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Neon is Trying to Tell You Something

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NEON IS TRYING
TO TELL YOU SOMETHING

by

GRACE ANN ARENAS

Bachelor of Arts, Washington College, Chestertown, MD, 2014

Professional Paper
presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts, Creative Writing

The University of Montana
Missoula, MT

May 2017

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“Neon is Trying to Tell You Something” — Abstract

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The following is the manuscript of my poetry collection, “Neon is Trying to Tell You Something.” This manuscript represents my development of poetic voice and style over the course of the past two years. In these poems, images accrue and take on new meaning, while still retaining echoes of their original connotations. This is how the speaker’s mind makes sense of things: evolutionarily. As a collection, these poems do not attempt to world-build or use their foreign landscapes as the driving force of symbol, but rather they use these landscapes as the essential terminology for their logic puzzles, their syllogistic reasoning. The result is an experience of the mind parsing its anxieties, doubts, and joys in turn, all with equal, attentive curiosity.

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I don't cry to take the moon home with me in my pocket nor do I fret to leave her behind me.

— John Keats

At Stage III the reduction in scope of WHITE and BLACK continues and a new category emerges. This may be either GREEN or YELLOW. GREEN normally includes English yellow-green, greens, blue-greens, blues, and blue-purples... At Stage V the focus of blue emerges from the GREEN area. GREEN now becomes green. At this stage, BLACK and WHITE are fully reduced to black and white, that is, to neutral values. The RED area is probably also reduced, losing purples and violets.

Basic Color Terms: Their Universality and Evolution

— Brent Berlin and Paul Kay

Green

This slow unfurling planet

I feel the shift
of every coiled quiver tentacle
underfoot
willing itself blossomward
feel the rattling mucus breath
and sliding over and between
of rubbery arms
feel the soft rhythm the coarse
music of growth
and requisite resistance
there is a heartbeat beating and I feel it
as though it is the off-on blink
of some satellite turning
my eyelids black then red
I understand a tongue
can't always taste like honey but
record the fading anyway
and the stretching petal desire is finite
not in tensile strength but in fact
of desire and I feel it
the sighing clutching grasp
everything it will be
unformed and in slippery pacing back
and forth ask for form
or path or shape finite and final
I spell it out
in steps
and feel a shudder of something
cinched tight— trying

On wanting to break zoology

From out of what mother-of-pearl placenta

this sense breached, a school of manta rays crying
at their lack of gull-snout, wing-wind, wiry
nesting tendencies

I will be your pocket alien, flannel wriggling,
alarmed gills practicing sedation
sedation practicing authentic breath
whatever means authentic anyway, a convertible

waxed to chrome perfection, heirloom grapeseed

would I have to rein in my tentacles?

Twist of licorice, liquid nitrogen and its haze-fingers
as if nothing is sufficient in grasp or grip
all amputated, the cephalopods of notebook daydream,
scrawled next to those transparent cubes

I drew dozens and the magazines said
this alternative to looping daisies meant I adhered
to order, structure, the way

Elmer's glue adheres, as a rule, to nothing but skin

but how, when you feel like nothing but skin,
is one to undress syllogistically?

There's something or nothing in the air

It had to be tonight, or else
the lake would raisin. Study
the snowy moon. I don't
believe we've met, although

you shouldn't believe
everything you read.
Fingerprints in tree sap,
matching. Incandescent

moss. I tell you I'm held
together by the will
of a fern who likes something
in my posture. Been watching

all this time. You say
that sounds about right.
And honestly, green
is your color— but brittle.

I trust it. I hand over
my fretful tolling sternum.
The pitches we reach, erratic
bliss. I'll fetch you

any number of pinecones
or unspool at your feet.
Satisfaction of twig
and scrap. Convincing

flora. The birds all
breathe— *however*.

Without notice: green

Neither lightbulb nor narcissist,

nothing name-tagged: Steve.
These are all nouns— there

could be trouble. Adoring

a bubble capturing

light, gnats. The process

is more triple-berry jam, and
you're short on sugar, and

lids don't match, and

there's sprouting. Tufting

and timid. Mid-air laughter.

