

## ABSTRACT

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UPHILL SOUTH

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Often narrative meditations on the observed world, the poems in “Uphill South” seek to explore tensions between boundaries, boundaries between human and non-human, place and movement, material and immaterial, and life and death. The poems attempt to translate physical sensations of experience (pain, desire, anxiety, fear) into language while the speaker struggles to define what overwhelms her.

UPHILL SOUTH

By

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## Dedication

For Diane.

## Acknowledgements

Thank you Stan, Liz, Michael, and Josh. Thanks to my wonderful friends and family, who graciously accepted poems as Christmas gifts over the past three years.

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*I want to let go of these things that don't mean anything—  
a dome of yellow smiley faces facing toward the sky.*

Anonymous

## Sugarhouse

There wasn't a rug even on the floor just towels  
my mom says covered dirt a dirt floor in the house  
Billy Blood had his birthday in outside the sugarhouse  
for making syrup is what I remember of the memory  
constructed from what she says she says she dropped me  
off while the other moms stood waiting would she leave  
me at the house they wanted to see if she would leave  
me there without a rug or wood or even linoleum  
just dirt for the floor I always knew my mother  
liked oriental carpets scuffless boards ordered textiles  
for our kitchen she was almost liked by other moms  
the women who waited as she says they were laughing  
when we came up the driveway that like our road  
was a dirt road there were four women standing  
at the Blood's house I saw a pig pen a mowed bright  
field the place for making syrup tasted sap before  
it cooked almost water the subtle flavor wasn't  
sweet in the plastic cup and no one was laughing then  
no one laughed in the hot room we crowded no one  
laughed by the stove Billy's father told me because I  
was the one he had to tell the others knew already  
told so only I could hear that the stove in the sugarhouse  
would boil this down to a hundredth of itself over days



## Girl in the Snow With No Boots On

Born in a snowstorm, I didn't believe in frostbite  
when my father paid me quarters to the run the hill  
without shoes on. It was cold in New Hampshire,  
but the trees went on forever,  
my house a gate to all points north.  
Canada, Norway, and the unnamed tundra,  
undiscovered but by me, waited in the back yard  
past the cow field and the sand pit, just steps  
beyond the stream that marked the boundaries.  
Made to wear an orange vest while my father  
waxed my short skis, even in kindergarten,  
I imagined my death inherent with tragic beauty—  
poor hunter, once mistaking me for a deer,  
he would be forced to find my parents,  
to lead them to the body mostly buried in the snow,  
ski tips facing downward, lips pressed into the cold.  
I'd still prefer to freeze to death.  
We built a sauna in our yard. My father had skied  
with the US team, and fell in love with them.  
This was no casual hour at a health club after work,  
no electric box by a swimming pool with white towels.  
This is heat, and I was raised here, cycling between  
two hundred and twenty wood-stoked degrees  
and the dammed pool of frozen stream  
my father cut through with a saw.  
How the body learns to pass the pain of ice.  
I embraced it, how the burning turned to numb,  
how if I'd wait a minute longer, my body  
would dissolve into the current, louder and louder.  
I looked at stars. The gargoyle my father  
left on a stump came closer, as if it broke through  
its own stone, and I could stay like this forever,  
heart beat—slower and slower. The sauna  
seems too far to walk. It's the calmest I've ever been.  
At school, I got in trouble once,  
caught in the snow with my boots off.  
*It's okay*, I said, *I have no feeling in my feet*,  
but they made me wear them anyway and I hated how they felt.  
Ice on toes, sharp shards on the sole, none of this compared

to the constriction of my shoes, the pressing weight  
of plastic, tube socks knit too tight, marks they left  
along my calves like ski tracks in the yard.  
They even sent me home once because I got there  
covered in blood—that was the time I'd slid the hill  
while waiting for the bus, when my face  
had pushed into the crust as I slid beneath  
the fence, and the sharpness cut through me.  
I knew I would slide it and slide it again  
with nothing but the slope to propel me.

August 30th

Take this memory made of words  
like *violence* and *abuse*, the night spent  
in a white lit room giving details of the attack,  
not *bad* exactly, just the way things sound  
in a series of events broken down into facts  
and legend, the wounds we cannot say  
because we never let them breathe.  
Take this *push*, this *hit*, this struggle  
to stay awake through school the next day,  
and put them in your arsenal for therapy,  
or an intimate disclosure to a lover in the night.  
Put your hand on the place where you wanted  
to be held, your mouth around the whispers  
you never figured how to make, and pull  
from this the story of a willing to forget:  
your name, date of birth, the time you saw  
your father cry so hid beneath the cellar stairs  
and waited, waited for the sound to end,  
the door to close so you'd know you were alone,  
waited for the silent relief of solitude  
that comes now, in this moment,  
where you can see the whole thing clear enough  
to know you never heard him cry at all.  
That was the night you were taken from your home,  
the night you can't return to, except  
that the light seemed revealing,  
that the office table held papers  
you'd never see again, and  
the man asking questions in his uniform  
looked as worn out as anyone  
as he filled the blanks with summaries  
of the answers that you gave.

## To What

Always wanting to feel things deeply,  
when I was thirteen, and a boy on the bus  
said he wanted to have sex with me,  
I asked my dad to drive me to the A&P,  
where I waited for the boy to walk me  
into the woods that overlooked the park,  
to the place he'd get drunk and smoke cigarettes.  
Preparing for the thing every moment had lead up to,  
the kind discussed by grownups over dinner and wine,  
I put on makeup without a mirror while the boy collected  
bottles he organized into a single line. Then  
he pulled me onto his lap in the Adirondack chair  
he'd dragged from the park, and when we kissed (on the mouth),  
I had my first taste of cigarettes. I liked it—  
the subtle hints of smoke, his hands where now  
are hipbones, the way my lipstick smudged his neck  
purple. I hadn't eaten yet, and the emptiness  
filled me with a light kind of terror as he  
unbuckled my belt, as my own hands reached farther,  
and he asked *do you want to* so I answered *want to what*  
though I knew it would happen because  
we were already half naked in the woods.  
Then we moved onto the ground and started,  
rather clinically, as if following instructions  
in a manual: spread legs, insert part inside.  
Lying beneath him, I awaited transformation.  
I looked at his face that had come so close to mine—  
the gap between teeth, eyebrows, lips, a half grown goatee.  
He was smiling, which was awkward.  
Even when he went in deep, my body felt so separate  
as if nothing had changed except something semantic,  
and I thought my own thoughts, didn't feel any different.  
Scratchy leaves tangled in the roots of my hair,  
the bottle by my elbow thudded toward thighs.  
Tomorrow I had school again. In a few hours  
I'd eat pizza while sitting on the couch watching  
a movie with my sister (*Jumanji*, the one where  
the jungle invades Brandford, New Hampshire  
after Alan Parish gets sucked inside the game

he played with Sarah Whittle who has to see a therapist  
who says it's all imagined until everything gets crazy  
because rhinos set off car alarms, and buildings crumble down,  
and there's a lion in the bedroom to symbolize human nature.  
Then the game ends, and Alan marries Sarah;  
he gets a job making sneakers, apparently  
very profitable in industrial New Hampshire.  
Not my favorite movie, but it was filmed a few towns over,  
a big deal back then, so much larger than our lives.)

