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THE LAST ZAMBONI

By

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Bachelor of Arts, Whitman College, Walla Walla, Washington, 2016

Thesis

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

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in Poetry

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THAT'S FOR SURE THE BEST I'VE EVER DONE YOU

Ripple Blue

Is density good or bad?
asks the doe-eyed girl
of the woman screaming answers back
whispering sideways to me
Sometimes it's best not to recognize yourself.

Tensed against the swell
I wait for rocking to silence
or body to tip under
hugged in a child-sized ball.

Imagine the spent, drunk, and spit words in one basin
then imagine a time ocean
imagine me
then imagine more.

This ocean has no kraken
but no map
is flat enough;
not deep or concealing
just a color.

Hear electricity in the water.
See lightning behind the clouds
switching the sky on and off in the distance.

The child and woman fear different:
beast or bankrupt
in between is fear static,
the muffled clinking of a non-person bobbing
against floor and saltwater crust.

Is this the bad season?
Feel the water.
Is this...?
Listen to the water.

There are no bad seasons at sea...
...or they last September to May
or like gusts of wind...
...or bad seasons come in surges,
in phases like people we meet,
or once a life endured...
...or bad seasons are predictable but mysterious
as the rains and five-year apricot rot because
density is inescapable
not good or bad
as watching a child grow.

But force my answer
I dis buoyancy
though it keeps me alive.

Writhe like an ant in open water,
“I want out.”
Sing and meditate,
“I want out.”
Tantrum beat,
“I want out.”
Holler sick.

Be an otter and dive five minutes down
kick toward what you believe is surface
and when bursting at last you breach...
ripple blue in all directions.

Surgeon's Comments: Active inflammation in all regions, incipient lesions lower left abdominal quadrant, random biopsies confirm active disease.

Note: 23 yr old patient remained atypically conscious and interactive, refusing warm blankets, detailing knowledge of dental Root Canal protocol and other...

METASTABLE

Loath to walk blades upon the slip
I left toddler skates on the Alaskan bank
and crawled an hour peering through
lake-rooted branches,
junk twigs, suspended leaves, cracks,
where only the entranced eye feels
shadow of fish tail twelve inches down,
air bubbles from the unknowable breathing.

“But I’m cold!”
“Ten minutes, direct sunlight.”
“Can’t I eat vita-gummies?”
“No.”
“It’s six degrees out here!”
“Nine minutes.”

Enamel is the second strongest substance on earth
after diamonds, undisturbed,
but only a coat.
Once lesion reaches pulp—
blood, nerve, living tissue—
the tooth’s only salvation is death.
Snagging the nerve is painful,
but worst is infection, abscess,
plea for blood to flood a place it
cannot go.

Mom explained epigenetics to me at eleven:
“The interplay of genome and environment.
The Journal of Autoimmune Disease advises,
you are your cure; you can turn it on, so turn it off,
try meditation, eat yogurt, visualize.
Inflammation is inner fire. Put it out.”

I followed guilt back to her finding
the stack of Tooth Fairy silver dollars in the highest cupboard,
and behind, a jar of baby teeth submerged in water.

Same blood type,
my cells half her code,
wrenching, scarring
fiery since her dental residency
when we left home.

Blame floats frozen nameless
but I have been a girl alone with blood
halved
and I watch the elements drift
too far below.

Mom grasps my chin
swiveling softly to profile:
“Your teeth are perfect.”

I’ve never had a cavity.

On a synthetic rink,
Coach says, “Don’t fear ice.
Don’t skate on. Be with.
Fall, girl, fall!
When you commit, you fall,
if ice is self,
into your own arms.”

Once the nerve is gone
and acid bacteria scraped,
inundate remaining tooth with clorox
and fill with stabilizer the body will not reject.

The mouth channels killing frost to the core in one shot
of soothing shivers subsumed.
In a white room refrigerated
so bacteria dies and heart slows to life.
Not thumbs, tools, thought, or language
but spinning, dancing, jumping on ice.

Trip myself into ice,
jump higher to topple colder,
spin through blur and wagger tucked position,
even numb, risk speed with decorative flick.

If only I could make myself the ice...
swaddle my screaming baby
and lay it in snow.

When the tooth has been violated
this is what redemption looks like.

Waitstation

Songbird
in the restaurant
behind curtains or the bar
they coo me fondly
hushing as I pass.

Mimosa-drinking young hangovers brunch
and garden party dressed baby showers pack
undaunted by lines
when coffee refills are free.
Could I actually get
drip in my latte cup
could I actually get
side of bacon
crumpled cash din
child babies waddle, scream,
draw, and dribble indiscriminate
ramekins swing
syrup, syrup no butter,
butter, honey, jam, compote,
peanut butter
pancakes garnished with fresh cream
and blueberries—when they shrivel overnight
Kitchen-Expo Jake sides a bowl for me in the waitstation
and pops a fresh pack.

Back on Kodiak Island
three cups of blueberries came freely
rain-washed
in the woods behind my house
along the waterfall stream
bushes high as me
giving and quick to fill.

I deal honey out the goopy bucket
into an espresso station bottle
dripping stick scouring sides with vapor
burning my hand
into mini metal pitchers onto the table
the tea woman receives telling her friend
it contains everything needed to sustain life.