Confusion and echo sticking
to the grass. Do I even own feet?

I'm handstand-traipsing through

your closet. I'm slow-sweet

blending in a mortar.

I'm blinking. Small grit.
You're many widespread waters.

And the atlas just melts,

falling asleep.

Molting

I had been chewing my grapes all in secret
when someone dropped me
in your pocket prayerbook mouth.
I'm not versed in these verses,
their grist and tumble.
Sanding eyesight.
Someone should have thought this through,
I've never been the kind of pinecone
you can twirl in peanut butter and seed
for the birds to battle over.
This is a whole new coat
of paint I've been inhaling. Hedge trimmer,
rabbit scuffle, burrow:
I didn't hear
the prowling of it. Soil sturdier
than my piano cover,
and I've always wondered
about piano covers—
let dirt and dust gather, opt instead
the bassoon. Harp.
Someone thought about melody
and discounted harmony and neglected
a chorus of frogs flooding pond
with arrhythmia. Spermy squirming
tadpole, let me plead
my case: my legs are too short
to stalk water-ripple,
yearning electric scales.
Accumulate sun-curse blush,
only. I may have run out of blood.
Someone decided air was my color and breath
would copper me for brief seconds.
See me, penny-stitched.
A shredded napkin for your thoughts.
A taffy sigh you stretch
for six full root beers.
Its echo on a toothbrush. Someone
versioned me a cloud with red cracking ribs
at the mention. In someone: twelve oceans,
an assortment of pickle jar lids. In someone:
twelve oceans, the makings of gills.

Desire in kingdom plantae

Unsure about life cycle: blossoms
yellow and plucked promptly,
video ribbon rewinding, a fabric

safe to bleach? Would like
to believe it's a forest
of coffee bean trees. Vascular mass

tended, thick raindrops. Red
unexpected berries. Those practiced
in small revenges are patient

with harvest. A pit, a seed,
a stone— resting sideways
on your palm: foreign kind

of peace in that patience. More
than this scorching,
the *you'll burn for it* heedless

of eyelashes. Would like to know
the film will not corrode.
Want waves of it, stirring leaves.

Letter to a houseplant

I envy your bright
sterility, green but unlikely
to encounter any bee. Slumped
and stroked, I wonder how
I could become uncoveted aloe,
a nectarless ficus tucked
between air vent and lamp.
I never wanted to overflow
fields beyond eyesight—
as much a matter of chance
as choice. Reluctant wildflower.
This lamplight and hardwood:
only way to unlearn seeds.
Tell me I should
keep the sun off my back.

Reminder that this isn't me dissolving

Phyllo and prosciutto slipped
between books. Three

of clubs slid down storm drain.
Oh, mathematical.

Who's ever tried sewing a tree
back together?

Cripple needle, rusty pin. Lake
in orange segment,

sweet acidic depths. Plunge.
Even eraser crumbs.

Allowed to burn, watch embers
kiss dust motes

mid-flight. Yes, fish is not scales,
but scales scraps

of setting light flicker. Dark flash
beetle wing. Bug, cloud

both remember rainfall through
cotton-eyelet leaves.

Can't I be changed, utterly, without being changed, utterly?

Realistically, the plaque is painted.
Or engraved, or whatever it is
 we're doing with plaques nowadays.
What I mean to say

is there's no knife sharpener.
 Or however you get
a hot air balloon down. You must
have had a mosquito bite

 that never stopped itching.
Getting taller by salt, thin grasses.
I grew into this pocket and pick
 at the stitching. But how it holds.

Counting, dividing by twos

Ask the good china how
it feels about steak knives.
Birds who mate for life,

despite. What is this hot
glue gun urging? I feel it
in my pinky toes the way

I can still feel my pinky toes.
Blessed banjo-haystack union.
Green-skin, sparkle-sacrifice.

Only I'm allowed
to say it, fine drizzle of doubt
over popcorn. Slick fatty

heat on tongue.
It's like why rain when
there's chainmail rusting over?