## Self Portrait Inscribed

This my arm wrapped back around this neck,  
the other angled in front of these breasts  
to support the weight of half-raised ribs  
dropped from shoulders along the spine  
connecting these, my hips, in what's called a  
torso twist, this pelvic cross, this thigh, this knee,  
this black contour drawn to keep weight inside,  
not building skin to muscle, muscle to bone,  
but delineating where one form ends against  
the room the way I once learned how a figure can  
only begin in relation to what surrounds it:  
this purple robe on an iron chair, the constant  
hum of a gray space heater between  
a vase of silk flowers and the yellow cloth  
draped beneath the body of a figure in the center  
of the room with fifteen onlookers  
circled in the studio with easels clipped by  
bulldog clips and sheets of newsprint shaded  
for the thirty second gesture drawings that these  
students sketch with thin sticks of charcoal,  
just a few quick lines per pose, a head if there's  
still time, and the woman I brushed against in  
the hall by the darkroom on my way to this job  
works quickly in the corner, not even turning  
pages, layering one form over another  
(shadowed legs, a fan of arms) leaving the  
impression of movement on the still image  
drawn across the page, as if these lungs  
could really breath, these feet could walk  
along this ground, as if this form had blood,  
had hands made warm from touching hands—  
this my body called figure called model  
called life (as in drawing), a series of lines,  
values, shapes incorporated into this space  
where I lean now into the long pose segment  
of the ninety minute session of ARTS 283,  
section seven, studio four, a three credit class  
offered mostly to non-majors, where the TA flips  
the stereo on, and asks if the volume is OK for me.

Dear Marianne Moore,

I'm writing you because you've been dead  
my whole life, and I don't want advice, another voice  
to tell me what to do. People always try to help me,  
and it's not that I'm incompetent or anything,  
but (like Mike says) the world overwhelms me,  
and I tend to overlook the importance  
of spelling right, placements of a comma,  
can't make the distinction between life and *a life*—  
lions into lovers, a grave into the sea,  
or the man who walks down the middle of my street  
with his hands over his eyes so I almost drive right into him,  
distracted, thinking about some guy, or on the phone  
with my family who I probably should live closer to  
because they give such good advice  
about running. For instance, to avoid injuries,  
do toe raises and easy jogs, buy good shoes and cross-train,  
make Mondays sprint days, Tuesdays run an hour,  
hill-train on the treadmill to climb mountains faster,  
and save long runs for the weekends so there's time  
to access what my brother calls the "spirit realm"  
through asceticism marked by vomiting and blood. Then,  
when inevitably you've gotten yourself injured,  
take four ibuprofen, put whatever heel, ankle, knee,  
groin into ice and water, and try your best to rest  
until it's healed. I can never stay off it that long,  
and they understand my "obstinance" (as my father says)  
because for the most part, my whole family's sort of injured  
most of the time, so it's no excuse to stop going.  
I put on spandex, lace up sneakers, pull my hair back  
by the door, then run into the city where I live now,  
where cars honk and people cheer as I go by,  
and a boy in middle school, barely, once said  
"hey baby how old you at?" which made me laugh,  
really, though now I wear headphones.  
Of course, my family disapproves of headphones  
as they disapprove of pavement, elevators, and places  
where I live now, where people sit around  
all day filing papers and reading reports while working  
for the government which my family certainly disapproves of

because we're from New Hampshire so *live free or die*,  
which we took real seriously when I was a kid,  
when my father paid me quarters to run to the sauna  
in the winter when the snow had iced over,  
and he and his friends drank beer by the fire,  
and I did it with my shoes off because  
that's what merited the quarters,  
though I would have kept going just for the hell of it—  
do I need a reason to write to you?  
Lost in the words inside my head, there's no hope  
for getting out of them— my creature lives inside me,  
and my family doesn't read poems. They do know  
a man, Bob Jackson, who was an English teacher,  
Rhodes Scholar, and now a seventy five year old runner  
with a pace maker bulging through his skin,  
taut thin with sun spots. They like him a lot,  
which makes it okay that I do this thing called poetry,  
forget to come home sometimes, and that I probably won't  
get married or have children, as you never got married  
or had children, though I guess you may have wanted to  
because when you buried your mother  
and put your name on the tombstone under hers,  
you asked the engraver to leave a space below that,  
which must still be there empty.  
I don't know how to get out of anything,  
which is probably why I'm still writing,  
writing my way toward that unnamed world  
where there's you and me and everyone talking,  
each imagined creature eternally crossing  
some horizon forever moving farther out of reach.  
Each voice sounds foreign, and though it's strange,  
I thought you'd understand because you're dead.  
And it's quiet. And though maybe you loved  
some man, your mother, or structures formed in sound,  
it doesn't matter. You know how this ends:  
when I die, don't bury me in the ground—  
burn the body into ashes, and throw them off a boat.



## Fishing

When she walked through the parking lot  
in her pink nightie, a darker shade of slippers,  
and white hair rolled in curlers,  
though it was barely afternoon,  
I remembered when you took me fishing  
off the Oregon coast.

Perhaps it was the way she walked beside  
a younger woman more fully dressed,  
how she ignored the yelp of the gray dog  
at the end of her companion's leash, pulled short—  
who can say the mind's trajectory?  
I'd never fished before.

When I reeled my line in, the pole bent forward.  
Amazing, to know the strength of nylon. Even the boat  
seemed to bend, though you stayed below deck  
sleeping with the ballast. I remember it often,  
your father with his bent back  
tells me to pull strong, to turn and hoist the tuna  
the size of a small child over the railing  
and onto the deck where I see its black eyes  
buried in the sides of such a long thick body,  
sleek without the appearance of scales.  
It felt slimy, though I never touched it,  
though I longed to run my hand along  
the smooth surface, a shade of blue so dark  
I imagined I could see my reflection in it.  
It only lay a moment.