Lipsticked chardonnay
split-plate lunch women descend
command Tuna Salad down to truffle-dressed greens
then build it back with chicken and havarti
bread double-toasted, carcinogenic, you know
gluten-free taste of faux

upper-class spite afforded twice monthly
in leeringly polite
could I bother you
divide five cards even
boxing a quarter burger for Jimbo the pet dog
sweating, soup samples garnished up
grubbing under table nudging feet with wet rag
to clean their spill.

Exploitation began with honey
and pollen
anti-aging seed-sized brains repurposed
for dementia
venom against HIV
hive glue to human sores
honeycomb structure labeled and snatched
most efficient in the natural world.

Then remembered I left the bee
hanging stinger above my lace anklet church sock
knowing once brushed
it would crawl on to die
battle lost us both
when it fell off with shoes and socks
dropped foot to my snowmelt stream
quiet, sad.

Dinner stealth to ease
blushing postures
candlelit removed from crumbs
nibbling women made-up well in tailored dresses
above dry red wine and risotto
or polenta
Pardon, what did you say?
across from combed men in jackets
handling sleek weighted cards
and local butchered slabs of beef.

Bees hum in the key of C
not to be extracted
just heard.

Hazelnut hemp cappuccinos
two sides of ketchup
sampling of spiced aiolis
yes the ice cube water is filtered
tray of rosé flutes
bussing an untouched honey pitcher
I return to vapor and swish to the dump bucket
shaking my scalded hand.

An ounce of honey fuels a bee once around the globe.

No sludge in my ducts

what a whole lot of wasted time goes into staying alive
I'd rather hunt and gather
a hollow needle in my vein flows out the tube unpulled
I'm sitting slipping blood for nothing till
power up

breathe in
hold your breath
click click click guga guga jjjj JJJJJJJJ click click
relax

click click click jjj jjjjjjjjjjjjjjjjjjjj jjjj

*Doing great in there, Emma
don't fall asleep on me.*

first time I had one I left my bra on
slid me in packed corpse tight till
power off *hold on do you have underwire*
woulda lit up burnt my band
magnetic fry

JJJJJJJJJJJJJJ jjjjjj JJJJ

breathe in
hold your breath
click click click
relax

the last tech said I breathe slow
cycle an hour and a half patients backed up
this time I hear the point of capture lungs empty
trick the tech and my diaphragm band **CLICK CLICK CLICK**
fasted and hungry for a muffin
I rush the pattern, flipbook through
says I breathe like an athlete does that mean I've got a golden ticker
you can know a whole lot and have no idea
I'm feeling superior cause I breathe slowly that's where I am
it's 7:30am my blood pressure is 102/60

breathe in
hold your breath
jjjj Jjeeejuu jjjj chka chka jjjj
relax

*Alright, kiddo, two sequences left.
Hang in there
here comes the contrast.*

bolt

blood clots my underwear twisted
outside rushing from myself
streaking

from nose red and dropping
mouth open in the mirror
to rope sliding

stool marbled with iron leaking
off dye dripping flush
pink water

flowers taste away from leaves
go to seed shedding everywhere
lodged to the sidewalk and
wrinkled green for legs
higher-jumping legs
gift wish me transplanted
in a potted world

lifted and left loose
to a windowsill, no upkeep,
swarming nested,
clouds spied and spent kissing downhill
crickets and honeysuckle carry cool

already hugging air jumpy
I want more

flare me up
back to blood seasons

chase me down across soil
root out white cells from the base
newborn grass cleaved a blade
clutching or leaving

what was never prime

Zone Defense

Intimate in the hub
head waitress Kate counsels
“Emma Lou, with that work ethic
you’ll be a SERVER like, *snap*.”

Josh flaunts comment cards
guts his books of cash and receipts,
“A proper server is subtle
with tones not traces registered
of what we see
every sip
the date-night argument
adult children reverting petty
across from parents.”

Stacks of triangle napkin folds insulate,
the hour before closing in the waitstation
bussing
I shine and roll silverware.

Koral calls a clear on table fifteen,
drops leftover steak to box,
rests with iPhone
complaining, fourteen percent!
“Goddamn Mother’s Day
kids can’t tip, it’s *my* goddamn birthday
it’s not their fault no one ever taught them
I’m from Chicago”
then stuffs bill to book
quiet-yells “corner”
me squinting
unsure at the curtain.

Kitchen-Expo Jake
never sounds bell after 8
texts me “BS”
brussel sprouts up
so between rolls
I run my favorite dish.

But tonight Expo raised Grill-Side
no messages
only dings that could be cheese planks
I stay my station.

Clink, swoosh
I turn to hand
retreating and

almond joy ice cream
one and a half remnant scoops
not cleanly taken
but well-formed
still cold and sweet
plated and garnished
smugly better than bought,
slivered, toasted almonds
chocolate sauce know-how
experimental citrus zest for me
pressing lips against newly-polished soup spoon.

“Corner”, Koral.

“Just think of the floor as a field, or a court”
he advises brotherly.

“I’d like to be a wing one day.”

“Guard,” Koral corrects, “guard or point guard,
I’m from Chicago.”

Silverware tray and ice cream bowl
I kick the swinging door
smeared sauce and fingerprints,
Dishpit Isak agrees, “Wing. Totally.”

I smirk—the lowly heist
we don’t know fine wines
but we *have* played basketball
lifting glassware
from front washer onto bartop
watching the restaurant empty
behind yellow polishing towel.

Kate idles beside,
“A busser passes unseen
reading only glasses, plates, silverware.
The waitress must gaze into faces
that rule her for a meal
warm or tart.”

