

The Valor of Mortality

Justin Andrew Hill

July 2024

The Valor of Mortality

Contents

I.	Gunpowder.....	1
	Rituals of Devotion	2
	Gunpowder	5
	Whisperkissed	7
	Miss Brooklyn Grin.....	9
	Let's Tend a Garden.....	16
	Staining a Handcrafted Back Deck.....	17
	Rabbit's Foot	18
II.	Template in the Temple	21
	A Birthday Car Full of Balloons.....	22
	The Ballad of Lennie and Joan.....	23
	Dissociative Aperture	25
	Epic in the Inner Sanctuary	26
	Thanksgiving.....	28
	Fierce and Fearsome.....	29
	Sushi and Cheesecake	34
III.	The Traveling Cowgirl	37
	Socks; A Small Heater; Rituals.....	38
	Broken Sets	39
	Knockout!	42
	The Snowball Studies.....	43
	American Cordillera	47
	The Sphinx at the Taj Mahal	51
	Eschatology	55

I. Gunpowder

Rituals of Devotion

I. An Offering to the Muse

see I close my eyes and imagine the dark hills, no
I trance breezy as drapes traipse a moonlit ceiling
as gasping irises crest channels carving cheeks

she tells me I must make an offering to the muse
so, I lean my head back with a submissive breath
arch my spine and bare my throat, outstretched

as eyes roll and vision blurs, an ex-stasis of love
witnesses the face of the gods turn water to wine
her divinity ravaging coiling threading my neck

have whatever you want, I'll burn it all, let my soul
turn tinder, smoke shatter cinder to be swallowed
in your vortex, exorcised from my body by desire

II. Open Fields

Revivification: all about blessed breath not rest as
kings' lungs inhale gin iced on cucumbers sipping
sundress drunk — "loose-limbed, a little sticky and
verdant." Tell me things flavored of eternal spring
recurring recounting how this story never ends us.
You must try each batch of curry here until forever
temperance dawns behind sleepy good mornings,
our soothing sounds of hazy light voices curdling;
phone call on the train ride to work loved sunrise.
A few minutes late but exuberant and fast-paced,
fresh air rendered Wednesday's midweek grace—
us toasting spicy palomas to a million little treats,
to knowing I can't resist when you pout feminine
wiles, returning Get into bed or go out of my room,
and beige grandfather oaks overseeing winters of
deer-filled grasses relayed ageless sage's senses.

III. A Letter from an Old Friend

Your memories are intimate to me like wrapping my arms around your old green futon for the first time in years and knowing I knew this one well. I was just wondering if you remembered that time we went down to the temple, collecting rocks all along our path, that time we sang with the rocks. You are my guiding saint, a new self beyond all this desire. You won't hold it against me? No, I'll just hold you against me. You said that my outfit splashed a cool autumn breeze on a spring day,

when you opened the door in a bathrobe. Always behind, you took a shower while I washed dishes. We washed a lot of dishes, and in between drying dishes, we sat on the couch while drinking coffee. We put on the diffusers in your room, and you put essential oils on both our arms, and I kept almost kissing you so I wanted to go outside to get some fresh air, and we walked your German Shepherd. When we got back, we cleaned the stove, and you told me I did an A+ job. We made pancakes, and

we made a lot of breakfast, then we ate breakfast at 3pm, and I wanted to go to bed with you. And then we went to bed, where I tried very valiantly to be well-behaved; the lions were mostly tamed, but one bite led to another, and I left an hour late. I love you as big as the Texas sky. I love you wide as the horizon, twice as deep as the ocean floor. Somewhere between the no and the yes I wound up drunk in my sundress on your kitchen counter, my eyes looking up at you hungry, ready for more.

Gunpowder

“My name’s Gunpowder, dear,” she pleaded, all laid back and sunk down into her chair, with the brim of her hat low, boot-scoffs on the table, and the whiskey halo in her glass nearing renaissance. Stories burned into and buried with me. Stories of lovers, friends, ambitions, all the other sad, lost things. Stories I don’t want to disclose; don’t want to lose or remember; when it snows, under siege. Stories of sisters brothers laughing of each other, grandmothers’ kitchens. Stories of how you want me to say your name again and again, our mouths full of marshmallows and chocolate by campfire.

“So how ‘bout a plot of land, handful of chickens, down comforter, and body heat in Montana,” she muses sideways on her pillow in a sultry morning voice that puts Dionysus and Aphrodite to shame. Maybe we’ll head to Patagonia to drive the rest of the Andes instead; keep the plot of land and the chickens, the down comforter and the body heat, but change the venue and the language, distance from the rest of everyone. I breathed something sacred, ancient, quiet in the cold summer fog of the desert-dry, sparse-thicketed Peruvian Andes, looking out from my back corner condor window.

“I promise firecrackers are pure of heart and clear of purpose,” Gunpowder confides across elevated views to the snow-covered graveyard aside latent trains in the depot wearing snow sheaf blankets. And firecrackers are just what you need in the still dead of winter — even more off in the mountains with my dog, you my love and another cup of soup to feed the heart and heat the core. Desire brings fresh downs of snow’s crisp, sunny beauty to say boldly, “We’re not melting, going anywhere; we’re going everywhere with you.” And always when she comes back from tending fields or lending flour,

“Do you think you could fit me in the books for the follow-up refrain to Sunday’s overture?” slips from her delicate lips and slithers up my thighs through my spine in old devotion to friendship memorials. Come back to me when you wake up, then come to me, then never leave. You say I’m everything and maybe that’s true but you’re here and that’s all — all that matters anyway. You’re here. Repeat myself in odes, rituals, and elusive trips to South America. Wanted to visit Mesoamerican origins of indigenous civilization in Mexico and these sights; Guatemala’s Lake Atitlán; our cabin’s faulted love.

“For God so loved New York City...” that he packed the subways full of people and these streets full of

frozen love as we work together to get on and off
the train; up and down the stairs; out and indoors.
I talk to you but pay you in conviction, distributing
favor like a goddamn Elizabethan consort vesting
grace: harems and concubines, husbands and/as
playthings — you know, the usual sort of mischief.
Bacon, egg, and cheese pre-bought for breakfast
tomorrow, on-sale chicken thawing in the fridge,
going to bed on time, and demanding heaven's
attention — the different ways we say *I love you*.

Whisperkissed

when I ask if you feel that my work is beautiful
I mean does my body speak to yours I mean
that I desire to know (you) if I speak to (you)
I mean that over the candlelight in the French café
did our souls whisperkiss secrets you've sought
answers dripping liquid to your lingering questions

I mean that I agree with your taste and your ideas
of rare beauty in those pieces that translate you
not into their world but to an atmosphere between
I mean that I want to speak to you, that I want you
to find my mind and find it beautiful, to feel it call
to you to be one with it with us to be a new one

that I care what you think, that I want to know
(you) if you've found what you're looking for in
(me) if my inner life could sate your refined taste
I mean do you want it like I do, to know our flavor
to savor soft kisses over the hips of our minds and
feel on our souls staccato dancing breathing words

yes, I mean, yes, how you explained it to me in the
pastel fog under Hopper's *Queensborough Bridge*
that I want to be there, and that you are beautiful;
when I say you are beautiful then I feel your mind
feel your seeing to be beautiful feel your eyes find
their beauty in the resonant harmonies they study

then I feel your taste tie cherry stems across my
watercolor washed sight, weaving structureless
occasions between images notions impressions
I mean then I feel beautiful your way of seeing me
your seeing of an inner me, pointing and incanting
'that's you! those are your colors! I feel like that

like that's something you'd paint!' that I should
dress how I feel 'cause yeah, I don't feel like this
teach me to dress how it feels to bite my lower lip
to walk from my knees, inward yet alertly present
feeling these loose strands of hair framing my face
noticing your curls and inner perspective contours

leading you through the concert among the crowd
our beauty is in your accelerant to break my limits
to remind us of laughing and running the subway
that with you I get to be beautiful, inwardly awash
dropcloth'd in sensuality you butterfly mouth to me
doesn't this shirt feel good? on overlapping levels

while your eyes and mind curl up into my occasion
delicately trace our longing, fingers through the batter
slowly swirl our mixture to help me us you be new
prophecy our script and read your part in my palm
mirror the lines from my hand to yours in the scars

in the bloodlines and the fated burns on your wrist

I mean we are tragically doomed to be so intense
so temporary and fleeting across this holy terrain
just how many matches have we lit up between us
how many comets have we rained down upon sense
in this shifting sand field feeling of seeing thinking
but O! What sacred fruit grows in our becoming!

your glory's devotion baptizes me, yes, I feel your
Being to be beautiful in the me it crafts, forces me
to become soft, and slow, and soft, and slow, and
don't you ever want to kiss your friends? No? Hm.
I guess it's just you, but isn't it also me for you?
doesn't our playlist say it all when it ends with

'I don't wanna be your friend I wanna kiss your-'
lips perfectly planted in already blossoming time
so how could we ever feel apart after colliding?
our minds are intertwined I mean you felt it divinely
when you learned we were crying at the same time
was it me or was it you? who started this, our us?