Like why even
winter-proof
nice suede boots. Losing

mildew vinegar battle.
The converse: exquisite
peeling. Parting.

Keep plastic flatware
under sink,
for emergencies. Discard

the feather residue.
Crisco sizzling skyward
in a pan. With it:

this need. Until now.
I am sure, though, I did not
realize you necessary.

For FX's sake

Remember how before CGI

you'd actually have to go film in the Alps?

The reason I ask is I might as well be

soft-shoe-shuffling up the Matterhorn,
yodeling for a fruit plate

from craft services. In the thick of it.

If I were a shellac-haired prince, I could

go door-to-door finding a face that fit
my face, a shining glass stunt double

we could cast and recast in a mold, this time
rubber. As it is, antsy for that avalanche,

the approaching pine. Computerize
my functionality, my reaction time

on the slopes. Seamless, my powder-swishing
hip sway. Why must you be so

anti-crash pad, disdainful of green screen?
The world's made progress enough to kiss

sitting in separate dressing rooms. No risk
of static pop from the cold. Among other things.

If I said I wanted to startle you with honesty, would that startle you?

Not everything can fascinate.
Filled with the wrong kind of powder.
Not everything survives
like the whiplashed liquor bottle
flung for show. I am here to announce
I am here by way of excessive blinking.
My throat had been a Doric column until
the thing you carry with you came to hollow.
Marble-munching termite, drill bit.
I have held my melon-baller
in a careless grip. In the face of dishwater.
But then, some motivation that barreled
in, glistening. Searing green and white.

The replacement goldfish asks

Am I swimming with all the same verve

of my forebear? What uncertain times
these are, pebbles painted blue. And everything
circle: house and trajectory. I can't

distinguish myself in dim water, the chipping

away of my grand plastic
castle. Drifting in flake, fragment memory.
I am the ficus in the corner,

I am souvenir hermit crab and everything

craving to thrive. I am dust
that was pollen grain and remembers
nuzzling petal. And would

crawl back to blossom. Yes, and shatter shell.

With everything, I'll angle to the light
and the light will hit and the promises
I promise— to be radiant, to have you see— will be kept.

Which ones are the better instincts?

To stay reckless as seaweed, feigning
tooth or tentacle.

Often cough salt, though never
tongue it like a cow.

Clinging, pointed—to grasp

is one of the first things learned,
but thumbless
for cycles. Like unsteady
starfish, clumsy cartwheel.

I can only be like scraping barnacles, sticky remora.
Coated, wool and breadcrumb. But then

there are eyelids like pink cowries.

Magnetic waves say yes, spinning
the exact pebble.

Knocking the leg of the dock.
A secret of pith under red nail.

I embed and raise hackle,

for the house may become
more paint than house, in due time.

Consume the fox mouth slowly

Is there such a thing
as too much moonlight?

It's a process, I guess,
like learning the quick step,
sketching with non-dominant hand.

If I were a moth, I'd be quilting
a new pattern for my wings.

Treebark thimble—
name me one bite
of silver among the ferns.

But fingers click against each other,
tiny woodpeck rhythm.

Nothing to maneuver.
The dark, slowest dissolving,
catches of it left in acorn.

And there's a whetstone that keeps
needlepricks of light sharp
for long-dead stars,
so I can't trust anything.

Hydration is the least of it

Funnel cake and tunnel vision. You are carouseling
around him every second
and no wonder dizzy-down, drowning.

Enveloped, impeccable
bubblegum. They'd call it something
like the vapors. Eyeroll. But isn't everything

fogging gray-white? There's not a lick

of justice to it: this satin hibiscus,
this wobbly tripod, this trademark. Don't count
your tickets before they're

hole-punched. Slogging through mud,
cartwheel. The iron in your blood,

there's no forging it, but salt could be
practical. Dredge it from his neck
after a morning run. Preservation

and popcorn. Melting, crunching, molding, twist.

It's like neon is trying
to tell you something. It's like you are trying
to tell you something, all thousands.