Closing
rosé to mouth her eyes shift
nodding sideways at the door
to a jacketed gentleman
holding lilies and an invitation
for me.

Self-conscious, yet to finish
I fold the rag, reluctant,
hoping Kate will immerse
in pint glasses undone
I go to him.

Button down black
over my right shoulder
Amy clears table nine
and close behind the maître d' podium
Isak and Jake emerge, comb the drawer
for Friday payday envelopes
hushed, debating zone breaks.

I stare down the stems
sniff indulgently
treading words,
“A good waitress knows to troubleshoot
display the menu
read aloud
until they hear the right answer.”

“Emma, hey Emma”
over the left
Jake hands my unshelled check
sum flopping naked between us three.
“Thanks”
I don't remember his name
“Just give this to the doorman.”
extending the card
before he's gone
a call from the kitchen
“Family dinner's up, y'all.”

Later I drop my empty plate in back
eyes grabbing mine but not meeting
Isak puts out his hands quietly
“I'll take care of that for you.”

Popquiz

Poised in the upper right row
copying the multicolored drawings on the board
hitherto lost I've got to research the word
phosphatidylcholine which you keep saying
like I should know it
I look around and no one seems to know it
except you of course this lecture you've said it twelve times
which must be fun if you get what it does
when I go home I'll look it up in the index
I'll memorize glucosamine and galactosamine
my favorite amino acid is Glycine
the C sounds smooth and easy to fit
unlike other acids it clocks in and gets the job done
no one expects you to speak upper level science
not like politics, sex jokes, pop music, celebrities
it's not nature and nurture it's
start at zero that's science
a chance to win something back
I was crying with my coffee and study guide
silly because biochemistry doesn't matter to me
allostery, amylose, terpene, isologous, inositol
couldn't hold them all in my head or
meant to and ran out of time
unfair all this on a quiz what's more
the exam doesn't ask how I feel
it says draw all 20 structures
and I know them or I don't
that's why I'm here
what does phospholipase do which fatty acid is released
what consequently happens in a human

sparknote riverfloat

when hail catches up
across the misted surface
I'm alone in the water
nose up this time
twelve miles from it
out of gas, broke,
I can't call home

Betty where are you?
a bus-load pulls up
from windows that won't close
children taunt me
hey meatball head

there's a woman too
the sex doctor she says
no degree just results
the kids listen fixed
she wears black and bright lipstick
I say looks pretty, pretty for pink
this is bold she jaws me
lighted pillar candles on the bus
it's a game and I'm losing
she seduces my hat
with an extra toothbrush and towel
never the sharpest
I regret it now
how she'll mistreat that hat
trick-or-treating she for sure
takes home the candy
what I would look like
in her costume

people on the side
holy heck what is going on
point my way
in swift current pulled along
can't take me even in a tackle shop

got to be a phoney
look where she's brought you
I yell unplanned remember my hat
still kids flood free consultations
but most will pay for a chance to win something back
eatchur brussels sprouts remember
I bought them as a favor take notes
Betty I wish you were here she says
not giving people what they want

that's the fastest way people want you

from sticky lips I don't trust
share a drink with her
no way no thanks
a sex doctor's saliva or Betty's
but she's taken my hat
so it's not a question of germs

her push-up in my face
virus hijacks the host cell
hardly alive but replicating
braless there is no natural beauty
if you were counting on natural
reconsider
take out a wad of 100s
cash and count
though she flashes white teeth and says
chemistry's a force beyond control

she calls me honey plum
calm down already
I'm writing a book about it
16.00 USD but for you 14.00
don't mention it
create a weakness and walk away
slit the blubber let pressure do the work
your hands are manicured
or they should be is that ... a callous
oh god where are you sleeping?
no but which hotel?
not any hotel I know

watch me she says watch how I do this
watch the tide turn to you
men are like dogs and dogs like to steal
men are like dogs and dogs like to chase
as soon as attention's got
disappear if you're not sellin' it, sugar,
you're not hot as fuck
kiss-a-death put the book down

oh Betty I'm not fooling anyone
wrinkled cold in the water so long
not that they're ugly my eyes are swollen
though I was looking and
everyone's got bags under their eyes anyway

he's got the setup innertube lodged
a man with a mustache
spinning in the eddies
iced tea two lemon wedges
coffee Sweet N' Low
a known carcinogen
the Sunday crossword
Puzzle Master

here's the hack
it's not about knowing anything
assume degree
it's not about answers
use status quo
S - ING - TH - SH - CH - ED
play the pattern
each blackened grid
play the board
remain in power over yourself
it might turn into a different story
BOB DOLE ELECTED

no that's, c'mon you know
that's not how you spell it
FIVE letters not six
a country...oh, the Allies' foe
not THAT one
she's...got to know this, right?