just promise to return a lipstick-kissed postcard when
I send you the ink-stained draft of our epistolary novel
written at midnight on your New York sidewalk porch
while sitting you put a cigarette out on your book and
when the cover didn't char I went in filthy for seconds
till upside down with you marked us lilting on a page

you agreed we need to finish that canvas and that
its style and gentle attention to detail depended on
our being near on melting skin under draping limbs
your eyes confided we'll have to get close again
with a smile that gasped at an innocent excuse
to press up against sides for another movement

when I say you are beautiful then I'm soul-struck
then your energy is woven forever etched into me
I extend our world's sense to treasure our us but
god I keep forgetting we're a pair of tragic kings
the way you explained it to me under the confetti
in magenta and turquoise light lines, o my colors

'Everybody loves a happy song, sure but' and
your eyes lit up as your hands carved gestures
'Just look at all this. Happy endings? Nah, come
on,' you said I deserve better, no idea what I see
but I thought we answered this under that same
confetti I love your eyes your mind your very Being

as a selection of perceptions and connections
I fell in love with your way of seeing saying the
images feel like you — wanting your seeing seen

Miss Brooklyn Grin

I. and More and

In between breaths she shakes out she might've
found religion, and that's just fine because that
means she'll come again every Sunday fulfilling
mythopoetics from old poems. The critics framed
up a black and white still-life of our featherlight,
ravished bedspread — the Met sending it to the
gods in smitten smoke as memento mori to our
sunflower love. We whisper days of no problem
leaving bed knowing we'd be there at the end of
the evening, yet it's so cold that it's hard not to
feel ominous about things; all snowdrifts and ice
covering — far too barren. How could your lark's
warmth survive the sunlit, airy sterile bouncing of
winter's brilliant ambivalence? Yet stellar wonders
pry further into love's future to ask for just a little
more, and more. And more and More and

II. Gingersnaps

I felt blessedly honored to meet and say that, you,
anyone who gets a long time with you is lucky like
gingersnaps; lucky like tasty bedside treats, like I
love you's that I feel down through my toes; lucky
like such fine delicacies and sink your teeth your
nails, your hips into me; lucky like always swooning
our presence; lucky like coy admonishments coolly
on how rude it is to make a lady pure purring and
shining then abandon her; lucky like basking and
bathed in your undivided attention; lucky like rural
no neighbors, no more abusing pillows with teeth
to keep quiet; lucky like knowing exactly the kind
of low-lit Upper East Side wine bar you wanted,
serving falanghina; lucky like knowing exactly the
kind of low-lit dive bar you wanted, with the photo
booth; lucky like desire so immense and powerful
it's a little unwieldy; lucky like I'd like to see you
tell me it's none of my business; lucky like always
chanting I love you's off the phone as goodnights.

III. Raphael in the Bathroom

Blending Jameson underneath malted caffeine as aggressive like changing outfits in bar bathrooms; as fielding redemption requests on piano; as faintly releasing gifted condor earrings under furniture I'll recover days later, like handwritten poems in my planner lingering after you've been gone a while.

Stay close, she whispers, Don't go anywhere. I'll be back after I graffiti our names inside a heart on the bathroom wall. No, you didn't. Yes, I did. Over palomas we led an attempt to invent a make believe story for someone else 'bout that rugged scar on my hand from when your lonesome nails met my skin.

I want something old and comfortable with you — Raphael in the bathroom and our initials in a heart with Expo marker. Try the curry. Be here in a way no one else can match or compete with. Run the room. When my friends excite me and drag me all around them, show up calmly without fanfare to

remind them that I'm yours; you don't have to try. Drinks! You tell me to get whatever I want since this round's on you, just like the last one; just how much love have I accrued? Tanqueray rocks since the bartender's feeling generous. The open-lipped pour of love will carry into the New Year, brought

on by free limoncello shots because the bartender thought Alex looked hot. You want a smoke; have it! Turn right on Broadway for Mr. Happy but just come back to us: you good? I'd buy your favorite cigarettes and keep them on my person for you, if you'd let me. In the morning, with your hairline

smelling of Tanqueray from so many goodnight forehead kisses and my sweater smelling of your perfume from all your resting and leaning into me, I admire the four printed strips we took in love, all tempestuous unsettling the photo booth, just like you wanted, as planned according to our wisdom.

IV. Cracked Wooden Flooring

The cracked wooden flooring concerning another morning, and busted puzzle pieces strewn across the street walking with colleagues after work. She demands that a top bun requires conviction, so of course I reply that I've definitely got that specific ritual down well, chef. Yes, dear, of course I know how to make bread the old fashioned way — what with all that kindling laid bare in our make believe fashion-setting vintage city cottage industry's old world banana splits, with diced pineapple, sundae chocolate, and at best freshly sliced strawberries. Fresh peanuts would be ideal but who cares: here with you is enough. More more more but whatever when it comes it floods down the faucet drain, so why collect rainwater when my leg is shaking and I can't see straight and I sit horizontal at my desk? She says obviously you need sleep but so fast just bless up for the bodegas and yes praise be for the chopped cheeses. I had a lovely time at the party; you're still best wink of the evening so bless lucky gods bared distraught, pure, and desolate you've

determined to keep me along for your upcoming second coming. Packing it trim in a not-very-big suitcase, Miss Brooklyn Grin makes room for me, proclaims, "I think I'll keep you. You actually might survive. You want to kiss me again? Okay; I'll play house with you any day, and when you get home, I'll simply pull you into our bedroom by your tie to show you all the corsets I haven't worn in years." When we go out on Saturdays, she makes friends with the bartender's girlfriend just to shuffle seats to inch ever closer to me, close enough to whisper of her love for the smells of baking bread, tomato leaves, and fresh cut grass strewn about the hay field; my love for the autumn smells of long-haired dogs, slow walks in cold still forests after it rains, spiked pine trees, old junipers, laughing rosemary, lavender, sage, and campfire smoke; our love for the springtime smells of coffeeshops, bookstores, libraries of leather, old pages, of grasses, flowers; love in the winter for spiced smells of clove, anise, orange peel, and a really nice whiskey; love in the

summer for the smells of the ocean, the sea salt, and the way sea foam sprays when you jump in; love for the sideways slithering slanted questions, mine and yours, being asked to get at what we're getting at but not saying. I'd buy you a fireplace for passions to front our arts and sciences since you'd hate for anything to have been mishandled. Do you remember that time we went to the park at night with a flask of bourbon, a picnic blanket, a bottle of wine, and various earnest yet misguided

intentions; the banquet was set. I mourned to the soundtrack, rains flooded the fields, old harrowed street lamps blocked out the stars, and we held in close to each other in the nighttime winter pallor, fueled by ages of gallant promises you'll always handle the logistics so I never have to worry about all that messy scheduling. So if you're itching over the next few days just ask an uncle for smuggled liquor at that above-board, well-to-do wedding, since the children want to know if a manic man is made out of a black hole, and if so, how big is he?

V. Sun Cycles

Sun cycles or not I'll probably still text you, but eh, I'm just happy you're dreaming about us — I hope though sometimes it's more fun to be missing me. She warns purity of heart makes the trains run on time. She warns I should only seduce girls who get my poetry. *Yes you. I just love you're fulfilling the hot, overly-intelligent elementary teacher trope.* What am I supposed to think when you plead that my rhythmic, staccato, sweeping sounds over the phone leave you rubbing your feet like a cricket? I find offered bottles of tequila on my walk home from work in the corner of metro stairwells down, so I start each day fresh, bright and hold back my vices, you, as long as possible: start forever slow.

Old friends commenting on pictures framing faces painted with I love you's; so when they say to be honest, you bless yes, and they remind you that, "You deserve good sex, poems written about you. If anyone asks, just tell 'em Triple Scorpio Maggie sent you," leaned in and whispered, "I worry about a lot of my friends but not you because you know, always knew, the promises of spring and when to catch the next train out of dodge." Maggie knows I never liked realizing I used my time poorly, but oh well. "Mm my train's here. Sweet dreams." I'm sure you mean it but what's it like melting further under stars, days, tasks, like time's cadence running out of love, cups of soup, batches of curry, campfires.

I cremate our s'mores as a ritual to summon you. Marshmallows go on the s'more when they're still hot and on fire, fresh off the embers, straight into the heart of the matter. "It's safe to break me." If you know the chocolate goes on when you smile, then I can be the graham crackers to ground you. I call our gods to eat my heart out with the matter. Let's pencil in these sun salutations the sun cycle you come back. On the cycle you come back, you come back to me and never leave. I repeat myself in odes and rituals. I appreciate the slowness and the beauty of it all in every moment — even in the fast and ugly. You'd be good in purgatory, I think; very manageable, very responsible above board.