In anticipation of a precise minute

Driven by the *yes*

that this will all, one day,
unstarch. Meanwhile, it's gumdrop
after gumdrop;
passing dachshunds lick
my blistered heels. White

is not a color
of patience; I have learned
nothing. Squealing
bones, robotic jumprope bound
for knots. My sandpaper fist—
why never coiled
silk slipping
through itself, fingers.

Vaseline on

tangled links. I'm
spitting out panic
in sharp ice. Enough
to slice the flannel through,
enough for piercing
ears, enjoying it.

Prove some principle

of oil, raincoat,
hydroplaning, the vinyl
after all— but still
hold me.

What does it mean to romanticize?

Once again, unwinding

what's caught
between boar bristle. A toothpick

dipped in gold paint,

fleck like mouse tears. I'm attending

to gaps in teeth and knowledge. Singing,

potentially. Have to be
coaxed in the sweet way

of coaxing: stick of butter held

in prayer hands. Know

that this isn't the same as picking

through recyclables.
Nothing malicious as glass. Instead:

cold button.

Attentive residue. I'm undecided

as to the shape and size

of storage containers. Crave
a lake of it all, gnaw out my shoreline.

Portrait in journalism and wool

- Q: And where are all the rabbits in your world?
- A: Knife open a letter to cure joint aches,
plant patches of sweet mint
below your window.
- Q: Letter like rabbit like violet rubble—
there are places in you
where kettles recite the names of planets.
- A: Hum snippets celestial. The mint
is for dreaming more dreamily.
- Q: Wonder aloud who your fingers are,
whether you consider all ten male. Do they,
for example, wear epaulets? Trip up spine:
explain a comet, leopard seal,
chair missing one or more legs.
- A: Leopard like letter like rabbit's foot.
- Q/A: Very much, confession.
- Q: Does this shoelace remind you
of anything— or, not.
- Q: Would you let a lemon tree tendril inside you?
- A: She matters.
- Q: I will use the yarn to knit the alphabets
that flood this canvas.

What is a world without fur?

We'd never thought in terms
of fathoms before, who's inching along
the icy dark. Cold oil spill skin.
Identify the clothespin predator by imprint
of teeth left in ankle. If a wave wants,
can it tumble and tumble the same handful
of shells? Let's praise the vestigial
hind limbs. Ode to blubber and baleen. Nothing
snagging, loose squiggle of wool. Slide
over, under, asleep in industrial fishing net.
Love being the desire to go whale watching;
such an exact ocean, its ratio of ghost
to squid. Glossy lunar gravity, the low moon
swerves. I could float like spray of salt
in the distance— spark.

You'll have to live with that color, you know

I was trying to decide whether you were a bookshelf or a coffee table. I was trying to determine how much I could trust you to hold the things I consider non-perusable, to relegate you to the living room. Didn't know you were made of oak, not cardboard. That you could withstand. But I was never one for testing compressive strength. I was trying to color coordinate and only make use of monochrome shades. Who could plan, prepare, find a place for so many varied blues? Sometimes you are every sky and speck of Blu-Tack staining a dorm room wall, every Robin's Egg and Russian Navy. Because I wanted whitewashed and blacked out, I thought to nix you altogether, another junk-store donation. I was trying for the minimalist approach, all clean lines, slick edges, sharp corners. You've been sanded down. Lacquered. Lacking an eye, I was trying my luck. I was trying to leave you warping on a curbside. Be this bedside table, pillow, a full-length mirror, in spite of it. Forgive me with feather down. Don't let me rust those screws and hinges. Not trendy nor timeless, not a must-have or a steal. Have stolen me.

Carbon has two main forms and honestly what are the odds

I'm not sure we
can rely on form anyway
in a bathtub
full of soap roses.
Remind me,
what's a spine again?
The train car
chain of it always
clicking, winding.
I'd rather not dissolve,
not so far away
from the dustpan and so
surrounded
by complete orbs
of dirt. There's a method:
be small, contain
the vital. Just
ask the forensic procedural.
But I have twelve
looms per metacarpal
and a hankering
for cake. A tangled
kite string but never, not
ever, a kite. Tying
together like raw
pork tenderloin. Tenuous
from outward pressure
of apple, pen caps.
In my ear:
cartoon sizzle of a fuse.