Then he handed me a bat, black hard plastic,  
and I don't remember how I hit the fish,  
just the subtle scent of metallic that couldn't wash away.  
Years later, my brother told me  
that when the rugby team crashed its plane  
in the Andes, while eating their dead for survival,  
the players saved the eyes and heart  
to be buried later— a story of hope he said,  
but I don't worry about my body when I die,  
and I don't worry that you didn't come on deck  
until I finished the job, and I don't worry  
about how, after that, we never touched.

You're not the only one. Things go on.  
One minute the world seems fine and the next  
you might hear a boy outside selling flowers  
he's picked from your neighbor's yard,  
and you might even buy one, cut the stem at an angle,  
arrange it with a bouquet in a vase where no one sees,  
and the boy goes door to door down your street,  
spreading handfuls of gladiolas and tulips.

## Field Guide

Yesterday I came upon a flock of geese  
at the reservoir north of town who appeared  
to stand on water— seven. In the middle of the  
deepest part, I counted no reflections.  
They stood a thin line.  
It's times like these, when I refuse  
to think of you, that I ask questions to pass the time.  
What do you call a tree bent sideways,  
standing tallest at the tip of a branch?  
Another is missing limbs, and has sections  
where the bark won't grow.  
Look at this one. Can you name it?  
Who decided what these things should be called,  
not little names: cat, frog, cumulous cloud,  
but important words like sorrow, yesterday,  
privacy, the way we sink into the sound of it?  
Tell me it's a process as if I could escape  
this section of time: my century, my rotation,  
my moment at the table discussing  
migration patterns, hemlock populations,  
and the joys of fresh oregano I planted in the garden,  
as if I could escape my disappointment  
when the monarchs leave too soon,  
tomato blossoms falling so the plant will bear no fruit.  
And I can't escape my anticipation  
mornings after a rain, the scent of cold and dampness  
behind corners grown with moss,  
and the shiver run through my body,  
reminding of things unseen, without a name,  
the space between the proverbial *us*  
who is not you or me any more than it is  
sink or swim, live or die, love, hate, yes—  
there is no right or wrong unless  
you're standing on the wrong side of the water,  
and the stars have dimmed behind the clouds,  
and the road you took has suddenly gone,  
buried in the live mass of vines and stone.

## Goats

*~After Pliny's Natural History*

It's legend that two goats met in the middle  
of a long bridge, so narrow that  
they couldn't pass each other,  
that it would have been death to turn around  
and recover the ground behind them.

Water turned on the rocks below,  
and a man watched from the shore there.  
Too long to wander backwards blindly,  
it seemed certain one would fall.  
There was nowhere else to go.

The does stood soundless,  
and with no signal, no nod, no gestured sign,  
the man watched as one knelt on the boards  
so the other could walk across her back,  
and, in this way, reach the other side.

What remains unknown— no—forgotten,  
is that when the man returned home  
he was never the same. He wrote  
their story again and again, spoke it  
into the words he said, forever.

In Arizona, 2007, I met a man who would  
bring goats to the city in his four door Honda Civic,  
a man who kept unmarked guns in his closet,  
and left bullets between cushions.  
As he carried a loaded semi automatic

into the forest (wearing a three piece suit and  
aviator glasses), he told me not to fear.  
He drank bourbon in the bathtub, hatched turkeys  
in the bathtub, and bought two Nigerian Dwarfs  
to live in a square spot of yard. I know

goats have a language they speak  
through their eyes, so you must take precautions

to keep them: plant parsley near manure,  
walk regularly, and stroke their beards  
into the earth, as they see a place beyond—

you've heard it in their cries. Sorrow sounding  
through the ground, it moves the earth blood lower.  
These goats were pregnant, though nobody knew.  
They got fatter and fatter as the year went on,  
though by the time anyone suspected

they were long overdue and the small one  
could no longer walk the line along her fence.  
This was a man who kept chickens and pigs now.  
(This was the man who left me in San Francisco.)  
This was a man who should have known all along.

When you burn the bones of a female goat,  
grind the ash into whitener for your teeth.  
To break a diamond, simply soak the gem  
in warm goat's blood,  
and with a hammer, you can break it.

Pieces will shatter into clear diamond dust  
that you can use to make a potion  
to drink with the goat's blood, so  
you'll gain both their sorrow and strength,  
though when you lie down at night— only darkness,

the image of a wandering eye, focused in  
its movement. Black and glossed, it looks inside you.  
When the man left in winter, Thomas led the goats  
to a place with crosses built from pallets  
where he strung them up and bled the insides down.

I was there. We all were there.  
Standing slouched beside the knife,  
we heard their sound, saw the stillborns paired  
beside each other. Long dead with bodies still warm,  
they curled in the shape of a heart, not like children

draw on paper, but a mass of muscle flexed

and pulsing, and we agreed, yes, we all agreed,  
that this was for the best.

Salt, skin, bone, stew— we repeated words  
to name the thing we all had done.

The sun had gone. Florescent bulbs lit the ground,  
and we congratulated ourselves on our selfless  
act of kindness. It was over— the smell of meat  
and cigarettes, sharp chill of December,  
and while someone snapped branches to start a fire,  
I drank my beer in the back of the yard.

## Rules for Crying

When someone dies, or is dying, you can cry then,  
when your country goes to war, or you've been involved  
in an accident where you lost your legs and arms,  
when you read a book alone in bed,  
or watch romantic movies with friends.  
You can cry about puppies, kittens, or birds,  
when falling in love, when love falls away,  
or if a hurricane destroys the city where you live.  
Don't cry on an airplane, in the library, or to ex-boyfriends.  
Don't cry in the stairwell where people pass to smoke cigarettes,  
in the bathroom where women fix their hair,  
or beneath the bar stools when you've had too much  
to drink. You can't cry in your mother's house  
because she blames herself whenever you're sad.  
Can't cry in a letter because tears are not words.  
And you can't cry on the sidewalk outside Papa John's  
on the north end of Baltimore, even if it's raining.  
You can cry chopping onions, when light shines  
in your eyes, or silently in the dark where no one sees.  
And you could cry at any time before you learned to speak.  
But not in class now, whether you're a student or a teacher.  
Not when you rock climb, or if you fall in your heels.  
And you can't cry underwater, because the sea is full of tears.  
And you can't cry in France when you've left your ticket on the train  
and you don't speak the language, at least not very well.  
Don't cry if you're an astronaut, a surgeon, or a knight.  
Don't cry after having sex, no matter who it is.  
In the shower seems okay, or to your friend Nicole,  
and you can cry in the car on your long commute home  
after holding it in all day, smiling through the halls,  
through the copy room, at your desk, and smiling  
through the meeting you can't remember now  
because your breath became so loud  
you couldn't hear outside yourself—  
each swallow more encompassing than the last.  
No, don't cry for this life you've chosen.  
Don't cry for the four walls or the polyester carpet  
or all the times you've cried before.  
In rare instances, it will become appropriate to weep

for the sorrows of the world that overwhelm you,  
and you'll experience relief, as you leave your tears  
behind you, leaving only drops of salt and heat  
to signal where you stood. You'll be  
the sound of a hundred sounds releasing,  
then fade into the quiet as a low resounding hum.