VI. Keep Me

I want you melted into the mattress, journaling on the bathroom floor not to wake the roommate, like having the lights on at all, ya know? I want you in overnight texts like I so hate to say Goodnight to you but I'm always with you so consider yourself kept — in my love across state lines, in my arms at night across seamstress's stitches, in my world across a wide night. I want you well-rested, fresh, evergreen, spritely, and lovely. I want you clear like water, jagged like the Alps, and smokey like a fall campfire. I want you like otters holding hands while they sleep so they don't float away and lose each other. I want you the way that apple juice

reminds me of kindergarten and being five years old. I want you the way that losing youth means I still want to feel like this is the beginning like we're always beginning. I want you like arepa with rice and beans, like tortillas filled with eggs, sausage, jalapeños, and cheese. I want you like staying up past bedtime, like sleeping in late, like neck kisses and scratches behind the ears, like another bowl of soup, another cup of coffee, another slice of New York cheesecake or cheese pizza, another Sunday morning in bed talking to you. I want you in old ways and new ways, in dresses of vestiges repurposed, in coffee shops and kitchen counters,

in winds that bend over palm trees and rains that turn things gray, in storms and rip current days. I want you more than ever these days. I want you safe and sleeping so soundly. I want you waking up refreshed and excited for the promise of a new day to carve out with your love and grace. I want you protected and flush. I want you with a backup plan and an exit strategy. I want you in the snow like snow angels who're still playing house. I want you like an unfinished poem, like stories that never end, like those fresh beginnings we kept on talking about. I want you kept so safe and sound like your birthday morning, today's your day, like Christmas

morning, like today's your day to give love. I want you easy like warm sunny afternoons on the porch in a cool breeze. Most of all I want you loving and laughing and radiant like stretching out your spirit in the world's curious embrace, like spring waking up early this year to give us a hug, like all the big and little mysteries blooming open all over again.

Let's Tend a Garden

breaking ground ain't quick and immediate
takes time to till the topsoil, a minefield's hot coils
we'll ask only of you, 'Unfold crossed arms.'
to have this dance, to disarm the fifth wall
between symbols and dreams, waltz-themed armaments for a fiend
defense strategies and militant offerings, obscene anatomies, borrowed topographies
breaking ground kind of happens like that (quick and immediate, like it ain't)
it happens when it's already happened; already underway, always in durée
you never dip your head out from the stream, always on the move, never stop and breathe
and you can't — no one can. just flow. so now we've broken ground, sown along together
maybe this time we've even analyzed the soil examined our roots for clues of what we need
to change and to grow and to heal and to love
to tend a garden together
spend Sunday mornings drinking coffee
across from you, holy you, with a pencil and paper
a pen marking my day-planner, moleskin dreams, secrets I show to you
only you
planning the needs is already planting the seeds, dividing rows to separate crops and
writing timelines to populate fraught soil — ground and bodies who've been written over
inscribed already so often — setting up scarecrows to ward off our monsters, sidelined safely
behind boundaries and kind meanings feeling this teeming positive esteem for us as a team
build fences and lay lattices, grow roses and strawberries, a bouquet of lavender and daisies
fragile in our hands like space held between, as tender and delicate as our power to spark
Magic
when you've been to death's door there's really no time like the present anymore
set the plans in motion to test the ocean, call the lumberyard, order parts and wondrous art
let's meet in our garden at midnight under the full moon to seek divinity and experiment with
existing tangled and messy, breathless moments and intense presence absent resentment and
at peace with ease

flowing at the best possible time to begin

Staining a Handcrafted Back Deck

five fresh paintings lain on Hreather's feather-gray
blanket, background of trees, the birds and the bees
Polaroid summers, the beaches and the shaky knees
Caption: *Aftermath from playing with watercolors*
melted minds in a blurred design; fuzzy, soft and
ethereal; colorfully lovely. You! human watercolor
wonder, breathlessly blending our energy together
tongue-tied effervescent caricatures dry slow so
draw close, tangled and messy, nearer now dear
rhizomatic root systems openly explore, fluidly
flow uncontrolled when there's no role to play
limitless without expectation, fields in motility
our shared choras a chorus to harmonize today

Wednesday bardos, tutor and stain, afternoons
spent studying proxemics and passageways

Rabbit's Foot

My baby's all balmy and soft like a warm breeze
from a balcony with the sunrise, spicy potatoes,
peas, cream, warm naan, and chai for breakfast,
as all the bright chirping at the cessation of the
crow's cawing wants to tell you that it's morning
again, that behind the omens it's morning again,
that I keep you like protection mantras or a lucky
rabbit's foot, like oh what a lovely imagination you
have with which to tell me stories, to lie to me, to
keep me safe, to love me and give me your best.
Surprise snow days reprieve faith in humanity like
thanking a child for feebly, insufficiently holding
the door open — but the thought was there and it
takes faith to catch that to see the love and purity
of heart. Freezing and melting both happen at the
same temperature, depending on which dog you
keep, or a dog howling at the moon in my shadow.
I would like to be the voice that gets it right. If so,
making love is intellectual, academia is an orgy,
and why don't you ever turn the lights on until
after it's over, rifling through my spice cabinet?

I want to stay in bed all day, but I have to see the
Taj Mahal each morning in your commitment and
your devotion, like I can't stay here after you're
dead, but if we were still once more just like the
good old days horizontal head on shoulder, then
the chimney fire roars again. Hear the birds in the
morning and we're in Eden again, collecting raven
and crow trinkets of cows, goats, pigs, parakeets,
pigeons, squirrels, dogs, and monkeys out in the
Indian subcontinent. I ask her is it worth it to be
dirty and disgusting without a shower to talk to
me more; but since she says yes, she still makes
all the time in the world for me. But we still have
those days; I hate to see you pack your bags for
your travels, but even in a haze your figure's still
gorgeous with lovely elation, Cindy Lou Who nose,
and Disney Princess hair. You made my working
so wonderful, you made my snow day so spiritual,
not good but it was kind of hot when you hated
your own work. You say, I think you're just trying
to get me into your bedroom; I say I think the work
can't be spoken or furthered in public. You'll have
all my Saturdays with that break for tutoring while
you cook dinner you could cuddle my best friend
German Shepherd of eight years up until I come
home like I always do. Let them catch us guiltily
dividing chores: you do the dishes, I'll do laundry,
and we both cook way deep out in Patagonia and
in Eden and in Jerusalem and goddamn you taste
delicious so you melt again and I repeat myself in
writing rituals that inaugurate me like a prophet
under love's desire yours mine yours mine yours

mine to hear and to bear, to teach and to carry.

Yes, please, then it's all settled, and I'm excited to fine-tune you, to play you around into purring pure shining messes over and over again. It's okay, call me a million times in the middle of my workday for another two second bite of love and life and not so gentle into that goodnight, sweetheart; I hope you sleep well and rest so gentle; that love holds you down with the peace you've earned while all our good work and loving care stays behind in the matter and the others; rest so well east of Eden.

Hanging my sister's art and dusting your piano like spring cleaning and gratitude and all fresh beginnings, cold cut combo, sultry phone calls, just something simple to get me through today. I love my layers because they leave you with all the more details to undress me about, to dress me down in, as we honor our bodies and let them talk to each other the way material things do, with all the friction and the fire; swimming in a canon sea of overlapping chanted love and declarations of love in this way and incantations of love that way and chanted love over the edges again and More and the Taj Mahal was as perfect as they always say, completely symmetrical over the twelve years to build; his dying wife asked him to rend heaven to earth for her honor; so he called down so many mourning birds to bring forth its construction, soft sciences only for the two of us after graduating chemistry and anatomy, with us left incanting and chanting love as transformations and rituals to go from day to night and from night to day. Rose at daybreak has never had this much milk and honey and Rose's sunset will miss her fresh twice-a-day unsweetened chai, spiced ginger, and love's feisty cardamom tasting light, bright, quiet, and true so love so sexy winds up dozing off carelessly in our harem dreams even at that 500-year-old fort just because still I simply cannot help myself around you, what with all the work you put into loving me.

Can I come over to help you edit? I heard you can only work in your bedroom. I heard you can only write in your bed. Yes. Yes yes yes. All the signs say love is like a radish, my valentine — desperate for sunlight beneath the surface; all the signs say love is like a rhubarb, my radish — growing in the dark in search of light, as double skip-stop trains bless the purity of heart, as sometimes things just exist in an ephemeral way, unlike the way you left me unfit for public consumption but both nobilities are present — body and mind desiring you, as I'm chewing as I say it back anyway: I love you with a clean mouth, you, muse amongst men, well then,

we're both model humans and, well then, we're in Eden again, and, well then, we're Adam and Eve.

Another photoshoot, give me hotel bathrooms in every country so I'll have to memorialize the good ones for you; well then, maybe; maybe I just keep them for myself, like you know! You know! Do you ever just eat a tomato? Yeah if it's a good tomato, like you. My mom grows tomatoes, like me. You know! In Eden we're eating virgin tomatoes off the vine in summer together love's everlasting spring. If I ever do get married, it won't be in a church. I don't care where, just not in a church or a temple or a mosque or a synagogue, but what does that matter it's not like we need wedding plans anyway with details of the when and the where as long as we know the who by heart, by our very own heart. Get out of bed to start your day, and we're in Eden again; get into bed to start our night, and we're in Eden again. Every day, another hallmark of trust and intimacy with you, so much that every day's another hallmark of trust and intimacy with you.