ok but does Hillary fit
it's not that you're wrong
but your answer is wrong
want a clue?
oh I've got it now
CLINTON

once you get in, Betty
I swear it's so cold on a boogie board
but colder above
a tube is shelter if you're swimming
belly in under 95
soak to extract flavor
don't know how much further
don't know if I can walk back

clear as 25 down
it's ending in OVER
have it your way

I only ever see OVER
why are you stuck on it
maybe two words
could be any word
but it's got to end in ER

in on the joke without me
I'll let it hit you
maybe falling asleep

won't you tell me a joke, Betty?
how do you confuse a blonde?
STEEP!
paint yourself green and
throw forks at her
but it's not such a zinger
one thing I know
intent doesn't matter
it's still manslaughter

oh, of course
that's the POINT
no one wants to
the Puzzle Master hints
here's the trick
Jodie Foster inspired assassination of
c'mon now
it's not like the hint is fair to me
the story is lost and all that's left is
SPIRAL STAIRCASE

on the banks a muppet scientist in khakis
a tight pink sweater what's with those goggles a thermometer
testing temp and pH poke the mud with a stick
release bubbles from the decomposed
weak forces hold everything together
if living it's weak if equilibrium it's dead
below biological 95 proteins denature
it's not manipulation just what happens

strip my clothes wet to the washer
double comb falling hair
for leeches Betty not ticks
it's almost 10 o'clock
it's not even 8 o'clock here
I wish I were there

listen here I've memorized F and D fructose and their derivatives
we can synthesize any polypeptide take out your wallet
lick your finger, cash and count, baby
sometimes a cause is never found but once the kissing goes
pancreatic problems it doesn't matter how many syllables
it doesn't matter what clothes you're wearing how slow and low your voice is
magnesium water, turmeric, and thread count
are gimmicks

weak forces hold us together, Betty, and that's good
none of us have any idea really but we keep breathing and reading
our cells keep moving because they know structure encodes function

and there it is my face
held in two hands
what a relief they're not my own

if you do not know amino acids by heart what can you hope
you know nothing about humans
if you understand every element
if you know the simplest units you can grow
when first transcribed it's just a string but structure encodes function
to fold into form do you really think it's all random
one average protein flitting through choices 4 billion years
that's right, 4 billion years that's how many
I don't think so! your skin doesn't think so you must be
more elegant

there's nothing to get, is there, Betty?
ta ta and a jug jug jug
what's to get?
it's all there in the cytoplasm floating

memorize lipids, R groups, substitutions, saturations
you'll know the properties you'll have the tools
really it's a shame at a cocktail party when you look around twice
check your company before saying endoplasmic reticulum
this is for everyone

lipids and proteins make the cell membrane
impermeable it holds on to what it needs it shuttles through
secret pathways it's flexible it reads signals and adapts it takes material
but if a toxin would pillage what's been built the membrane will not give

exit under the bridge
a huddled crowd clapping and laughing
they don't know me and they won't try
lift my hat because I've earned it
knock knock on some door

don't expect an answer
if it's not locked
there's a towel inside
it's not an accident
there is no holdup
it's time to dry off

SAY IT ISN'T SO

The Last Zamboni

Sunk to slutty pedestrian
I mouth my excuse lacing up skates
I glide innocent, vowing I didn't know
ice only layers without interruption.

Cut and run or takeover
I don't know.

But if that's how you're going to be
this is how it's going to be
I'm not taking the bullet.

Listen, it's like this:
I'm mad as hell and I can't do this anymore.

No I'm

I'M MAD AS HELL AND I'M NOT GONNA TAKE IT
ANYMORE.

ON THE FLOOR MOTHERFUCKERS.

I said hands UP
on the FLOOR.

Gimme the Benjamins—ONLY the Benjamins—and no one gets
hurt.

Hey YOU! Yeaaaaah You. With the bug eyes and that dorky
hat. Geezus You think you're cute. STOP crunchin' the
hell out of that apple--You think it's snack time? That
preschool-look expired on you thirty years ago.

You! With the Shirley Temple hair Get me your best scotch
one from the gold vaults. Make it
a double, neat.

And You. Ya little frumpy lookin' punk with the raised hand.
Always sit in the front row, doncha? You want those fingers
taken off, do ya?

You don't *get* to ask questions and *no* you may not go potty for
God's sake.

Who you think is
calling the shots here?

You're face down on this god-forsaken carpet hasn't been vacuumed in probably six months cause You skip out on your closing duties, doncha? and you *seriously* think YOU'RE calling the shots? Yeah, right.

I'm taking the 50's, too, give me the 50's...and 20's...and those Yeah. Your leather boots That's right I saw you hiding them under your sad yoga ass.

No. I don't think *you* understand. This is a robbery. I'm robbing *your* bank And you're asking me—not even too politely—for a blow job?

UN-believable.

IN-credible.

Hold on a second. Freeze. Do you think I give a flying little fuck about your frostbitten toes? Hand over the boots, bozo.

You think I'll wait here tappin' my happy feet while you sort through that wreck-of-a-purse I mean GOD WOMAN PULL YOURSELF TOGETHER Are you handing me bargaining material?

You push back your cuticles Straighten your nauseating homeschooler tie Think you'll just unlace those boots with the nonchalance of a goddamn hero? You think I'm gonna sit here and watch?

BEEP BEEEEEP WRONG WRONG
I DON'T WAIT.

Not for pedestrian signals not for mumbling wannabe show-offs.

I don't wait.

Good. That's more like it.

Against the wall, dickheads, and stay there.

Here's the deal. I walk wearing your boots. No one follows. If you follow BOOM I blow your sniveling ass up.

Yeah?! SO? So I gave the order to whack your—
Look
here. That's enough from you.

Yeah yeah, you got me
I lost the rulebook and can't play the game
so, sure
I'd rather be caught greedy with a sack of gold
than startled tame with someone else's finger up my nose.

The closed rink past midnight
fat-wheeled rolling boxcar thug
mops a wake of ice freshly wet.

Edges dig to the shadowed slip
phony hockey lines and blemishes drop off
mirror to a lake wrapped wide with turns
of snow-patterned rules my own.