## Lesson With Wings

In the sandbox, she finds a dead pigeon  
facing up. *Look Sarah, a bird!*  
The body lies in the corner by the fence to the road.  
To touch it— I see her start to touch.  
How do I say that dead things are scary,  
to leave it be? There's nothing but feathers and wings now.  
Audrey already knows how to read the globe;  
she can find Arizona, New Hampshire, and Paris.  
She knows all the letters to her name,  
and that giraffes are animals native of Africa.  
When she reaches her hand toward the body,  
I'm concerned about germs and diseases  
so I stop her. *It's dead* I say, *don't touch.*  
Unusually obedient, she listens and stops.  
She looks at me, her arm still extended  
like a question: what does dead mean?  
How do I explain the body as a vessel for  
I-don't-know-what? How is a bird  
ever anything besides feathers, blood, and wings?  
It doesn't breath now, doesn't fly,  
and I can say, with relative certainty, that it will  
never sing again. Right now, dead means  
that I'll have to call maintenance, so they can  
properly dispose of the remains, clean the sand.  
Dead means I'll have to move the children  
to another part of the playground, close the area off,  
that Audrey will ask *when is it coming back?*  
and I will have to answer *It's not coming back.*  
*The dead do not come back.* She'll pause,  
drop her arm, step back, and repeat me,  
*dead, the bird is dead,* though she'll say it  
to no one in particular. Right now, dead  
is a body that looks like a bird without flies.  
Dead is the feathers that mat to one side,  
embedded with wet sand— the limp neck.  
It is the rounded beak, unopened,  
my nervous uncertainty as to why  
the heart stopped humming. Dead stills  
itself against the leaves and paper in the wind.

Audrey stands still too, watching me watch  
the way she considers the thing on the ground—  
if it's dead, that means it was alive  
as Audrey and her friends and I are alive.  
What else could die? Our classroom bug?  
Giraffes in Africa? Could it happen to Snickers,  
her dog— he's older than her by several years,  
and will come at the end of the day with her father  
who (like always) will ask her what she learned.  
When she tells him, it will not sound sad.  
Dead will be something she saw.

## The Window

I'm not afraid. When I heard the knock at my window,  
I knew he was with me, a wire screen between us,  
my light still on, though it had been dark  
outside for a while—the long range of darkness.

He'd talked about it for weeks, crawling the roof  
between houses to clean spilled seed from my feeder,  
though that was before the police came,  
before he chopped our neighbor's azalea

so his machete notched into my railing,  
and he denied the mark he'd made, waving  
the blade in line with my chest—*match it up, match it up*—  
the way some holes extend forever. I'm not afraid.

I've learned the way death seeks its form, swollen,  
calling into the night where crickets chirp in six-eighths time,  
rows of yeses paused between rounds like firings in the street.  
I wasn't afraid, though I screamed.

It seemed like the right time to do it, and I admit,  
I even liked it, the high-pitched ring that lasted a moment.  
How sound waves disappear. I screamed because  
I had to, safe inside that sound.

When I was seven, maybe eight, and my sister slept  
beside me, one night I swear the hall turned green,  
and a woman in white walked toward us.  
I tried to scream, to wake my sister,

but all stayed still inside the room, the woman closer,  
hardwood floors that didn't creak, and her smile—  
full and joyless, eyes reflecting mine.  
I felt her death inside me.

Then something happened that I didn't know  
would happen. I forgot about that night,  
forgot about that woman, and my body became  
my own again, sleeping through the sound. It happened.

Now, I was running toward the hallway. A man  
yelled through my window. Barefoot on the painted floor,  
I reached the phone for help. I'm not afraid.  
This is what you do in an emergency. Stay calm.

*No wait*, he said, *someone shot me*,  
and I turned because this is what you do when your  
neighbor says he's just been shot. This is  
what you say when you don't know what to do.

The crickets stopped. A silent street. The light  
on the sidewalk tinted green, and I went  
to the window, saw his hands shaking. No blood.  
Shirtless. The same old scars spread across his face.

I'm not afraid. This is my life now, shaken against  
a space divided, light pressed to dark, the weight  
of wind blown through realms converging  
at a single point of contact: the screen,

barely tensioned, split along the side  
where my cat has torn the wire. Stretched hind legs  
and claws extended, he keeps scratching to get out again,  
to reach a side I'm afraid he won't come back from.

## Fireflies

The streetlight has burned out,  
and waiting for you, something woke me,  
maybe whispers through the wall,  
or a mosquito near my arm—  
you aren't home, haven't pedaled north  
from work downtown in the kitchen  
where late night neon signs keeps the light  
and noise awake. I try to lie down early,  
though I remember times I've ridden south  
through steam vents and red green bulbs.  
Here— glare out the window,  
a white flicker, then another.  
Fireflies gather around the dark dead lamp  
leaving trails of electric glow, brightening  
the post and the street below as they surround  
the fixture with reimagined light.  
Of course I caught some years ago,  
sealed them in a jar on the table  
by my bed. Haven't we all? And woke  
to the fright when the lights burned out,  
leaving the dried bodies of still black bugs?  
What images emerge from the blankness at night.  
*Look closer*, I expect you'll say, that the light  
has only dimmed, fireflies— just dull moths  
burned to brightness. You could be right,  
though the street is as dark as it's ever been.  
When you get home, I'll show you.

Thursday, 9:34pm

Halfway through the last time we'll have sex—  
your body stacked above my frame, erratic rhythms  
splitting one limb from the other like a tear unzipping  
hips, neck, chin, a clean severance down my spine,  
until between the two halves it becomes clear that  
there isn't anything inside, yet you watch me— I turn,  
neon glow of the digital clock. How long has it been?