The moths fucking on the wall in the morning light like choral singers in canon's hallelujah ask us all, Have you figured us out yet? I'm not all that great, you know, just pretty and sad, desperate for more life, and even though we've mended a few loose strands since you've come around, chai still just means tea, it's still just in the tea leaves, the story of every morning the maple leaves me to deal with what my hands wrought, brought in, wrung out. A hope of a child apologizing getting on a crowded train, like the adult apologizing to the children in the doorway, the adult apologizing to the adults in stairwells: tasty fresh concrete and a clean slate. But the photographer says we love a cloudy sky on a wedding day since I'm not quite ready to be illuminated, so thanks for being soft with me like a secret; I can't help it; I can't either, yet my favorite beautiful thing you sing to me is your mind, your way of seeing, so in all things you teach me, your imprint is all of them, simply in the selection and attention of what you noticed, loved, and brought to me — building not bringing another temple on the Acropolis, the Erechtheion leading and leaving Athena outside my window in Athens, where we're all just so hot in the balmy and soft warm breeze.

I was worried but my baby went down to Delphi to see oracle Pythia the fasting woman hallucinating on fumes in the basement; everything's coming up riddles but that's alright, she says. My love stands up and withstands the wind; she conquers it all to radiate yes bask the sun-soaked mountains north of Athena's rays and winters in Athens. Yes, love.

II. Template in the Temple

A Birthday Car Full of Balloons

I used to work with this guy named Eric
he was in his mid-thirties back then, back
when he drove his mom's car out on deliveries

real nice guy — I closed down a lot of shifts
with him as my last driver, washing dishes and
swapping stories, letting each other in on secrets,
questions and answers, "hey man, you ever..."
fuck I miss him

he showed me this song by Bootsy Collins back
when Gambino's "Redbone" crept on real popular
said it reminded him of "I'd Rather Be With You"
those trippy bass grooves coming on like Winehouse
I wonder how he's doing

back then he was still having trouble moving on
he'd lost his girlfriend three years before
the love of his life swept away by a drunk driver
how blasé, and honestly, what a waste
people need to get their shit together

Eric told me about their relationship the
two years they'd been able to cherish with each other
once for his birthday, she'd filled his car with balloons
"I mean, who does that? She was just so sweet, man,"
he told me one night, still so in love but

with so much resignation hanging in the air between
"I was gonna take her to the beach! She'd never been
to the beach before, man. Never went," he recalled while
bringing me the rest of the dirty dishes for us to wash
always just mourning rubble

Eric drank two glasses of brandy before bed every night
watching cartoons to remember forgetting the woman
he lost but couldn't dismember, but that was back

when
back

when. I heard last year he's not with us anymore.
and the whole mess together — where was the line
in the end between her pain and his? in the Wound

The Ballad of Lennie and Joan

two ghosts drive sunset strip through an old desert
winding unrest, wound up and wounded
ghosts translucent all the same
if I'm being honest

Lennie and Joan came from backwaters
barked out of town fast as they could, wasn't
fast at all but eventually they made their way out
all the way off in the City – preface to a plague
dancing to death at our own personal masquerade

are you the Red Death?

it was good for a while, bubblegum streamers and lilac dreams
Joan and the City, felt like I'd finally found one that suits me
homemade Indian food to save money, Kalustyan's for the best
spices, hide in my mind's café to elide the insightful refrain
to contain my disdain and sustain the mundane and
what pain
particle-plague death hit us up for coffee like the two by
fours and particle boards that racked the backs of our heads
like the Judge's book gave us contusions in our bar fight with Life
obviously we lost that one all the way Off at last call — particles
between dusted coughs, burning to ash, particles mislaid to rest in
cramped quarters, particles freshly flayed at the masquerade

and poor Lennie never knew when it went down
always a little late on picking up the latest story
folks used to say his brain had a built-in delay
or maybe a short-circuit where some wires got
crossed, or where Lennie got cross with you

Close the blinds dear, The vigil can wait
I promise the watch will go On
It can but only go On, and On, and On
My dear Grab the shades and Come to bed
Get some rest before your next extensive shift
It will be tiresome; You should prepare

the particles filled their basement before long
all Lennie and Joan could do was move on
they roamed the rivers and mountains a time
some distant riverside high by all the colors
of the water frying latent conflict for breakfast
and a collective agreement to let live

they made it up to the city together, and
they burned under a plague, together, and they
made it out alive, healed up in the mountains, together
funny thing is they're right back where they started
stuck in their small town, gotta help each other out
up to the plagued City before Together and Forever ends

like I said up front, two ghosts drive a desert road

where the sun-flinted asphalt lives more fully than
Jessie's haunted specter; Every person's a story but
some days you just gotta respect the rules of separate
ways, learn to accept when agreements break, when
weather alignments change and people rearrange

obviously they didn't get back to the city, not together
Joan wanted stability, and Lennie wanted out, sought better
find resolution elsewhere, dear reader, ye of much faith
behold the calm seas before you, sacred way, holy terrain

Dissociative Aperture

music is a communion, not some fucking performance
forgive this holy union, bless our nightly ordinance
sit steady with your friends: B. Dylan and V.E., Sharon
play offbeat till the end— until you turn hand-skinned carrion
shed your timing, bleeding brittle throat
sung under grunge-soaked vocal cords
strung time-again ‘cross callous rope
hesitant, effete between opal shores
snapping turtles teem, kindly lining beneath
twenty feet deep in unadulterated moat
negligent misdeed, forgot some little note
honestly answer me, why are we so broke?
yellow-sleeved panther always fleeing off-key
faded and grotesque, sputter out our lantern
with my bell jar choke our fire won’t breathe
abandon fragile hope to squarely bury the intern
fairly offer death to ease your living piece
please embark on joyous departure
jaded and molested rest requests
dissociative aperture

brothers’ infinite jest just holy heretofore
forgive and forget I guess Cain forevermore

but then we deliberated disappearing often
enough, I mean you’d mention it every week
disconnect like Tom Sawyer for what you need
some time spent in New Mexico
I knew we’d eventually follow the script,
destined for the iridium deserts of our mind
the power of pure creation — wild sands speckled
our face like memories of youth’s psychedelic
glitter leaving glimmering holes in my hands from
where we pierced me, bled dry in liminal spaces
with our uncontested Beauty, so kindly take
your leave, and let me back in my wintry sea

Epic in the Inner Sanctuary

woke up three hours late for work today, no alarms going off, weird what time is it, eleven
fuck I was supposed to be there an hour ago breathe, the hyperventilation sets in like normal

we've been through this before, let the tears out

pour cortisol, flushed ducts for twenty minutes trudge your pants on in the meantime, button up
your shirt while the tears push through, like you, fuck I want to tell you about something else

but they don't stop, the tears, fuck they don't stop

Instagram audio call from the assistant manager that I'm crushing on, Special K, I am so sorry
fuck I'm still crying, Kathline, I know I'm letting everyone down, wailing voice bending, breaking

we really depend on you now, you gotta show up

I know, I know, crying out to the heavens, god, I'm sorry, my brain doesn't understand the words
it's just a feeling a cry an expression a breakdown another breakdown 'cross the years, the breeze

fuck haven't brushed my teeth yet gotta go back

inside I'm probably getting fired today well maybe tomorrow they probably need me to double today
but they can cover tomorrow or maybe they'll keep me for two weeks until they find someone

don't I know I'm just another brick in the wall

listo, teeth are clean, check all four pockets twice head to the train with my shoulder bag, bump up
into someone, walking too fast half asleep, he supposedly dropped his Hennessy XO, so I should

know it's fifty dollars man, but where's spilled milk

just broken glass in that bag, and he doesn't want any problems but he's not from around here, and
he's gotta get to the family barbecue, I am still so sorry, show him the eleven dollars in my wallet

fuck. fuck, why does everything keep breaking

what am I doing so wrong so blindly, laundry left two days in the public dryer, why can't I see this
is my fault, how can I feel what I can't understand why why fuck man I'm sorry the ATM is empty too

there's nothing in the bank, next check spoken for

shake your hand, if I see you again, I'm sorry I got you next time, I'm sorry, take the eleven
dollars, man. hello world, hello beautiful, have it all take whatever you want from me

do I owe you? have I wronged you? I'm showing up

put me on trial, weigh my heart, fuck, I swear I'm sorry, I know you don't want to hear this
but here's the knife, and here's the scale, and give me ten minutes and

here's the grafted heart, a transplant, weigh it

empty my wallet, I have to get to the train station fuck for whatever reason the tears flushed even
stronger now, but I'm walking I have to get to work I have to I have to I have to take it take it from me

hey man, are you okay, hey, tears, hey man

are you okay? yarmulke, slightly taller, keep walking, what can I do to help? what's going on?
are you okay? he's turned the corner walking next to me now, hey man, are you okay? no I'm not

reality morphing around, a Natural God before me

are you okay son? no, I'm not. what's going on? how can I help? I say, tears, you can't help, it's
a moral problem, I feel like I'm not doing right that must be why all of this is happening to me

to show up for work, to show up for love, again

weigh my heart, she said I wanna go down not up I said, vigil never stops for me, only when I sleep
'heart in the faith, I'm good love,' but do you have olive oil or is it just canola, and don't you ever

clean the fridge, fuck, not again, another slip

he said son what can I do for you, I mean he's, I'm still crying, hugging me by now, can you pray?
do you pray? kippah signals something like Nature something like something I can believe in this time

of course, absolutely, my name's David, beloved

what's yours? Justin, one of justice, oops let me hide that part until I figure out how not to rush it
how to move with my hips in bachata, how to slow it down, real slow, allusions, can loose

can use whatever I want, I wanna slow this down

savor: beloved. justice. slow. low slow. — breathe up at 5am typing up the rush, waking up the crush
wait fuck, we're still on David, he told me bye said Justin it's gonna be a good day, I thought, grace