Prologue with set examples

If I have learned anything about love
it has been from your hors d'oeuvres-platter
approach, your way of serving yourself
in cubed and toothpicked bits
with a breezy little laugh, *oh, this?*
this is all I had in the fridge. No I know,
we didn't meet at that kind of party,
but maybe I wish that we had.
Isn't that the only way to know each other
intimately, seeing the exact shade
we dye ourselves in contrast to the crowd?
You, my sharp turquoise, neon
and body-pocked from so many
paring knives, always make yourself known.
If I have learned anything about love
it wasn't from that boy who was a man
who was a boy, or from the faces
and ceiling tiles hovering above a crib.
Every pulled tendon, splintered
bone you went ahead and walked on
was a lesson. Remember that party?
More organ meat on trays. It takes a toll.
We're not girls people picture like girls,
but we did stay up until dawn
like you're meant to, and ordered pizza
like you're meant to, watched meet-cutes
on that 20-inch screen. That didn't teach me
much either. How terrifying it is to live
as an X-ray, how fearlessly you walk
around that way, your skin like a cobweb.
You'll never make a soldier, so utterly
unarmored. If I have learned anything about
love it's been by noticing your eyes
have a habit of opening incredibly wide—
shocked by my suggestion that you find some
shield to keep your body apart from the air,
from the maddeningly thin air.
Why do you throw yourself so resolutely?
What do I serve of myself?

Prologue with endless nail-biting

The eggs you crack open are yolkless
and I know, we've been here before.
You will forget again until the craving
for antlers chafes kidney and windmills
crowd your living room. There will be
a living room, and there will not be
mud-black warren with its myriad exit
strategies, no sharp-gliding figure skates.
Ice clouds like blanched almonds.
Submit nothing in writing, or else watch
your feet morph into second editions.
Crave again, thin lightbulb. You'll never
stop sweeping hair off tile or losing hair.
Nine out of ten agree that this life requires
binoculars, telescopes, but no grappling hook.
Exhale a bridge of cotton swabs. Onstage,
it's a matter of Peachie Keane who flickers
glitter guttural, yellow sloshing in shells.

Prologue with apparently bone-deep anxieties

Tell me, as you scrawl with a Sharpie
just left of my hip, will you be sure
to mind your stitches? I would hate
to be left leaking, a punctured tire,
cracked mason jar of sea water.
Would like to keep the majority
of myself. I wonder even whether
this suffocated ovary should have
stayed in place; it may have held my
conviction about the purpose of acorns
or some other heart-deep thing.
And now a biohazard. Strange how
we can break down and shrivel in turn.
How you harvested a walnut. You've
cut so much now, told me later, woken,
that I lost barely any blood at all.
And I want all the blood I can get,
so I thank you. I want the plasma
that makes my eyes twitch, the platelets
that make me laugh when he sneezes.
Careful with those forceps, they're pressing
on my pragmatism. This room has a name
I am inherently suspicious of. Oh,
to remain inherent. Thank you for your
time, consideration of my abdomen,
for my iodine-stained skin. My body,
sliced and sewn. As far as I know, mine.

Prologue with someone else

Even flowers— humble bluebell, ever-unrequited mums, tulip pleading *believe me*.
I can hand you this pearlwort, here, will this do?
I know my voice is dog-pitched higher than those you tend to listen to. I know you are a dog-person masquerading as a mother. I am a cat-person who should never nurture anything much larger than a paper cut. Newton would lose his mind over us, adore our equal and opposite torsos, how neither of us has anything to do with elasticity. There's just two kinds of electricity, which ought to tell you something. A lightning storm once frightened your niece, we wrapped her in quilts until her breaths could again be used to tell the time. That was a joint effort. I will cut you off before you finish the story. And say nothing. I think we must be train cars clasped and hurtling down a hill, there's enough momentum that the dragging doesn't feel so burdensome, though just you wait until we're back on level ground. Opened flat, we are a recto and verso, we cannot know what the other has to say without a craning of the neck. A tulip stem exerts itself to prop an overlarge yellow head. I couldn't find you growing in the field. Only dandelions, dissolving spore by spore, only earthworms and indentations. Perhaps you are not blossoming at all.