After her third divorce, I heard my mother say that  
all her husbands wanted was sex. No matter how much  
they hated her— drunk and awkwardly lumbering  
into bed with that long thud sound you can feel through the springs.  
It was bad when they were drunk but worse  
the next morning when, breathing stale metallic booze,  
they wanted it again. At sixteen, I couldn't understand.

Now the minutes don't switch. Time, always wrong  
in our house because I set the clocks sporadically to keep  
from being late, moves slow. Whenever I try to hurry  
(I'm very punctual), you hang behind, and I think if I could  
show enthusiasm, you might move faster. But I'm too tired.  
Without the sweat, maybe, that smell that once conjured  
*somedays* and *yes, yes, yeses*. I cannot bear its taste.

When you try to kiss my mouth, I can't help but pull  
away, though your lips move softly and when you say  
you love me all that comes out is that stupid question you  
don't have to ask, whose answer seems so inappropriate  
right now that I stare at the time realizing that this minute  
has lasted for an hour or more, maybe two. It's possible  
that I've always been this way.

Sketch of *L'Amour et L'Amité*  
for Brandon

My fourth time to the Walter's Art Museum,  
I finish the sculpture I've been trying to perfect:  
marble folds of fabric, the shadow of her breast,  
white light along the fleshy parts of a winged baby's back,

their angles of embrace.  
I read the description of the piece that I've saved  
as gift for myself for after it was drawn.

You might remember this of me,  
how my lines went down so slow, too tightly, moved  
by what you called the arbitrary sequence of my mind.

You said the erasure was for highlights  
as I drew her arm length again and again, layering  
charcoal over streaks half remembered—the thick black.

And you said not to care so much,  
it's just a sketch book after all, and had me drag  
your conté crayon down the center of my page  
leaving that stupid pink mark you said meant *nothing*.

The nothing that made me turn the page.  
The nothing I returned to for hours each day until that pink  
was finally blotted behind shades of black and white and gray,

so you wouldn't recognize the lines I'd made beforehand  
when I'd tried to get the legs right and failed at the foreshortening,  
sloped a shoulder too far down, and drew hands un-supporting of fingers.

I didn't want you to see how I'd curved their noses crooked,  
or that her eyes were drawn to blackened holes, set low with no reflection—  
the corpse-like mouth, a forearm wrongly bent.

I only wanted to draw it exactly as I saw it,  
shadows pulled to focus along her gentle neck.

## Tuolumne Meadows, Yosemite National Park

I came to escape into ropes and cams and gear,  
to climb the granite domes, and destroy  
my hands, wedged in pin scars  
and jambed into the Fairview cracks.  
I came for the small holds bouldering,  
for tips blown, and a swelling sun-burnt back,  
to hang in my harness from an anchor  
with no ledge for a comfortable stance.  
I came for the sound of carabineers clicking  
as I'd reach for a sloping hold.  
Came for bolt-lines.  
Came for lead falls.  
Came for the long walk down.  
I placed nuts with draws into constrictions,  
tied my figure eight, equalized a sling,  
and focused on the singular purpose  
of moving my body from one spot to the next—  
tried to forget. Yes,  
I know how it feels to run a section out,  
to climb above your piece, your draw,  
or remove these systems all together.  
I know how to move with the kind of efficiency  
that does not look back, that will not stare  
into alpine lakes, or down into The Valley  
at Half Dome and El Cap.  
This knob. This flake. This polished friction slab.  
I balanced on the smallest edge  
to inch into the blankness above it.



## Repairing

The clock in the Shadow Room suddenly broke,  
and the woman who is not the girl you met climbing  
somewhere in mid-Maryland eight months ago  
broke her arm again— or was it years?  
She keeps dying the way we all must keep dying.  
How time scares those who fear they can't have it,  
but it's no secret, you know that we cannot.  
You know how a ghost can only kiss  
with the smoke that a cigarette can't blow,  
and how that smoke must pass through us  
as we pass through time— can't quit it.  
Can't stop the clock that tells (in smoke)  
only the time that came before us, what passed  
through tongue and lip and throat, the lungs.  
Can't close that smoke inside your mouth,  
wrap it in the arms and hands of time  
so that neither vapor nor hour moves forward—  
clockwork jamb. But the girl who is not a girl  
or woman, tending to the right arm of the wind-up face  
(broken hour, broken minute), keeps making  
the same tick sound with her mouth as she winds it.  
She smokes a shadow. Smokes a pipe.  
Smokes a handful of dust found in the corner  
where the cat lives, though even the cat keeps dying.  
Nine times that cat must die, though no one's  
keeping count. The wound clock still won't ring.  
The girl tongues its metal arms inside her mouth,  
clicks them to her molars, bites against the edge  
of an arrow that would normally point to a number  
she believes would be whole again if swallowed.

## Deadlines

Before I die, I must learn to read the wind  
so when I spit, it won't turn back on me.  
I must read Proust. Must learn to juggle  
bills and deadlines of this world with my ghosts—  
the ghost of desire, the ghost of pain.  
Their filmy figures interrupt my routine  
so I'm always behind on grading and paperwork.  
No, I haven't paid Radiology for the X-rays  
in July. I owe the state of Maryland hundreds  
of dollars in traffic fines, and that annoying  
low battery smoke detector beep  
has only stopped because I removed it  
(and to be honest, I didn't even do that).  
Still, Yeats keeps talking about magic  
of the liquid mind, transcendence of bodily  
boundaries through the simple act of imagining,  
so I'm forced to spend hours that look like nothing  
because telepathy is, by nature, invisible.  
Whenever I need groceries, some spirit will come  
and demand we have tea because that's all there is  
in the cupboards. If rent is due, the ghost of my  
mother's grandmother will try to make me take  
her name so, like my brother, I'll be a fourth—  
Muriel Eulily Weeks the fourth.  
Ghost of Rachel Carson. Ghost of Joan of Arc.  
Ghost of the man who built the house  
I was a child in, and ghost of my childhood self.  
Have you seen the ghost of wishes? Ghost of love?  
Once, I swear, I even saw the ghost of a ghost  
in receding lines of dimness— ghost of the misremembered.  
Remember when we found the phantom couple in my bed  
but thought they couldn't see us? Now I know they do.  
At night, they spread out in my sheets so I can't sleep  
because I don't like to touch when I'm sleeping.  
Like you, they speak in phrases without context until,  
when life exhausts me to close my eyes, I see  
the realms they've crowded without structure or form.  
How ghosts love dreams because we're all immaterial.  
For months, I've meant to say I love you

in real life, as your ghost wanted me to say,  
but when timing got complicated, we played chess,  
and I lost. I missed the chance to keep you  
(was that even a thing?). Maybe you knew all along.  
When you go, please don't leave your ghost behind  
so I must mourn the absence of an absence.  
Ghosts don't consider their timing inconvenient,  
but I'm a very busy woman with many things to do  
and can't be bothered with their wants any longer.  
I must learn to name the birds I hear in trees,  
must memorize *Directive* by Robert Frost,  
and do laundry. Next week, I leave for Costa Rica  
where I plan to travel light, not checking any bags.  
You'll be gone by the time I get back,  
but I'll still send you a postcard if I see one.