I need grace, hella humbled 'cause last Sunday I

'nobody pray for me, it been all day for me'd what an ass, classless glass ego crassly gasping
but fuck at least I'm finally drowning that demon 'pray that the holy [...] yeay, yeay,' Kendrick again

I'm sorry I don't mean to steal; I just want you in

I want to show you what you can't see what I can what I do every day my brain what boulder I claim
can you withstand the hurricane? ok what hurricane I'm good love, it's fine love, hurricane mind, love

full of endlessly recapitulated restitched decapitations

and you open your eyes, o that litany, and, next you're on the train, fuck gotta wake up, be alert
presence, dead space, blank zone, honest, I just don't remember, have space instead

space to imagine the rest, the better story ahead

risk a form break just to say, in all the ways, again, again, weigh my heart, let me in, cause love if you
need someone there at 5am, coffee and oatmeal, a partner, awake I've got you, just drink the water

Thanksgiving

I promise we made dinner, but it just wasn't enough for her,
so a squirrel must gather nuts in the summer, radiant
through the soft-edged, hazy intimacy of heavenly bodies
coming together more closely. A five-hundred foot kite
on a windy day at the pier is discerning whether or not
she wishes to acquaint thoroughly or merely
as one of those inevitabilities with the man whose ice
cream is now on her shirt. You could not begin to
rebuild brick by brick the frail, fraught care
with which by her loving parents she'd been raised and
adorned within the essential structure of a God-given
new beginning or as some other manner of
sanctimonious symbolism for their second chance.
You could not barometrically measure the critical pressure
typical of growing up under such watchful auspices.

Weather forecasts, though improved with technology
over the years, typically will not suffice when notifying
next of kin. Thunderstorms overhead. The living fury of
heaven standing on your front porch. Parents prefer
in these times to hold on tangibly to some of their dead child's belongings
naturally. Naturally the act fell upon me as a vow to
love you a little longer make amends and fulfill
honorable judgment the wild passage of devotion
in the storm wilds shrouded skies, downcast eyes, and
devout cries saints' delivery a rental car full of your boxes
cross-continent to your parents sixty hours of duct-taped driving
in seven days. The terror of that drive, the force of tornadoes' wind
in that storm. Dear reader, have we reconvened that she's dead
yet? Normally when I write in the second person I'm invoking my
deceased which is to say I am speaking to my target audience.

Stories of devotion escalate quickly. I was shipwrecked early on without
answers, but I was in devastation further on with your passing story, the
sui generis, boldfaced violence of your death. I didn't have any of the
details yet while driving your things, but I was sideswiped in
the rental on my way out of Brooklyn. I had to insist the
other driver wait for police, Winchester in the front seat,
because my rental company insisted. New York City doesn't
have time for nonfatal accidents. The driver was my mother's age. He
was taking his son to school, who had the same name as me.
He asked to leave but told me about lessons he'd learned while waiting
for the police. His son had to take the train to school instead, and
the driver sidestepped my mentions of the tidal urgency of my trip.
*Look, man, I'm sorry I hit you, but I didn't mean to get dragged into
this. You seem like you already have a lot going on.* No shit. I mailed in
the police report with Doug's help in your hometown after crying with your mom.

Fierce and Fearsome

I. Black Balloon in the Street

Crashing coves through bayside
wooden windows and into the street
I wanted to catch you black balloon little
string next to the two birds Biblically bathing
sparrows in the trash-lined gutter begging you
praying in lacerated proclamations crying
out to my dead lover while restrained in
the hospital bed lost another of your
travel bottles lost another grail
of the good and holy water

crashing sacred meditations
reminiscent of holy pontifications
musings promises made while down
on his busted knees bloodied busted
knuckles his forearms greased soaked
crimson sloppy with bruises in self-defense
the iron taste of his own blood down his face
again Bless me when I say *his* I mean *my* It's
this sleight of hand duet I tell myself to elicit
some empathy in the red and rainy season

crashing black balloon in the street
raging gale carried me away that there's
me only sitting my weight holding down
the weight grounded by the tension the
weight between abrasions and the taste
of iron through the sputter of catching my
your breath under dripping clotting blood
I gasped like a wet dog cradled breathing
or trying to through thick visceral viscosity
they called the medics held tender grounded
and stable between my rails by a fierce and
fearsome fear of facing further cataclysms.

II. A Wake for the Dead

I don't write about you, I can't, it's like you and your
memories and the me I used to be, it's all untouchable
I've already ducked away from this feeling, I told you
I can't write you down, you can't ask me to fix you in
place like this, like a phantom that won't keep writing its
own part in my life, like a bad, like I made horcruxes of us
actions fracturing our love to save my identity, no memory
to explain our burnt bedrooms walls, tears in your clothes
tear-stained, can you tell now? I think I'm the monster (I am)
eighteen months still haven't forgiven me like you have
and when I'm burnt blue on nights like this I can feel you
looking in, sad and confused that I can't seem to figure it out

ya know, how to move on

but that's not what's confusing you, and I think this must be
what heaven, grace feels like, for us all to soft lock eyes
in compassion, true empathy, to say, 'No, love, I never
blamed you, never wanted to watch you suffer, be
the cause, to make you think that you were it either'
you say, 'Can't you see how this wasn't your fault?'

and I'm sorry I know I can't I know I shouldn't I know you couldn't I know

but lately I miss when you'd hold me, snuggled up on the couch
watching tv, sleeping in late together, camping upstate, cold weather
tents, sleeping bags, arms wrapped, legs woven, souls wed over campfires
love keeping us warm, but the cloven memories don't keep me
don't get me very far because I still can't get very far
with the memories, before they flatline, before...
but at least I can still see them — for now, I mean
I will never stop mourning you
and I'm scared to forget you so even
when it aches, chills me through I'm grateful
we're still safe inside each of us somewhere
and I promise — you were beautiful, love.

III. Ode to Desire Breathing

while estimating boxes and luggage
capabilities you turned your bedroom
into an escape plan, with fine print from
the great poets' lay hand, familiarity's
the stain and their thief — forget! the taste
to make better? taste to be dissatisfied, I can
never fucking tell, tasteless, gracelessly
hoarding horrid pictures of morbid
tattoos whose orchid hues renew bad
views as my fascination with death's a
desperate testament to my featherweight
attempt at mastering my final chain
when sunburnt by love's fair fell fury
one must learn to peel off the dead skin
you know sometimes in writing like art or
whatever one destroys the rose for its petals
to tame take root and grow, stolidly halt form
and procure a faltering waltz
within yesterday's haunted repose to rescue
half-crashed fragments burning in snow;
that basement changed me for the worse
broke things down real straight and simple
but I figure I better finish my metamorphosis
always swimming further away from the shore
chasing contact highs from complicit cannibals
keeping company with cacti in concrete jungles
bristled, ha!
but honestly sometimes it feels like a bit of a sin
for such beautiful bodies to slip by one another
like wouldn't it make sense to come together
everywhere but here
but the mourning is a chance to remind myself
of how much I want something I've forgotten
to be senseless and safe with you but, but the last unicorn is dead and there is no second spring
and I'm sorry dear, everything else, clinging
the perpetual loss of innocence, so what's
cold you mustn't wake. everywhere but here.
here instead and relieved to be hopeless
I'm carving my eyes and my perception so
you'll find me, recognize something warm
and tired in them, my second spring looking
for your late twenties short skirt long jacket
And the wanting is good, a warm meal and a roof, desire breathing
in the heart's beating rain Everywhere is here

IV. Dissociating on Ninth Avenue

Dissociating on ninth avenue during retrograde.
Fixing broken clocks. Synching time. Sometimes I
like to write stories to remember how it happened.
Sometimes I like to write stories and rewrite how it
happened. Sometimes the flamenco dancers still
tell the story of your love in the wind. Sometimes
you fly back into town. Sometimes we catch up at
the check-cashing venue. Sometimes I stay late
for work. Sometimes we catch dinner at our old
spot, tell the stories we've been hanging on to in
broken phrases. Sometimes it's still not enough.

Sometimes the flamenco dancer with sharp feet
filled of heaven's force, stomping; the bartender
with the blue shades, indoors; and the singer with
salt and pepper curls, half-bun; testify the tested
conviction it takes to make it that long, to make it
past grief, survive love, testify to the "we've done
this before, we've been here, still here" to drought
suffering in the love, to the strained compulsion to
move that fast, to do it up that well. Not enough.

You don't make art on a clean, unstabbed heart: I
desperately futilely stitch our home back together.