Like a professional
I don't worry over shoulder
constant arrival of shared rink time
I outrun the sirens
whip the surface sculpt
no faces urge me from a fall
no faces
I roll, curl, give heat off then up
crossover backward
the feel I've always wanted.

But a coated man signals me
behind the latched door slab,
The rink's closed, ok?
ice only layers without interruption, ok?

Cut and run
when degree rises
there's no blushing explanation
they just handcuff you,
That's enough, alright?
The stunt's up, ENOUGH!
Enough of you. Enough from you.
Enough.

propofol

everyone wants my
birth date, last name
spell it, do you smoke?

and this is the scary part
life organic made of
three molecules
that's pretty much it
and a double bond
turns vanilla toxic
and two hydrogens
flammable agents
corrosive I am smart
but these moves
are not fair

sometimes I just act
rightly dosed
on an empty
still eyes closed
the short half life
I want to play
let me play

it's hard to know
how could I
grapefruit juice will
ruin you complete
push pocket changes
chemical properties
new boil points
always gamble

Emma, baby, sweets,
you're fine, sweetums, sleep,
I have you, I am
holding you, sleep

but I like being here
to hear the things I
shouldn't these
strangers kind in sync
pamper me sick

chatter protocol
and my drip
I'm a brat but they think
I am great, pressure 110/68

my veins stretching blue
beyond the table
she's burning this unit
deluxe metabolism
oh sweets, her hands
so cold who could
stay warm today

release the moon

to wake neath a favorite face
worried, ice chips spooned attentive
to dry mouth warming now,
coaxed from 63/33
a slip near death
grounded

but no, just the moon whispers back,
stay

release me soothing
return to zero
and a future frozen calm
where shimmer mist healing
dew dusts once earthly hair blue

wave, point, reach
through darkness
curling into myself
on the far side of the nightlight
to eyeshadow skies
and space silence
lullabies
collided, crashed, and sent
reeling from earth's gravity
alone and fractured
whimpering as wounded asteroid
knocked feeble
and shell-shocked timid
exposed...

trembling lip cradled
in moon's serenade

*yes, dearest
tides on earth will cease
24 hours turn weeks
the last eclipse nighten day
and this guiding orb
shrink a cherished point*

*we're orbiting away three
or four centimeters
in what they call year
delaying reception of letters
unwritten
and dehydrated strawberries
tenderly unsend*

before the sun explodes relief
or the book snaps merciful shut to a pin
this gradual drift off
cross armed shoulder turn

a sheltered, rounded,
reassured departure

the monitor tracks a heart
beating for no one.

INFJ Jesus Christ

AARON DUBIE,
Move forward. [and the man accepted his sister's suicide and bought shoelaces so he
could walk to work]

LEAH,
Climb this mountain. [and she uncovered a peace she had not before known]

JORDAN,
Try. [and the despairing man saw a heartening light shining onward]

JACQUELINE,
Open. [and the hostile widow welcomed warmth and homeless children into her empty
house]

Body of Christ.

INFJs tend to internalize conflict and experience health
problems under stress. (personalitypage.com)

Mom dreamt I was the immaculate conceiver,
I birthed myself, Christ the Savior
flipped inside-out,
a living body born crucified.

Only lepers mention Jesus' second life
the potential of a hijacked corpse.

Fourteen inches of split ends cut,
too severe, fibers degraded
past donation to cancerous girls.

When Jesus saw this rejected, isolated, abused, and very sick man, he was
immediately *moved* from somewhere deep inside to care about him.
(FaithGateway.com)

They put a heart on my driver's license
without proof of organ health.
Grinning intoxication buried guilt.
Splitting me open, they would find
nothing salvageable.

INFJs see helping others as their purpose in life. Their real
passion is to get to the heart of the issue so people need not
be rescued at all. (16personalities.com)

PHILIPPE,
Appreciate. [and the anxious man forgot his spoiled tomatoes]

NANCY KING,
Feed the birds. [and the grey-haired woman believed they would return]

CATHERINE,
Start from the beginning. [and the stifled woman escaped with her daughter and cooked
with spices again]

Blood of Christ.

Immune deficient type O
I commune on
Baby Blood.

Universal.
Clean, rare, from the purest,
to the weakest.
Baby savior.

There is no greater satisfaction than knowing I am able to help an
infant survive. It is more rewarding than anything I have ever
done in my life. (RedCrossBlood.com)

Red Cross phoned Jesus twice a month.

Congratulatory warmth
of cookie and apple juice box:
spread the good news of noble hematomas
and gallons of blood sucked circulating
to save the destitute masses.

Some stories want for telling.

JB,
Live. [and the man sobered and picked up a life left alone thirty years]

Jesus not only interacted with these rejected ones. He
reached out and *touched* them. (FaithGateway.com)

REFUGEE CHILDREN,
Speak. [and they told their stories and listened in many learned tongues]

SOLEIL,
Feel loved. [and the little girl reached]

That closeness was... a strong God ... giving dignity
back to the despised. (FaithGateway.com)

Jesus turned smiling from the cleansed leper, juice box in hand.

ALBANIAN FAMILY OF FIVE,

Look. [and they wondered at French identity papers and 7,000€ in their purses]

ROWAN,

Do good. [and at last the young man found purpose]

Downcast eyes call me back
to the taker's yearning.

Some stories hurt for telling.