## Cat

*for Mark*

Maybe I say you can't come over,  
because I haven't changed  
the cat litter, and I want you to like me,  
the way I always want people to like me,  
but how could you trust someone  
so thoughtless with their pet? I used to like him too,  
but never the name some man I lived with  
gave him, a stupid name, not even appropriate  
for cats. Why don't people name their pets  
sensibly, knowing the word you call a thing  
will somehow find a way to define it?  
Maybe you can't come over so I won't  
have to tell you he's anything  
besides *my cat* or *buddy* or *guy*,  
so you won't hear how he whines  
down the hall as if I haven't put out food  
(the exact brand and flavor he likes),  
or see him standing at the door like he wants  
to go out into the January back-alley  
of my house that you can't visit  
because I'm sure you'll think I'm cruel  
when I don't open the door, or worse,  
when I do, and he just stands there, staring  
into the gloom, then back at me, as if it's my  
fault the outside isn't better than the in,  
and he'll linger for what I find  
an unacceptable amount of time,  
utterly exasperating, until finally  
I pull the door back (his last chance),  
and as always, he'll just stay inside,  
run up the stairs, and whine some more,  
meow in the hallway, kick kitty litter on the floor.  
Maybe you can't come over because  
I'm embarrassed my cat's a jerk,  
and it probably says something about me that  
he pooped in the fruit bowl on the counter,  
or how he used to pee on the bath mat every night.  
Maybe I should've been kinder when he was young,

taken into account the psychological needs  
of this feline eunuch creature that I stole  
from his home and mother at eight weeks old,  
brought to my house, the only one of his species.  
Or maybe I'm afraid he'll like you,  
that he'll rub against your leg, let out a long slow purr.  
Maybe you'll even pet him as he stretches his spine,  
reaches front paws forward, and extends  
the back legs up, seeming too long for his body.  
You might scratch between his shoulders  
where he holds the tension tight,  
and he'll pull back, roll over,  
so you'll rub his white chest fur as he loves you  
immediately. And maybe you'll see that love.  
Maybe you'll realize that we sleep in my bed  
without touching, that I push him off  
the books I read without a second thought.  
You could go home to your own house,  
your own cat, and say how lucky she is to have you.  
Maybe you'll remind yourself  
how special it is to have love.  
I say you can't come over  
because this is the story I tell myself.  
This is how I let him out  
where there are dogs and cars and broken glass  
even when the weather is perfect.  
Maybe you'll think I care so deeply  
he doesn't have a name, and that I'm scared  
by my inability to say it. Maybe you'll think  
I'm cold or fearful of affection.  
Or maybe you'll understand too well,  
as he curls to sleep beside you, nesting into  
the crux between your knees, his breathing  
perfectly timed with the warm pulse-surge  
down the artery in your leg. Maybe in a moment  
of compassion for this oversized cat,  
that you may or may not consider neglected,  
you'll see me, a few feet beyond him,  
staring longingly at the space where he is  
safe and warm. You might realize  
how much we look alike then,

how even though I'm taller, we both have  
unblinking eyes. And we'll sit quietly  
for what seems an unacceptable amount of time,  
and when you say something to break the silence,  
you might ask his name, so I'll be forced  
to choose, as his chest lifts and falls in sleep,  
to choose if I should tell you, or make up  
something else. Maybe I won't answer,  
and he'll keep lying in that place.

## Monument

Going blind, he can't wrap presents.  
He finds cheese and meat in a bag in the closet;  
another has two books and a picture of a necklace  
with my grandmother's name engraved into a heart.  
*This, he says, I haven't been able to order.*  
When he hands me the bags, I know something's leaked.  
Grease stains the paper. How long have they been there?  
Something sticks to my hand when I reach in. Then he's gone  
to the bedroom to get dressed for his eye appointment  
at one in Nashua— a thirty-minute drive.  
My grandmother will drive. Six months ago,  
he decided not to take the test to renew his license  
because he wanted to wait until he could see again.  
Downstairs, my grandmother's made food.  
She says they'll be late if he won't hurry,  
but he can't hurry. With a washcloth, I wipe  
the presents off. I cut green and red paper  
to put around them, then fold it onto the squares  
of cheese and meat, fasten it with tape.  
When he comes back with a bleach-stained sweatshirt,  
asks *will it match*, I tell him I don't know anything  
about fashion, and he laughs. How my grandfather  
always scared me. I pick a different shirt,  
pull it over his head. So the fabric won't bunch  
around his arm, I hold the cuff and his right hand,  
moving slow, knowing slow is the best way to hurry,  
knowing his button-down buttoned underneath  
will need adjustments at the collar, and that his  
comb-over has fallen on the wrong side, so  
I'll have to flip it back. When we're done,  
he's surprised I've finished wrapping.  
Even the cutout picture tucks inside a glossy fold.  
Then he looks at me, right eyelid drooping down.  
Both his whites are red, and the medicated drops he's been  
prescribed keep the tear ducts constantly watering.  
*Time after time, he says, I never thought I'd get here.*  
*The good lord always saved me when I thought*  
*I should've died. But here I am—*  
*God left me with you, and God took my sight.*

I hold him. We've never hugged while standing.  
I feel his frame against me, small, hidden in the layers  
of clothes. Then my grandmother calls from the kitchen.  
We should refrigerate the food gifts, I say. I say  
I'll put the rest in the closet, that they already  
have tags. When he goes downstairs, I clean  
the paper scraps, saving larger pieces in a pile  
on the desk, tape and scissors in a right-hand drawer.  
Things aren't as I remember. I'm still afraid.  
My grandmother says he's been seeing ghosts,  
and walking around with his eyes closed.



