these were the notes you taught me to beat
against it all when someone else's voice
was too loud?

Our babies would be birds

Never more than an Ostrich,
slim in the wrong places—this
is what I am because she tells me
this animal is what she wants to farm
together when age doesn't favor us.
I think, yes, they called me giraffe-neck
in grade school, but I think they meant that I
was a bird— always fixed far enough
away to have all outside features blurred.
Children pick up babies from fallen
nests even when the faces are mashed—
they only know of a baby, just as she
did of me on her third day in America,
hugging me so tight at recess that I
made up a jaw condition to stop
these hugs aimed for me to feel them
way up in my face. She wasn't sorry
I stood there alone, unable to hang
upside down on bars without a partner—
she said no to a traditional
ball at 15 and returning to Mexico to stay.
Instead, she found me and shouted
that she wanted her babies to have
my blue eyes and long neck and never
mind that we both hold eggs,
science would grow with us. Now,
I've dyed my hair black to see
what our babies might look like,
and suddenly my neck doesn't look
so long, shadows covering my shoulders
and chest, growing them out to meet its reaching,
and my eyes look more grey, and she loves men now.
Somewhere, she is in a lab testing
different layers of the earth, knowing
how they fit together, holding a coffee cup
that I sent her, a baby ostrich printed close-up
on it, tight-mouthed and waiting to be told
which level she'd like it to rest between, which
barn she'd like it to sleep in, or if she
might let it into the house soon, where
she sits alone with her citrines.

Hair in Our Home

In a gathering of friends known
by my girl but not by me,
a stranger draws her sweater above
breasts to show us women long

black hairs that clinch bare nipples,
and for a moment she forgets
to ask us what is wrong with her
and straightens one out to its full

length, looking hurt, her face
glued up. I wonder how these hairs
still strike her, her legs and armpits
grown over with the same thick

strands that leap from her head
declaring an infinite reaching
that curls in contradiction of
the color of them and the notion

of being past her prime. I only
wonder for her sake; we know
that to take one's body back is to
take it back limb by limb, it being

hardest in the places we've been
touched most, so we laugh and fling off
our shirts because we are all sisters, and
when she sees our bodies also leave

trails of growth across knotted skin for us,
I see behind her eyes—no person
is there, just other animals.

She is awake, not worried she'll burn
in the sun, a seat of palms bending to her.

Something Lay Sweet in Utah

Breathing in chips of glass is what grandma's carved
voice reminisces over the phone. *Read
those books down young one. Don't get married
long-haired thing.* Am I that one thing, dusted

over her sloppy potatoes, making them alright
because I could sit in class, my breasts
out or covered—a choice unlike the social pay
she hoped for while working factory days?

As fine as dust can be—she won't hear
that I've been in bed, laid up like her
abeyance from just simple time. My best love
tells me time does something different in Mexico—

her cousin woke one day, no yawning, no
hunger, no urinary trials, just body,
and her mother bathed her, letting her
there for six years. Six years and she felt

like some tres leche. *It's just my time to be let.*
I can hear her, click, click, *now that's bull shit.*
She wants to lie and that's just fine because
her abeyance is grey, it comes plangent out

the clouds like left over work on a Sunday,
as you sit between your own ears. I can't
just lie because she burnt the concept
of the bras I don't wear; though those things

still talk at me like a boy in heat for as long
as I've felt my body, felt their eyes even
in the sweetness of my teeth, something
she gave me. Now there's an existence

to think of—the cookies she hid in her
cabinets, though she lived alone before
being collected for a broken body,
it's the idea of them having been only hers.