[he was stuttering at 3AM in a homeless shelter lobby]

[she stood behind the glass door, locked]

[his eyes and voice remained hopeless]

[a letter each week detailing fears and suspicions]

[it has fallen apart]

[food so bland, the daughter winced when he entered]

[her husband died in a home two hours away]

[he stopped eating]

[their families left for Germany to be rejected again]

[cynical and bitter]

[it was a dream: they were denied and deported]

[he never answered]

Lambs, watch me die.
I have not delivered.
I am not coming back. For lepers
there is no pardoning cloud of ascension.

I thirst forsaken,
jealous of Jesus,

his moistened vinegar lips
suffering from a righteous, clear mind.

Flood me with drugged wine.
The scalpel never cuts
but the gospel's score does bleed.

Codas on hold

90 minutes
so no, it's not going
emergency
I lie to automaton
press 9, 9 again for rep: 9
Barricaded Betty snaps
alkaline phosphatase
but not how enzymes rank
or ghosted x-rays break.
CPT code won't shortcut
my "thank you" recorded
for quality purposes.
Mouthing receiver
Look, Betty, it's not like I wanted
you to call me cunt
but now you've done it.
Bitten Betty starts—Yeah
now you've done it nodding true
the knife will surely carve me
to gulp wrinkles but
half-cup pudding dinners
compression socks toe open
I get it that's too far
I didn't sign up
never signed anything
blessed Betty wants to like me
I'm beginning to think
her freezer's full of sliced bread
we all have our problems
we're both sorry and
neither writes a script.

Cap Cloud Down

No runs in my stockings, no airplane,
I turn to a cornfield, alone,
slo-mo mute in time.

We've fed masses finely dining
confettied sky around
pulled miracles together
somersaulting crash landed
the only casualties, us.

Drowsy in my seat
an engine explodes
they throw me to matro,
call me to cockpit
I laser the floor.

Busted hydraulics,
overbooked spreadsheet
two hour increments
two two-top bartops free
too late for alarm
will carry-ons fit?
there is no steering.

I pull panic from Servers aflame
one Busser sloshing to and from
forty tables, forty rows nibbling pretzel mix
arm grabbed as I speed walk by,
We're ready for the bill,
balancing plates square, round, deep, tipping broth
from pocket the phone rings
a final message.

If engines can blow,
is that a crack in the window, a hole?
stagnant food in the kitchen window
32's plated, sell it,
tickets printed, hanging, holding, crossed, stabbed,
we're popping off.

Expo slaps salad cooler doors with knees
flying, I have one fucking runner
need oxygen
Sauté-Side drops fresh pasta
They're all firing at the same fucking time.

Breathe, pressing intercom,
Good evening, professional, calm,
subdue feet at disaster's stench
and nod, There used to be a place in town, what was it called?
fried brussel sprouts with balsamic and...
pardon, those onions are burning,
antsy, backing, swivel into dash
Please remain seated, belts fastened
we're trying, touch table corner,
cooling, Your server will be a few minutes.

Owner in the dishpit catching
smashing towers on a treadmill too fast
I drop and turn
Grill-Side blocking with burnt pan,
Hot, it's hot.
I stand my ground
Clear the aisle.

Broken glass, Servers gasp, No more
Owner welcomes, We'll find space
radio blabbing possibilities,
You're not gonna make it,
Our 50th anniversary,
Clear highway for emergency landing,
We're easy, please,
We came all the way from—

Podium gripped with thrusters
back and forth seesaw on the fly
mark an eighteen-top downdraft
must turn in twelve minutes
rearrange, wipe, prep quivering waters on tray
fourteen-top res arrives in twelve,
Don't seat anyone at seventeen it's,
Why are people at seventeen?
their crisps, tortes, brûlées and espressos walking
in the doorway, faces waiting.

If I had never boarded.

Unchecked the plane descends cruising speed,
no way to abandon cabin, hide,
hum last words in the lavatory,
Love you, Ma, Pete, I'm sorry,
I was trying to help, That's all guys, fuck,
That's it, I'm dead
Goodnight, Goodbye.

Every simulation fails

it comes to luck and flat land.
Fourteen becomes seven
we cap table three
all reservations in
only sixteen open menus,
Sous-Chef Jason bobs head
We'll make it to the runway.

Asking eyes from the kitchen
Grill-Side Jon hands me a Ribeye
Finishing table four position two
Hey, Emma,
I turn,
You did well.

4th-On Backup Reed house comps an ice cream spec,
I'm starving I need something,
scoops half to a coffee saucer
points and winks,
It's too much for me.
New Busser Amy,
What do I do now?

Crew chow at midnight, empty house,
Pastry Jade in the Kitchen brings plates,
seatbelts click
Tyler impersonating Rocky eating lentil salad,
Julie squinting mental algebra tip-out,
a twenty-two pound meatloaf wrapped in bacon,
debris lining the bar we slump.

Senior Server Caitlin pours beers into glass hotly clean,
What the fuck was that oh my god
Where's the nearest exit,
Did you caramelize this bacon?
He said he was allergic to garlic, garlic!
Look at the checkouts I swear to god
All within one passenger.

Rumors run the pipes,
people in movement the Owner says
our family thrives on decay and rebirth
their precious names appear some day as accidents
when trainees fumble server codes
or pull old cards clocking in.
The flight number holds
but at landing we disperse.

I turn to cold, empty air
an open cornfield, no airplane, no restaurant,
alone and walking hooded
but my hands are scrubbed, extended,
trembling for the solace of white ceramic,
not mine.