## MRI at Bayview

Already a late appointment, after taking my information, the woman at the desk turned the lights around her down, and lowered metal bars around her area with computers and filing cabinets. She said someone would be here soon, that they were already on their way. Then she left, and I was alone. I hadn't brought my copy of *As I Lay Dying*, the book I'd been reading for weeks. I hadn't brought my journal. My phone battery was dying. If they were already on their way, did I have time for a magazine? I watched the news, counted three blue boxes of Kleenex. I memorized the angles on the gray diamond carpet, the kind of rug in hospitals with textured off-white walls. There were four rows of chairs, a hand-sanitizing dispenser, and CNN reporters discussing politics I didn't care about. I hadn't brought any water. Then a woman came in from the hallway, asked if the gated desk was still open, and I said no, I didn't think it was open, so she left the way she came. No one had come to get me. What I felt wasn't pain, not exactly, though when I'd fallen, the full weight of my body landed on my hand so I couldn't move my arm, and I got nauseous. I couldn't stand even the impact of walking, turning in my sleep, couldn't pull the hair back from my face. They'd called it a *minor fracture*, now *triceps tendon rupture*, where the muscle detaches from the bone after bending the arm wrong, *forcibly*,

which should confirm my faith in force.  
I always thought if I just thought  
hard enough, what I wanted would be real,  
that if I pictured my elbow healed, it would be,  
and as the force of my body tore the muscle off,  
the force of my body would repair it.  
I could choose to feel pain or not.

    In the MRI machine,  
you must lie still for an uncertain amount of time,  
strapped down, listening to patterns  
of sound as it takes pictures you can't see,  
pictures of the muscle and tissue inside you.  
For months, triceps have been moving up my arm.  
If the muscle got too damaged, it's too late.  
Between the machine's loud pulses,  
varied in pitch and length,  
came long periods of silence.  
I didn't close my eyes to the blankness,  
or push the button in my hand in case of panic.  
In the tube, I tried to stay present—  
pillows, hospital sheets, headphones  
pushed around me. There were my toes,  
hands, the dull ache in my elbow.  
Breathing through my nose, out my mouth,  
I filled my lungs until the air stuck in my throat.

## After Surgery

I made a list to follow exactly,  
started meditation, read a book  
on conscious breathing, then letters  
saved in anticipation of loneliness.  
I researched foods that would support  
effective healing, and when well  
enough, walked to the health store  
to buy the food I brought home  
with my one good arm, the arm  
that washed, chopped, made the food  
for hours after I bought it, arm  
that opened each container, filled  
hummus, lentils, greens, and cleaned  
the spills I'd left on the counter, arm  
that swept dirt from the floor into  
a pile I couldn't move because  
I couldn't hold a dustpan and broom  
in my arm that carried scraps of fruit  
and peels to the garbage it took out  
in a bag to the yard where I kicked  
snow from the trash cans I'd left  
open through the storm. At least  
my legs felt stronger. I packed  
my lunch to bring to work,  
packed sprouted lentils, wild rice,  
carrots, chia on a spinach  
salad bed— everything I knew  
would count. I carried it  
to my friend's car because  
I couldn't drive myself,  
and he got me almost late.  
At work, I got tired, hungry,  
wanted something to eat,  
so went to the place I keep  
my lunch, the place I always keep  
my lunch— it wasn't there  
below my desk, in the bag, in drawers,  
not in my office—maybe  
in my friend's car, but when I called,

he couldn't find it. Then my hands  
shook on both arms. It hurt.  
The bad arm shook. I cried. It hurt.  
Someone heard, brought me a granola bar  
with no ingredients from the healing list,  
no protein, vitamin E, B12, fiber.  
Someone gave me a stick of sugar  
and said *calm down you'll be okay*,  
opened a package of sugar, salt,  
carbo-packed, may-as-well-be-candy bar,  
and said *You're okay. Breath.*  
*You need to eat. Everything will be okay.*

It's so hard pretending

to make the most of losing.  
I didn't want to eat it. I didn't  
want to tell him *no, it's wrong*,  
didn't want to sound rude, ungrateful,  
so tried to calm, took the bar in my still  
shaking hand, gulped for breath.  
I looked and looked— an empty spot.  
I wanted what would heal me  
that was lost, wanted my hours  
not wasted to months, not days spent  
with a knife's wrong cut, not press  
of fingers weak, dry, tired, or  
fear of sugar— my lists of ways  
to spend time getting better  
because I should have been better  
by now, should have calmed,  
should have learned what to learn  
from the surgery and the storm.  
I bit the bar— my mouth. I cried,  
not breathing, bit cheek, tongue, tooth,  
chewed without swallowing.

## Letter to My Former Self

Last night I slept in the bed without sheets,  
left them in the dryer, and when morning came,  
got up an hour later than normal. The mattress  
didn't matter, not pillows without cases. I haven't  
run for twenty days, and there's a pile of unread  
books on the night stand. You must forgive me  
that the hallway stays un-swept, forgive the shoes  
beneath our desk, jeans on the carpet, tangled into  
socks, dead flowers in a vase on the bookshelf.  
When you read this, fold a blanket, vacuum  
the living room rug, carry the recycling out  
to the red bin in the yard. Please know I haven't  
forgotten the curtains it's been weeks since  
I pulled back. Know I know the chaos of winter  
coats, stacked beneath the drapes. Take a breath.  
I haven't learned to breath yet. Oh Sarah, I wish  
I knew what to tell you that would make the healing  
easier, knew how to stop the fall to begin with,  
stop your wait. I wish I knew where the red bird flew  
when he left his nest by our window, when  
the street went silent, suddenly, and you watched  
for his return. The city's full of cardinals now.  
In bare bushes, they can't hide. I've seen them  
mass along sidewalks, on brown grass, through  
tree top branches, but none mean anything  
beyond that. Do you think they ever did?  
Do you think I could know *our* bird, even if I saw him,  
if he came back and settled in the same porch roof hole?  
It seems impossible to be sure, because how could  
I be certain, when all the red birds look the same,  
and even the right one might sound different.

## Uphill South

Walking uphill, heading south—  
such heavy steps are strange.  
Things have unraveled terribly  
better than expected, yet I can't look ahead.

To believe in the ghosts  
who are the only touch I sleep with,  
who walk this path beside me  
like white shadows in the trees,

to trust in their directions because  
the map merely symbols  
what I cannot understand,  
would require a faith I have denied.

In this world, I've seen nothingness  
mask in the rustle of leaves.  
I've searched for chanterelles  
in the wake of a rain,

and found them in the needles  
left by pines. I've found footprints.  
God, how the voices cried  
where no bodies ever came—

how the water in the freezing spring  
dried to stone beds in the heat,  
and pathways left by running does  
have overgrown with leaves.

I could be lost here.  
Could follow where the red bird flies  
with no regard for the thickened ground  
or viewpoints from a ridge,

could travel late into the night  
even nights without moonbeams or stars  
or a cold wind broken even  
by the branches beside me.