The litmus turned out red

This meant I couldn't love you. Suffice to say
 we all know the ending to Orient Express.
 Reliable realization that I was an opal, now
I am a dead opal, charred like barbecue coals—

but only through a tear in the cloth
 bisecting *now* and *then*. Curious kittens
 make for these fluffy dissections.
Portuguese explorers haven't given it a rest

since 1418 and now contour every speck
 of this bell pepper I'm eating. Not too spicy.
 Prescience for this precious tongue. To adapt
is an unsplit infinitive as well as stupid, I say

while breaking in these boots. I'm sick
 of losing Post-Its to the coffee-splatter library
 carpet. Hint: they all did it. And now
my feet are blistered. You are wriggling

in the continental divide between my shoulders
 and I can feel you wriggling. Got me chewing
 on chalk, spitting cirrus clouds. Kids ask
why the sky is blue on hotdog Wednesdays.

I would like to shred my gym uniform, weave
 strips through chain link fence. Would like
 to water my turnips but can't until I admit
every thing changed, and you changed everything.

Blue

Two thoughts containing all my truths today

I am not oak or maple
you are not maple or birch
and we are never aspen
ask again and I swear there will be
an entirely new kind of answer.

I have in my small raised fist
an acorn, a fable,
a fountain, and your sweater
as though a small raised fist
were, in fact, not.

This unspiky thing

High-sodium obsession,
this licking sanding raw. Don't know

about you but I feel
parched, immediate.

So very grit and sting. I can thread
together molecules

to form. Edit erosion time-
lapsed, zipping. I taste approximate

two flavors— the wonder
of casual pain. Indulge, indulge,

inflict, it won't be other
than rollerblade momentum. How red

this tongue— can handle
my antiseptic. Attend, though puffy

speech. No offered lake,
no sieving. What else is caught

and grasped in particle? Everything
that can be small.

Weak in the knees

Hollow bird-bones, please
stop buckling—

I'm trying to teach
my phone to stop capitalizing
You.

Why do we only
get death and taxes?

I'd take an inhale
of your apple breath
any day,

every day an encounter
with your chained-up
bicycle.

Maybe I'm too weak
to face joy

in those exact, exacting
measures.

A steel skeleton, a bird, a plane.
I'm always
getting sucked

into your propeller.

Myself apart

Where to start the search
under all these blankets? In shadow,

not sharpness. My features, yours,
watercolor of themselves.

Bled slowly down
the page. Feeling framed,

plagued. The necessary data etched
onto gold. But no, no flash photography,

we only want the moment
rendered once.

Or buy the postcard. Reproduced,
how apropos. Up to me, we'd store,

stow away, a basement full
of armless statues.

Collect reservedly these
brushstrokes, these spatters.

Not a moment we can see as orange:
segmented, separate mouthful measured

out for anyone who hungers.
My hunger, alone. My apple,

my landscape. Your hunger, myself
a part. Your blanket, your fresco.

Canvas won't tangle smoothly,
or at all, unless forced. Unless cut

by glass—fog-sleek— and woven.
Keep away from the open door.

Keep yourself and me, under.
Blue, our hazy, only moment. I insist.

A backwards and forwards forever

I want or wanted

your erstwhile sock drawer
next August's sweat
and baby teeth collection

I am wanting
to take an ice cream spoon
to your graduation day

stuff a sugar cone full of it
devour in one gulp
pair it with your salt-fried crow's feet

I will want to see you age
cheat your chin up
getting measured

take the measure of you
I have wanted to know
what you'll whistle when you're

fortysomething and could want
a mug you drank from
to crack against my tile floor

I'd want your last breath or two
to cycle seamlessly
into your first and I would

have wanted your first and last
any or every would have wanted
have wanted
want.