V. Template in the Temple

They started small
all the ways I lied to myself
tried to die after you
in the temple in
the template you set forth.
Catching fireflies from
the corners of my eyes that
summer when extinct insects
made a comeback, when
extinctions made a comeback
I learned the different ways to
ya know say goodbye progressively
by dousing and losing my things,
my glorious, tragic things.
Take every four to six hours
as needed to manage your pain.
First with the busted open forehead
they picked me up into the taxi. Next
it was all outside my front door overnight.
Of course when I kept going same as Glück's
passport we were forgotten in the adventure,
recovered with more bloodied forgiveness.
Just like last month when my neighbor
found my phone my wallet backpack
and good graces all out of order
all strung out on the street.
I limped around on my sprained foot
after icing it all weekend, and I even
got in trouble for calling in with a note
but at least I got three days' sleep finally
—— doctor's orders. Still it's hard to see
when you've lost your glasses, or when
I've lost you, which always amounts to
the same thing, the same letter in your
brick mailbox, the same cul-de-sac in
the hills, the same U-turn at the end of
the road. I lost that new pair last week
when I was robbed, and I found out
the definition of a robbery last night
when I filed the police report. Last
year you were killed in the forest when
you tried sleeping in suburban driveways.
My three new head injuries mirroring yours my
broken feet mirroring yours — fragile barefoot
birds — your shoes left in the catatonic mud.
Last night I had a dream that you came back. Last
night I was in and out, and it took me some time to
open Babylon's trapdoor to go out trick-or-treating my heart
clock your being here alive again still.
I jumped up out to hold you. We hugged in tsunamis, relief like the triage workers
could finally stop searching for you in the wreckage, in everyone else's soul.
But you're not the passport, and what was lost certainly returns
but as something fresh, tried, and true.
I hate it. I look for new ways to say I miss you.

Sushi and Cheesecake

When I can't figure out something as simple
as what to do with my hands in a moment
I eat time swallowing her
(sushi; cheesecake; other practices of forgiveness)
countenance as quickly as heavenly possible
seeking new foci behind which my time slips.
I forget lifelong rituals and oaths, seething on
after an altering with seers and soothsayers
that never arrives. I am waiting with prayer
for a spiritual ritual that never arrives. I am
waiting with your memories for a river that
will one day bend this way but not this day.
Sushi and cake, unlikely autumnal pairing,
if you count the leaves as unlikely as you
and your childhood best friend, Rebecca,
appearing at my house again to get your
gentle and domestic things, with a peace
offering of sorts, sushi and cake, or some
other demonstration of forgiveness, grace,
devotion, your everlasting steadfastness.
Rebecca was there with us because we
never could be left alone to revel in our
own delicate devices, lover. Blue eyes.
Taco soup. Deconstructed piano chords.

You took vocal lessons and wrote complex
songs about family histories and muddled
colorful wanderlusts of traveling vibrancy.
One breath, two. Take the eight count to
yourself. Take three years to yourself if the
world is breaking if the sky is falling take
these last three or the next few too take
my time; do not let me be unoccupied; I
barely withstand wind between eastern
tall trees unless I put it all behind me to
let the wolves lick their fangs and nuzzle
my chops. You'd find it all quite suitable.
You'd find your role in me quite insoluble,
light unsolvable, irrevocably irresolvable.
Shrimp tempura. Spicy salmon. California
roll. Cheesecake. Carrot cake. Red velvet.
Red velvet stained all across your coveted
green velvet futon. Shadow figures dancing
our love across all heated angles, flashing
lights, tensions and declensions, muscle
spasms writhing happily roiling delicacies.
You told me, *Nothing should be allowed to
feel this good*. One, two, three, eating time.
Honey if I try hard enough, could I make a

golden image to capture and preserve our
love? Honey, if I pine hard enough could it
ever resurrect you? I make my oaths, keep
my rituals in time. I will die on this devotion.

We settle differing territories of activity and various manners of being, unshackled modes of flourishing, allowing certain enticements be amended to the allure of knowing one another. It didn't begin with sushi and cake; they were simply brought in as a pretense, a set piece, a decorative detail you planned for the sake of the song. *We always knew how to set a mood*; you told me that after the art exhibit running naked in fields, the one about how intertwining never ceases, your agency lodged in my history, constructive of my spine, making daily being; the one you swore I had to see before departing; the one to which you drove me; the one we giggled pizza squirmy on our way to visit, at our old historical Houston spot. We talked about spiritual mentors, that I was one for you. I never told you it was mutual. We played and you confided that it's okay to be an us again and to bend the path a little so long as

we know where we're going, where it ends. That was when you showed me Prince's cover of Case of You by our canonical favorite Joni. You told me later that year, halfway 'cross the country, that *[You] love this recent turn in our story* — our story, because we still had a story together best friends forever after the breakup. You and Rebecca hugged Nana, left the peace offerings on her kitchen table, and both came upstairs with me. We talked for hours before you claimed your things. You left me with a white hoodie that I wear when I miss you. I bloodied it recently when I was robbed. I'm sure you protected me somehow. After we loaded everything up in the car I sold you, Rebecca left off before you, and you and I went back inside for our last lingering sparks of electricity, your last few things. Marauding onslaughts of tension tied my mind to bedposts like a timeworn battlefield, stained from desire and memories of holding you tight to my chest. After a time, you angled to leave, or something like that some pretense a clever construction to petition your everlasting position in my life, a

song and a plea: you told me you can't live without me; A Decent Margarita for Brooklyn, you called it. You're incredible. You always amazed, inspired me to seek unknown beauty. We had to stay friends, you lovingly insisted, because I was the only one who understood you, understood what we went through during the pandemic in the basement in the hotel you worked at on Times Square when the army came in to triage more medical care

from their field surgeons, pandemic theater,
when the drug users and sex workers came
in. After the song after coming to terms with
being friends again, you tried to start your
car. See, you decided to show me the song
in our car because that's where it sounded
best, and you didn't want to turn the car on
for fear it would bother or otherwise disturb
my grandparents whom you so gently loved,
since their bedroom window faces the drive.
The car wouldn't start, so we disturbed my
grandparents in search of a defibrillator to
bring us back to life together, and we sought
foundational stones structural mammoths

along the speckle-colored bottoms of rivers
stowing astride shifting chromatic waters. The
defibrillator hefted drenched when we found it,
so obviously it would take a few years to make
things right and spark. I was giving it those few
years. Your newfound boyfriend came over to
give you an electric jump, a lifeline. We talked in
the drive, ready to leave, fifteen minutes or so,
photography, philosophy, making art and friends.
Over time, he got used to our intimacy, less
threatened by our us, but the years of waiting
still haven't come to pass since you passed away.

III. The Traveling Cowgirl

Socks; A Small Heater; Rituals

I do the things that keep me warm. I still do the same small things that keep me warm, since the last time we passed by. I light fires in the dark. I wake up at seven and live by curtained sunlight dripping through until three. I don't sleep enough and drink too much caffeine and get irritated at the scratching sounds of air moving through my

empty room. I leave the lights off. I put on Merino wool socks, the ones your parents bought me for Christmas one year before our breakup road trip to the Pacific coastline. You wanted California 1 on your birthday, late April; Lake Atitlán in Eden's summer. Broken lessons and love-locked harlot eyes in January's snowy North Carolina cabin

downsized state lines in a storage unit I unpack. I hang your mirror at waist-level in the sole spot left on my wall. I compose your old art from your old friend for the concrete facing. Your travel bag is on my towel rack (I need to repair one of your pins), and your box of memoirs is under my bed. Momma Rosa asks for your graduation keyboard,

but Rebecca says this one is probably different. I recompose your unpublished art to ask you to live a little longer. I make new friends and tell them all about you. They know we're just friends because I can't shut up about you and how I love you, and though I'll never confess it to anyone I'll always be afraid of forgetting our world — instead inside, my

mind holds our memorial vigil, an endless city of coming and going with the streetcar racing up to tell you all about the hidden manners of the heart, about all the ways we'd do it over, all the same, to tell you the redeeming truth; golden and worthy, I bare my mourning like a veil of devotion, desolate, your love a floor-length fur coat of sanctification.

Broken Sets

I. Swans

There's this secluded lake in northern snows where a sole swan bides water.
The people in those alpine towns talk about the cherry blossom days when
he had a lover and a friend in spring. There had always been two of them.
To this day you'll hear his low drone an incoherent whimper begging for

God to change her recent materials. One band-aid here, another there.
I walk around all bandaged up with little amenities and accoutrements
blessing the symptoms, chewing on my cud, biting my skin as screaming.
The swan found parasites in his hind quarter area; he's developing mange.

It's hard to be friends with the bandaged swan. If he invites you over for tea and
biscuits it's hard to drink the tea because his teacup set is broken. He buried her
with her pieces, with her memories. He didn't care if the touch-up scarred or if
he came home with bound ankles and broken wings: suffering made sense.

II. Lions

Three lions setting up the iron-wrought gateposts introduce home as a roaming metaphor from our first kinship settlement. If I knock again would you still answer? We keep sailing past each other and the past if you could only read my mind, right, love? It was you who configured my heading, set me in motion down this ruptured road.