I could listen for the words  
to the questions beyond language,  
resist the urge to say *I know*,  
when I know there's nothing to find here,

when I know I'll find myself  
returned on the same path home,  
searching all the same ways gone before  
as if somehow they'd end differently

if I could only somehow *get it*—  
the answer to that strange familiarity  
that comes on, so sudden, when landmarks  
passed a thousand times appear as never seen.

I am so afraid to see them:  
the moss, the stone, the fallen log,  
to slip inside the wrinkles  
on the bark along a tree...

Is there no boundary?  
No edge on which to draw a line  
and mark this depth *enough*? Please—  
someone come and hold me still—  
or still this world from turning.

## Anthropology

2013— this planet called Earth, third planet  
in a series of eight that circles the star I call Sun  
(people once believed it was the only one;  
there was a time they believed it circled us).  
Earth, mass of iron wrapped with water and dirt.  
Earth, planet of oxygen and apes, home to my people,  
The People of Earth, a primate species who walk on two feet  
(humans), who build cities of the iron mined from the Earth,  
pull oil from beneath the ground and run machines  
to harden it, molding liquid into plastic (a substance  
used for medical equipment, vitamin jars, buttons  
on the dashboard of an airplane built for war  
that runs on that same petroleum force  
some people say the war is for).  
People of the woven wicker baskets.  
People of marble stairs.  
People of the atomic bomb and Fanny Farmer Cookbook.  
My people made this language, the language made of words,  
by mouth then hands, words to make meanings like *terror* or *sink*  
that cluster into phrases to speak across distance:  
*I felt terror at the broken sink, how was I to fix it?*  
People made the kitchen, made the sandwich, made the stove.  
They made the backyard. Made the porch lights, and lit the city streets.  
My people made the bedroom with the dresser and the drawers.  
They filled the room with socks and shirts  
then dressed themselves in fabric— called it clothes.  
There are rings for ringing fingers. Necklaces for necks.  
Bracelets wrap round women's wrists for fashion,  
not like handcuffs for immobilization  
or the therapeutic brace that lends support  
to an injured joint using Velcro and more plastic.  
We are the people of the makers of objects,  
makers of ideas we form structures to contain:  
time— a construct of the fourth dimension based on  
patterns in the solar system, orbits of the Earth round Sun,  
and rotations completed over what we call a year  
which is the time it takes for Earth to leave  
a given spot in space, circle around, and then return there,  
which takes roughly 365 days and nights



broken into hours into minutes into seconds  
recorded on the clocks we build and erect  
in city centers, bank walls, living rooms, and plug  
into sockets that channel electricity through wires  
into digitalized numbers that mark hours on the black screens  
of the boxes in our bedrooms. They ring for us.  
We make gods into pages bound inside books.  
Make lessons for our children who we sit in desks at school.  
When people die, we mourn them  
using coffins, pictures, urns. Some traditions  
preserve bodies like dolls, using chemicals and makeup.  
We wrap ourselves in sheets, blankets, and hides  
so we can dream enclosed during the dark times  
of the day called night where our given site  
on Earth faces into a deepest space  
that people we call scientists say is mostly nothing.  
So we give the dark times meaning, make stories and myths,  
watch the light from other stars, so small in their distance.  
We watch shadows cross the moon—  
cold stone that orbits Earth, facing only one side  
towards us, another marker of time.  
We are the people of a realm against oblivion.  
We are the people of the search for deepest past.  
The people of the image of a future gone beyond us—  
what's our mark? How long can it survive?  
Buried in the Earth, we find bones and shells and rocks,  
evidence of realities passed before we came,  
before my people walked on feet, before we spoke  
our words, or named the methods of documentation  
that form our collective understanding of this planet,  
Planet Earth—time before *time*, present before *past*.  
My people dig into the ground for remnants:  
wood-stone, amber cased mosquitoes, dinosaur skulls...  
we hold them in museums where anyone can go.  
Some fossils are large, the size of our great buildings,  
other ones are smaller than the human eye can see.  
More often, we display traces of ourselves—  
cups that held the water our ancient people drank.

## Letter to Mary Ruefle

In my head, I had been writing it for months.  
Began again. Then began before the beginning  
to explain why I was writing this letter specifically,  
and why I had intended it for her, specifically,  
and also why I had typed (though it was not yet typed)  
typed it out before copying each letter by hand  
into the card I had not bought yet.  
I wanted her to know I cared  
that every word was spelled right,  
that each sentence, each mistake even,  
was grammatically deliberate.  
I wanted to show how I'd put it off, tried dancing,  
watched seven movies in Spanish,  
and did the things that people do while tulips die,  
as the moon waxed and waned, and as my mother  
recovered from two separate surgeries.  
I wanted her to know that all this while,  
I had worked each word into existence  
as a sculptor works with clay,  
to make clear where there were changes,  
and to clarify each circumstance governing  
those changes themselves. I debated details,  
the introductory address— why write now?  
Did I have to tell her that?  
Then finally, after weeks of inserting and removing  
theoretical parentheticals, on a Wednesday in September  
while looking for something to send my brother,  
I found the perfect card. Hand printed  
by a small press in Maine, it detailed names  
for each full moon. The weight was right,  
soft coloring— that perfect eggshell shade, matte finish.  
It was everything I had wanted it to be.  
Hours before teaching, I brought supplies to my office,  
and while listening to La Boheme,  
I did it exactly as intended,  
typed each word just as I wanted  
before copying them one by one into the card  
with my nicest, black ink, rollerball pen.  
Then, after concluding with the most genuine

closing I could think of (asking no return),  
I put the card in the envelope,  
licked and sealed my words inside,  
and just slightly left of center (to leave room for postage),  
wrote her address in my clearest print.  
Like a cup of fire, I carried it to the mail spot on campus,  
and waited in line to purchase stamps, hoping  
they'd have something besides the standard bell or flag,  
yet preparing for the inevitable reality  
that it would probably be exactly a standard bell or flag.  
At least it would balance the corner out.  
When I reached the counter (letter in hand)  
a woman took it as I said I wanted a stamp,  
and she said *yes*. Then— how can I put this?—  
a most terrible thing happened.  
She slid my letter through a brown machine  
that marked my envelope with the price I'd pay to send it,  
sixty cents, a block of black lines and numbers.  
There was no stamp at all,  
and before I could say *stop— give it back*,  
she dropped the thing into a slot marked “metered”  
where I knew it would never be mine again,  
where, like all letters, it would be sorted, sent,  
carried in a truck to the place on the address.