Absolutely everything since 1981

Harry Hamlin, does that glass eye come
with a lifetime guarantee? If so, toss it over,

it's dark in here. Each morning begins
the same way: kale smoothie

with peaches, fortified with a snip
of Cassandra-hair. A balanced breakfast,

a broken window. It's dark in here. Let's plan
on it staying dark, let's plan on

a summer trip, somewhere Mercury advises.
Sunshine expert. Maps these days

are so damn detailed, I can count
your eyelid freckles from here, see a cricket

the dog is trying to eat, soggy tongue
of Fate. Do you ever think

about how one moldy day, you ceased to be
an oak tree because of city ordinance?

Measurements come after
eye chart, that blurry block of gray.

From there what can you see
but the cereal boxes on middle shelves,

the creases in your own palm?
If I knew then what I feel now

I'd have gone ahead and smashed more
glass, shredded more pillows.

Feathers flying— from such heights, you must
see the outline of everything.

Contortions of blacksmithing

I've compared it to sleeping on Neptune,
but think now, the method. Nothing of ice,

adaptation. Slow descent toward snow-lined
dreaming. There is so much to force.

Sledgehammer, anvil, whoever is which,
whoever wants to go first. Dimpled, pitted

sheets: intention, the anti-hailstone. The future—
hypothesis— is finely wrought

and filigree, a fence that swings shut
with no creaking. My unease at the thought

of engraving blurred by heat. Follow evolution
of scrap metal, how many hands

it passes through. Will I always be scratching
at fingerprint, tarnish? I will always be

scratching at fingerprint, tarnish, perceived
dent and discoloration. Incomplete project, us.

Who has a good mantra I could borrow?

Tackle box brain, lures
always snagging on finless fish.
Collection of useless discovery:

chewy plastic worm. Butcher,
butterfly open like whole ducks
for stuffing and find coils

of hem tape, slippery camisoles,
yearbook photos of every ex—
caught them in metal talons, down

river drifting. Rummage through
myself looking for a rubber band
to snap against wrist— come now,

little magpie, you only need twigs.
Not this nose ring, that muddy
tube of melting lipstick. My rusty

kingdom for fishlike memory:
a shimmer, a second, slick.
And gone. Can't recall Tuesday

breakfasts, but her every glove-
thread so clear carved in marble.

Uprooting

To think how many hairs on my head won't be there
come Monday. Farmhouse twistered, clump

of golf course dirt. I can feel hands, gloved, weeding
the ragwort out of me. But watch it now, watch

for healthy shoots. How will you remember the pliant stalk
of this body once it's tethered to a climbing post? So greedy

to sunbathe. How do those fingers sieve out pyrite? We are fields
of wheat and chaff and crows nipping up the earthworms

in the soil, all crows, black feathers sleeked, braying towards
the highway. Ponds swallow sunset, but we don't have the stomach

for so many burning colors. I don't know how long my grip
will hold. It's a sliceable little body, this body, this cluster of trees.

Pluck a pear from the middle branch. No bruises to bite around.
Sweated slick palm, I told you, I'm losing it. I told you to watch

how your garden grows, blossoms under and over and over again,
petals sky-straining, roots gasping, stretching at the stem.

Room of rind and pith,

room of discard, the nothing
things,

 half-chewed and spat.

Room of weeks-gone bread
and rainfall, egg shell,

 forsaken seedling.

Held in this heat, place
my apple core at the altar.

Shrine to remnant.

 Have never
not been building it, devout
 in my way

 to chicken bone
and straw. To endings
that had ripe, plump beginnings.

 Know how they must
have tasted. Memory of it,
soft,

 constant here. Room
of echo. Half-moon honeydew.
Sweet offering. I live here to learn

 what things
can grow from dead things.

What other things

 might one day
 dissolve.