EXEMPT

layover

Careless and ignorant
hair trimmings and ash freshly
cling

It's too late from my forest fire town
once POP reaches ear it's down
wrecking foliage
I won't forgive

On my back on my bed
two doubles served
sun-brown, blood in feet not head
legs lifted draining
words swelling
dropped asleep

Preserved in someone else's picture
I see only facial hair
scratching our grocery store memory

—new beside me in the conserves
your voice fluttered,
let's start from the end—

One suitcase, a bike in a box
simplified
brooding buoyancy not take-off
did you know this was the end?

Two years later I learn health care and power bills
a beard is scraggly, patchy
a closeted gay man's woman

And you in front of me
still bearded, flowered sleeves, pant legs rolled,
hair gelled, or fluffed
dimly curious, not surprised
I am not surprised

You say gorgeous, subversive
I type sub caesar os dressing
you drink rosé from flutes in hot tubs
I present wine with creased cloth napkin
wait for lip smack, "unexpected"
I'm deleting numbers and corrupting smile-triggers
the weighted silverware we foresaw

Start from the end

I only want to know airports

free wifi distant thunder

I google the names of your bald queens
grant them gorgeous but won't call to say

layover

so early there are no insects
just birds flying off in silent plumes

cold streak

“With you I know what to expect.”

I sleep in a slaughtered wolf’s fur

“Do you even have a bad bone...?”

broken pottery, glass,
sharp bits grown in a stone fence
immune to blushing
repelling anything that moves

I taught myself in the mirror
fashioned natural infectious clues
trained yawning response
so when I leave the door ajar...
you gravitate

“Tennis, rye bread, is there anything you can’t do?”

serial killers block off buffer zones
hive to hunting ground swept clean and buzzing
safeguard or staging ground

“I’d rather you react, get mad.”

splash a box elder around the sink
legs grasp, writhe funny
wiggle as if

“I *really* **like** you.”

bleat my featherlight composure
when you slice yourself
on my downy cheek
get lighter, fly off - up, up, oh
Empathy.

“I dig myself into a hole and you go out to lunch.”

I imagine you sprawled
sniffle sniffle
you will see my tight ass
not these dead shark eyes
yawning forward

arrow pushing

hey, hello fancy meeting you
bored under the bridge
twice can't be always
caught in bad weather
but we're 100 percent

highly unstable still present
never been so reactive
sometimes I select
dipole sprung to regroup
in reaction

but they keep coming back here looking
really at me dirty
they hold caliber from you
though stable our triple bond
that's why
that's how I become
their belly girl

they flag me
vacant reactant
no properties to speak in this
polarizing solvent
too big this world they think
for me being acted on in pity
not disgusted but they could be
car owners who know something
windows tinted I only hear
air pushed aside as they pass
counterfeit but travelling fast
it's pretty much all counterfeit at this point
passing en route in vitro
they don't care about highways
or metabolic process
what really happened here

I am
not hip class crafty
snared in what don't know
most doesn't matter me
but oh boy LOOK OUT
ask for a bathroom and they say
no belly girl
ask for a restroom and I could blend
might they just worship me

stripping for the wrong cause or person
they seem to think
me blameless in situ
not without fault
I could be one of them

at the eyewash station
ask are you choking? ask twice
is this a good time?
if choking make a fist
pinch the nose 15 minutes naked in the shower
before class
that'll do the rinse

listen here I'm not lost
I am belly girl as it were
the real deal
unmatched conformations
not lost at all

I anted up
up front I paid the cover
expecting flowers with a message
gamble on a set in the dark
I'm not sending you back not now

they slur mercury toxic
but I want to know
how efficient in solution
it could be you are
when I hear you out

hand over the smell of my hair
the sound of your voice from a story
I wanted to see for myself
and I trust my mass to hold

rearrange reducing agent
they circle back always
you lose you're out lady
(quit calling me lady!)
there're rules and exceptions
and so there are tricks
and you've struck clear on out
this time
you lose you're out none of this
listen here none of this you got it wrong
that's beside the point

I could say that's not how it went
that's not
how it goes I am not their belly girl
or yours I'm just her
my belly girl

no one's gonna stop me
no one's gonna know better
my own hands take matters
glad to be here thank you

belly girl
in rare form every night
but when they come
rearrange

some crook put this together
just tell me was it you?
before making boycott the business
have a talk before parachuting troops
maybe it never mattered but moreso
it's no one's business and moreover
maybe the joke's on
them

until the joke's on me
in my gut it doesn't
that doesn't feel so good
pushing toward the product
acting on me
when I'm not even sure
what happens when you break it?

pay for chicken
get pork not nothing
just whut zah fuck
what happened here?

ante up
approximation
hold -78 C for CRASH OUT
I ask how cold
what does that feel like
I could and I do
but where'd it get me?

capturing resonant structure
cloud distribution from a diagram
withdrawing is a form of sharing
you say no visual but hold to it

when you dissolve turnings
slap a letter on mine

what kind of errands
how do you spend your money
did yours include mine
on a limb
I'm not even sure I trust your
errands all your feral
informal non-bonding contact
to substrates not me
please don't go on anymore
trusted the impulse
I'm not sure I trust you

balance the charges I don't always want to
two positively rich atoms
unstable pushing toward something somewhere
when you call me almost bun
another biproduct
handing out pH paper off my chart
not tailored to an active site
so maybe it's something like god
when we push past the product
drop by drop careful as if titration
and it's topical
smelling dental numb

gooped amalgamation
you're gonna go without me?
that doesn't seem correct
that can't be right
I can't tell if we've made anything at all
there is no distillate to see
the stakes just rose
if instinct was wrong
you are what they say
am I what they say
what do they say

how belly girl
fooled again? read the manual
for once what's left
next step do I restore
can I cut losses
is there any
starting material left

all I want is my fair share
all I want is what I deserve
all I want is what I have coming

it's not like I didn't
give it my all
when the dipole breaks
where falling will I be?