Three lions are eating dinner together with the formal China and everything, I mean, really you should've seen it. These three lions are eating dinner in the dining room; it's half-past three; Father says, *Son, could you pass the hindquarters? I do not wish for you or your mother to risk consuming mange.*

Three lions: you, me, and the dog. We're eating the swan, who's also me, but further down when he's alone as a consequence of the three broken lion statues outside our front gate in south Brooklyn, up now when those same lions are out and about on my walks with our third lion, Winchester. Even my own mange doesn't taste good.

III. Elephants

A broken swan widower; three lions, I mean, three broken lion statues, I mean losing you; your favorite French elephant Babar, broken. I need to replace the glass or simply get new frames for all three posters — the set must not be broken, as many sets as I can save with run-on sentences and hanging lines, run-off lines that push you further than you want to go.

Desperation. The sound of trains rushing past in the night. A lonesome moon in Wyoming. A hot air balloon in my dreams. You're invited. Bring your guitar and please play me a song, a love song, a lovelorn song after the matter, still hanging on to our love till the very end always mine and yours. I have to believe you can still hear me.

Babar has extra teacups for the swan and his faithful dog. Babar has a new frame for himself and hides his love in safe solitudes in the interim in the temple's inner sanctum where there's room aplenty for the children and the grandchildren and the parents and warm memories and the soft bedtimes, the closing hours serving forgiveness and grace.

Knockout!

Ha! Good luck!
Prize champion,
my reigning queen,
absolutely howling
in uproars in
she's hysterics
birthday cake and
secret wishes at
the impossibility
of some up
and coming
challenger
vying after
my affectionate
loving attention.
Gold standard.
Morning sun.
Tender cup.
Spry acolyte.
Stunning flash.
Ephemerality.
Sheet music.
Bed worship.
Rave reviews.
Sugary cream.
Peach kisses.
Light sighs.
Silk curtains.
Sunbeams.
Beaming
curvatures.
The ring of
a resounding
winning bell.
She's thrown
the gauntlet
undaunted
from beyond
the pale. Her
heroic, saintly
knees spread,
boxing gloves
on the ground
in eternal rest,
leaning in with
a grin, asking
in confidence,
*Who's gonna
take care of
my boy?*

The Snowball Studies

I. Snowball

Refreshing cool water
river-dancing streamers
glistening down your calves
ardently leaking from a bag of
melting ice in the summertime,
like ribbon streamers flying in
the dawning hands of your
daughter at her football game,
the rattle of the snare drum
couldn't cage all the love
in the family you raised
cage all the passion for breath
and breathless beauty — coda:
the rattle of the snare drum
sharply strikes demarcations in
your daughter's choreography as
her pride and cautious restraint
discloses angels gently holding
the hems of her dress when she
kneels in prayer as an offering
that concludes her spotlight.
Snowball the frazzled feline
long-haired in all directions
hung around the street after
her owner left my apartment.
She could be your daughter.

II. Arpeggio

Refreshing cool water glistening down your calves
river-dancing streamers ardently leaking from a bag of melting
ice in the summertime, and you think
that is me, ice melted by the summer of my life
but not yet, someone comforts,
my life will be verdant and vivacious in equal measure
to the power of my youthful will, you promise yourself.

I believe you, you told me, You will find that will which is running wild like ribbon streamers flying in the dawning
hands of your daughter at her first football game.
The rattle of the snare drum couldn't cage all the love in the family you raised
cage all the passion for breath, glory, and breathless beauty — coda: the
rattle of the snare drum
sharply strikes demarcations in your daughter's choreography as
her pride and cautious restraint discloses
angels gently holding the hems of her dress
when she kneels in prayer as an offering that concludes her spotlight.

Snowball the frazzled feline, with her long hair in all directions,
hung around the street after her owner left my apartment vacant.
The orphan could be our daughter.

III. French Teacups

Friends tell me your remains have been located, scattered by animals, but located.
No, no, I'm sure they must have it all wrong, I defend smiling while measuring coffee
grounds, for I am still bargaining through writing. You're here, love! You're there! I'm still
searching for something, and it's most likely the case that — Will that be enough grounds?
Enough night? Starlight? Enough love? — it's you, but I'll never——
(One cannot state the existence of a particular differend without deforming and defiling it.)

Let us briefly shuffle the deck. Let us
just this once continually redirect the attention away from
behind the heavy curtain.
You were saying? you calmly inquired, peering staidly over a hibiscus brimming at the lip.
Was I? I responded, at a loss designed for my own benefit.

The French teacups arranged in perfect order at the streetside table covered in cloth;
station wagons racing around the hairpin turn
at such an alarming speed that surely someone must do something about it; a waiter
sets down our choices in front of each of us
as the latest nascent dilettante again rounds the corner to the tune of
the rattle of the snare drum
that is the music holding our breakfast together.

The image, teacher says, is still incomplete.
Yes, I tell her, but you and I both know such things can't be helped anymore,
and we must make room for new concerns;
someone must feed the children.
Does it provide an air of choice, she asked, to call the demands concerns?
I left the question hanging in the air as our waiter
cleared the plates,
which is to say I chose to leave the question hanging in the air.

IV. Brisk Consecration

Briskly walking
you stopped to lift your hem
check the red fingerprints on
the back of your thigh when I
passed the timing of the signpost
you lounged lingered next to me
on the phone with someone
your headphones sharp
perception angled partial
fast leaning backwards looking
downwards over your slim figure,
then also, still you
raven haired tank top effortlessly
consecrating a classic seafoam single-cab.

American Cordillera

I. Rhea

Rhea wrote the Americas as a land of endless sun, from her belief in youth's summer lovers, enough summer to rewrite her choreography adroit with an intense, focused commitment which wishes to attract your body within local earshot and which, capable of resuscitating a slew of boundless seductive virtues, demands want of a brilliant and determined commandant intimately reverberating her midnight cordillera. Lovers in a garden, left alone in their impropriety. The portrait of a family in the garden they raised.

Another focal fixture: lovers' hands enraptured against fresh tilled soil, and the admirable effort to discern softness, Rhea or Gaia, you or the dirt, as to which of your gentilities teaches me certain qualities of tender supposition, of supple urgency loose as liquid arching over you. The promise to nurture implicit in the way you melted into me, in desperately communicating her desire for a sharp refreshing acclimation of accommodating saintly afternoon delights bodies drenched in excess fruit juice lapping a windswept ocean terrace sunset.

II. Strawberry-Stained Lace

Avery championed the very image of devotion,
palms cupping upward catching rainwater to
rinse the strawberries taken direct from harvest
held by her hands, the very image of devotion
graciously giggling and kissing the bright juice
dripping through her fingers soaking down her
ribs wrapped in white lace and satin sleepwear;
devotion: bride or virgin unrepentantly indulging.

Avery adorned other images, of course. Once, a
warm worn southern summer revival choir. Once, a
fervent dream disguised as your revival four-piece,
masters of timing. Kindly listen! Don't miss it now:
they're professionals playing slick for you. Melodic
ascensions and diminutions seeking after salvation,
accent notes struck arduously, not quite on or off
beat, urgent till the song ends, a sudden run of time.

Avery made a point of regularly visiting the lake
promising to venerate the late haughty pilgrimage
where one dates, eventually to sate recompense
amidst some sense of community and everlasting
life after love after death after life. The image of
devotion squaring her chin to the sun. My brave
apprentice eager to embrace the challenges of
a future where love will always hold your hand.

III. The Well-Made Play

Ah, I said, so we're here again, I can
once more feel the great lines and
definitions of my ancient narrative
coming neatly into triptych form
from mortar rubble in the morning.
Yes, yes, you said, And what will
you make of this reorganization?
Well, I slowly coalesced thought,
I have never much cared for it,
the empty-handedness with no
stray marks and no errors, merely
a neat story told well. I have resented
the way it relentlessly carved my freedom.
Ak! But this is still a sonnet, you chimed.

IV. Lush

septic yellow offerings hold open palms
alms covering surreptitious forgiveness
psalms' relentless lecherous vision since
all-Saints witness Sunday took him in
rinsed and cleansed by

the liquid natural light floods valves
flushed open onto color and lush moments
space hanging for the pianist to state it to
remind your internal piece that expansion
collapsed awaits unfurling through duration

soothing cool swooning
draping limbs across blanketed
kings composing dog dreams and apple
orchard days faded far away
musky haze
the scent of a shiver

The Sphinx at the Taj Mahal

The traveling cowgirl drinks coffee in a morning diner and taps nonchalantly about stray dogs in India and Peru and about stray cats out in Greece with the rest of Europe and about one or two stray women that come when called. She promises all she can, and the sphinx winks to “Think of me god willing I’ll find my way into that bed soon.” Tell me: what did you see today? Tell me all about it. Tell me all about it in bed, but first come back to rest. No; I’m not done making you promise me things: swallow my voice as sacrament to your pleasure. Lost as a terrain of bodies. Lost in our terrain of bodies. Losing our minds and lost to our senses. Hestia’s queen here in our Olympus, eternal virgin goddess of hearth and home — eternal goddess, anyway. Hestia carries our torches from mother city to settlement when we start somewhere new, and from hearth to mouth when we’ve managed to get the kindling right, and from heart to heart when we’ve managed to get our mouths just right. Hestia held a position at the Temple of Apollo off before when Pythia was still doing time too with the fumes, and I heard in a ritual exhuming that the oldest temples were in the home, that Hestia also means altar, that she likes cilantro and that Hestia sometimes asks for offerings of her muses. She always liked to hold my hand and lead me in deep to the temple’s inner circle — behind all the noise, deep into her eyes with flowing dresses and glittering sequins dripping of Hestia’s adamantine arms. In the middle of it all, she stops to lead me to rest in the inner circle, and I sleep with Hestia.