workup the final
wash my feet blackened
ice cold protecting group
isolate what it comes down to is
crude powder
vacuumed dry

I don't like it
and I won't have it
and I'm not gonna do it

don't like this
won't have them

cheapskate you
still blow a bill
on blue ribbon
leather that'll last me
longer than you maybe

if you use me
everyone does
liable symbiosis
we both want
one equivalent

if we had each other
on filter paper found
yes that's it that's the precipitate I've been
stirring for all along

if we carry through charged particles
infrared fractured out
the right off-beat
if pure we test desired product
if we make what we hoped for

if we have each other
aside car wreck aneurysm
no dairy diet cancels
fitness bonus

they will come around
still more or less
die 31 early
I won't dial you lonely
no letters I won't
altogether gone burnt
dropped from a bridge lost
test product true this was
just an exercise
dump it rinsed down
gone so gone past gone

that's the problem I'd...think
we could all tee off on
lemon curd cake to toothless jaw
and unfair
if that were
it would be

city ordinance

Ticks

When I stayed with Grandmother as a little girl she was firm about the way we spent time, scheduling hours for schoolwork and never indulging outings or TV or games. I waited for her face to thaw, "Surprise! mini golf and ice cream. Would you like mint, cookie dough, vanilla, or chocolate?"

It never happened. We toiled through spelling exercises and math problems. When we finished we sewed blankets for the homeless and baked bread for poor families. I searched her movements, the way she looked over my shoulder when sewing pillowcases, how she leaned toward me when she prayed. I was uncertain every day until--once, her face softened as I finished math drills. Eyes twinkling, flouting self-imposed rules, she beamed, "We've worked hard. How about a nice walk in the woods?" I would have preferred handwriting. I nodded.

We strapped on boots and pulled over sweaters we had knit earlier that year. Grandma ignored my pout. She would not appear wounded. We set out, silent unless she saw a bird or plant she thought I should know. It was dark when we returned.

Inside we took off boots and sweaters, heating water for tea. Our faces pulsed red, our cheeks stung from the stove, our noses ran. As we diced vegetables and boiled water, Grandma stared at me suddenly, seriously, and I put down my knife from the vegetables and wondered if we understood each other at all. She reached out and plucked a tiny black spot from my arm. She took it to the sink, picking up a knife, and cut it three times across and three times over, like brownies, then washed it down the drain. She turned off the stove and led me to the living room where she sat me between her legs in front of the rocking chair. Her weathered hands sifted my hair. Each time she found one we stood, walked to the sink, and raised the knife to cut.

I wanted to roll in leaves, to shimmy through the bushes and the trees. Anything to feel those loving fingers loving me. I would buy buckets of ticks with my allowance, buy buckets and watch her cut every one to bits.

second that

that's the problem
with saying anything
then you lose your turn

competing with Sweden
Paris pretty much kicked my ass
and what's kicking mine

we will try to be everything
to each other sometimes
so when sweet talk dries up

puss is kiss in Swedish below the belt pouting
rotten someone's got to clean or catch
in the children's section I'd choose this one last

I'm not wrong but when you
hand out another's scratch paper
and it is moreover wrong

climb the upper west side send help please
tucked in a trunk outside the suburbs of some place
where r u I might say I can barely hear you so I won't
neither nor how come just don't call me anything

nothing by mouth

to rewire breath through my nose
pack cords of gauze down throat-full
catching splinters and shards
on override
shutdown

I wanted to turn wrong
then be righted

latex fingers
mold my records
paste my measures
ferry numbers cold
from fleshy palms
to sudden silicon exchange behind

contact lost
context stolen

till you press print
trust 3D
awaken digits out of body
grasp the scalpel
and it's not virtual

and you tape my eyes protective shut
mallet to chisel
hollow-split

will you guard the crack
when my bone breaks

slide lower jaw
forward counterclockwise
rotate all dimensions
twisted figures
concealed by numbers embodied tangible
to acrylic reference point,
the intermediary splint,
foreseeing anchor
in-between

position drill and fixate
with truest titanium plates

sever and unhinge the upper
and trip alarm
when the jaws misalign anew
two faces
above and below,
masked and bolted
contort

resect
retract
reflect

no threat
till the cut is incorrect

reflect
retract
resect

the cut is incorrect

floating jaws
lost in space
gaping before
the faulty notion

when my face distorts
will you draw back from the table
clumsy, hacking,
or pull closer, loupes refocused,
set me righter,
blind without those calculations,
daring on feeling the human way

could you even know me
to reconstruct my features
hold my yaw in your hands
eyeing lips sizing forehead
tilting every nearest millimeter
to micro-adjust my elements
for fourteen hours
while each slice swells consequence

could you even remember
to see me forward

past detached jaw
flesh sculpting repair
by manual mercy of handpiece,
saw, screws

and will you paintbrush my cheekbone
as sutures release,
the only reference point, me

tomorrow or the next
point and say,
look at her smile