Safe and cozy means going to bed with the doors locked and the Christmas tree lights still up bright in February, with you off in Copenhagen and me pinned in a coma again. I want you close enough to know everything that happens to me; I want us to be one life, one mind, one perspective, even if love’s a pair of rose-colored lenses worn by lovely creatures with petal hips and eaten with rosehips for dinner because the conductor wants to tell you that all dice are coming up rainbows, that nothing I write will make sense until it does with a flashing, until you’re there at the altar with love in your own hands. How blessed. How special. I’ll be right here waiting with my poetry until then, so come to me when you think you’ve found it all, the meaning of life, and if you think you’ve got it close up in your hands and really figured it out, give us a read (All of us.) and see if we make sense. Can you feel it? Do you love me? Do you love yourself? It’s evident; it’s everywhere. Love is in the middle schoolers on the subway just hanging out, playing, and getting

to know each other. Love is in the snow all melting
in patches across the biggest graveyard in Kings
and Queens. Love is in snow angels' playhouses.

Did your cat scratch you? Yes. Why? That's how a
sphinx shows her love. All of you already know the
secret anyway: romance is melancholic, love is a
tragedy read in reverse, and grief is love's eternal
reward wrapped up as another chance to love, in
memories, vows, and making beautifully, like Shah
Jahan commissioning the Taj Mahal be built in her
honor, said, I want my building of love — that is, I
want my writing to be long, kingly, and slugging; I
want to leave the world with a grand display of my
love for her, you and me and for all of us, for when
I can't be around to tell y'all and for when you're
gone and my jealous one's nowhere left to tell the
story of the maple leaves, no I mean maple syrup
with pancakes for dinner, for when she's nowhere
that can hear things anymore; I listen to one in her
honor. I'm starting to do different things that keep
me warm even with the floor heater on. Keep your
head up, and we're at the Taj Mahal again. Jahan
ruled for thirty years, with twelve to twenty-two of
them spent building entombment, employing the
labor of twenty-thousand artisans. While I listen to
one out in your honor, Jahan gave up listening to
music entirely for two years. We grieve differently
because we loved, because each love is different.
Both with staunch flavors so do it well, yes put it
on bold (the show!) for the people upstairs. Now,
listen, I wouldn't want to be unfaithful with your
face ya know, since you're supposed to take me
everywhere with you, but your mind sometimes
steals the show, ya know since you're supposed
to wake me up (with you) everywhere; I'm already
yours. Now, listen, you're teaching me how to love
myself, how to sanctify rituals to keep each other
in love like flamingo dust bunnies under the bed, a
bracelet with tiny bells, a house beyond the glen, a
kitchen counter with freshly baked pie. Now, listen
I melt well beautiful when I'm vulnerable with you
so my delicious weekends still only ever count the
days as if your resurrection welcomes down fresh
company to help me writhe into bed on time each
night. But seasons be damned, the Christmas tree
is just too pretty. Why should I take it down? Why
should I remove you from my life? Oh! Please just
repeat your name over my lips even as they drip
down with stolen promises written up as express
exercises worthy of conviction in tasteful places.
We have the time to have conversations of when
and where, but even still I feel like those wedding
plan logistics will hash themselves out in the end,
out down when the weekend after next is the first
anniversary when you went missing. We don't talk

about that. Last month one of my students asked why I started putting my hair up into a bun instead of that classic low pony, so I told them that my cat scratched me. No you didn't! No, I didn't; I didn't tell them I met a friend and so my cat bit my hand because I stopped petting her yet she wanted my attention. No, you didn't. No, I didn't. I told them my friend taught me to put it on top with practice. I told them that there's time for all the good things starting over again, so I imagine road trips, family holidays, and New England behemoth beaches in diluvian winters' old Heaven Forfend. I don't know; I can't quite keep track of all the great things you say; but with this little slack most days I can't help but feel like a lamb to the slaughter, in the field at the market, on the stairs under a judicious moon, billowing down the canine street, waltzing myself across sixteen floors to halt at the altar of love.

We'll talk soon (at the time when I see you again), but for now I gotta run, gotta fly with the wind to be a schoolteacher in some rural Andean convent, maybe down in Patagonia with the snow and that different way of making ends meet, of making the lines catch up with one another, what with all the streets proclaiming to repent before it's too late. Much like you, me, and Jesus, the MTA works in mysterious ways, like how that morning train was late, local, and skip-stop and like how mourning you has been late, local, and skip-stop ever since you started looking out your back door, buried in the Taj Mahal, entombed and enshrined in works I leave for you, in the streetcar racing up and down again, moonshine runners and bootleg brigadiers and one of your friends asking if you ordered the almond-flavored drink for the cyanide vibes. Then when we're all of a sudden coming up perfect now you know there's a point in the biographies where unfortunately you have to limit what you disclose, what you reveal, and what you confide by gazing upon your face with adoration and devotion like Rodin's sculptures kissing stomachs and looking down on each other tenderly, leaving me green-chested like undergrowth foliage of some forest floor where my heart runs gentle, soft, nurturing.

Hermes crowns me king of human ingenuity while Aphrodite's psychopomps lean over to sloth me sloppy lateral in the booth sleuthing as my muse and moonlighting as my guide for inner journeys, as if I were Hermes himself, god of subtle textures in the sleeves of your unconscious sweater, lover, giving synchronicity a tasteful name: recognition. Radio underneath rushing water of hand-washing dishes I'll always hear the creaking of the down at dawn, the tending of the hand, a forearm deep in

garden soil. I taste the metallics of it all, stainless steel from the iron in my blood or how I scrub the sink's rust into torrenting water vapor splashed in my mouth, calling after the iron in my palms and calling between my fingers tending further and deeper into my life's soul soil — love in the blood and the love in the tending. Sarama the fleet one curls up next to me in the soft faint mornings. The mother of dogs and of all wild animals serves with Yama, Lord of Law and god of death, to hold out and hand me quiet ripples in the orange morning air amidst a couple brindle and sable long-haired saints. Divine bitch births all good things in life, and Coatlicue's serpents sting the disrespectful, so they teach that a hearty bowl of harira will do well for breaking fasts and inaugurating nightly feasts. Show you my unstitched tie with tentative repair plans but you ask if you should join me in the bathroom, what with oysters and aphrodisiacs coursing our metallics; you taste of peaches like Patti Smith wanting the eighth heaven, a million little treats. We cut through the pavement twenty times already, turning all of the glasses over to air out, refereeing backseat maneuvers in the church parking lot for added protection, even making out on the subway steps to say goodbye. The mother of wild things should schedule a play-date for us.

Osiris, god of fertility, that dead and resurrected king, held veneration to Isis, a moment of silence as ceaseless shaking calisthenics gives Isis over to herself, gives Isis her little oft-bitten lower road. I want it evident from afar that nobody — no; not even death — nothing separates our love our light, the way we rip each other open all wired on-ramp, not anyone who says coalesces us apart, dares to keep us from laughing with each other over fries dipped in one sacred milkshake at the diner; no; not even I nor you could keep fiends apart, us now become love's liquid saints, Venus's and Apollo's chosen children deliberating on biting skin-laced lines gracing brownstone open-faced brick, as the sunlight enlists the transparent prisms refracting love's rainbows amidst all the different jewelry box ballrooms we need always waltz, two-step, tango, salsa, bachata, and otherwise slow dance across.

Eschatology

White flag on the side of a widow's funeral pyre.
Coastal winds sweeping in the same direction.
Baptized palms cupping a newborn sparrow.
River hymns caressing her winter endeavor.
Father cooking breakfast before you wake up.
Mother's reservations at all hotels along the way.
Semi-annual appointments with the pediatrician.
Emergency room visit when he broke his wrist.
A road map drawn out in the passenger seat.
Lampposts pulsing as kin drive through the night.
Plastic lids for soda cans to keep the bees out.
Timing your parachute after an act of devotion.
Riding a long-distance bus or railroad home.
The season's first litter of field hand puppies.
Sunflowers turning underneath a midday blaze.
Vines praying to their gods by the brick siding.
A steadfast plate of fresh supper every night.
Napping under magnolia blossoms in the spring.
How an older sibling wants to protect everyone.
The sudden and mysterious return of a lost sock.
An empty boat washed ashore with burn marks.
Vacant place settings at a long oak dinner table.
Arrows pointing the way to your aunt's house.
Three nights under the starstruck desert sky.
How soup and wine always improve with age.
Most rituals, such as love, can be replicated.