Because there are thousands of ways to disappoint and before there were maybe seven

We're getting late, these woods and I,
and have only half-eaten maple helicopters left
to offer in our dim shadow breathing—
gnawed in nerves, can't fault
the trees for standing still. Forgive my
 acidity, my lack of bilingual.
I can only speak my own muscular
tongue. Apparently, it's a process.
So many shades of vowels. But what about
a snappier solution—
e.g., what can I drink for the skills
 to paint your face
a meticulous tiger replica? Fingers always
 blobbing overbright orange. Hope
 you get the hint—
the hint is *stick with me?*
 — when I serve you Scotch tape
as a side dish. I need another napkin, eat it
and the curtains as soon as the door shuts.
 The nerves, once more.
 Twice or whatever. A process.
This is a *me* problem as opposed
to a *we* problem but paired things,
like sets of encyclopedias, are hard to dismantle.
Would like to be encyclopedia, your set
 of encyclopedias, but I'm a pamphlet
 on benefits of falconry and all
you really want is an occasional steno pad.
Or possibly— haven't checked
your Christmas list. You're busy not wanting
 all that much while I feel a nagging
inevitable, like last-ditch newspaper birthday
gift, can of paint gone sour,
foil fingernail post-chocolate coin. I'm
afraid you'll start and end your days carding
this wool, my vibrating tangle. And I'm afraid.

I'm always weaving ways out

My cold leg, your raincoat.
My paring knife, your lemon.
The problem is I think
there is a problem, nesting doll
without one shell. Where
is all that music leaking from?
I need plaster and you
say cotton balls. Everything
destined for junk drawer, but
I feel warned by gesture.
Unblinking. My recipe,
your bookshelf. I don't mean it
the way it sounds, and it sounds
like skis on gravel. If nothing else,
understand. What does it take
to stitch shut doorways?
A needle like a javelin.
Your window, my ladder.
I'll blink through the unknowing.

Recognize the temperature of skin

Taxidermal rabbit,
eternity of
raised forepaw.
Can you be sure
you have
a stomach
if you don't
sense the knot
constricting?
Understand,
I am always
counting
by twos.
Those silk
untwitching ears.

Satellite increasingly fed up with only its thoughts for music

Vacuum off the coffee filters
 and I'll take up millinery,
sew myself a stylish little hat—

 Understand, this head is
black hole, appetite.
Every speck of space junk

 floating by. I am skull-stuffed
 with chewing gum,
skinny calves, hotel art, broken

 French press. Six thousand
 charcoaled heartbeats,
hyperbole a mainstay

of galactic discussion. But I'd
 rather not talk about it,
 not while this sludgy stew

is up there, brewing. A flimsy
 dam, these orbital cavities.
 — Above all, I want it

 functional.
Gauze concurrent sieve
 and bandage. I want

 the sodden thing to slide,
fall on a passing comet.
 Hurtle nothingwards.

This may not count

I'm not angry enough anymore
to write the poem I intended to write
about wanting your regret.
I was going to compare myself
to a maple helicopter spiraling
downwards in a downwards spiral
and not paying attention to how
or where I landed, something like that.
That probably would have developed
into similar imagery, insofar as
it probably would have developed
in imagery that also featured things
hovering in the air, because that
is what anger most feels like, tense
hummingbird whirring, yet defying
physics: static. I could have demanded
marionette for me, using marionette
as a verb and drawing attention both
to that subversion of syntax as well as
to my own controlling tendencies.
This is how I write a poem: I pull
black gunk from the drain, dunk it
in neon glitter. It's a little upsetting
to be so calm now, so closed
and resolved, because I really wanted
to write that poem about wanting
your regret. It would have sparkled.
Anger sparkles, crackles in fixed point
of air. But then I remind myself how
you are not a poem nor should this
thing we're thinging serve as fodder
for a poem, but how else would I know
how anger sparkles or that I'm not
even holding onto it anymore? Tell me?

To hold on to this ink

Lousy with pinholes: this cupped palm,
this storm door. I was telling the story
before it happened. Drenched

in something like sour water.
Hand against wall: was that you
wringing washcloths, dreaming back at me?

I can't and I cannot and here, once more,
a pencil to gnaw at. Or else
plaster drying around the flimsier wrist.

Whatever things tell us
the nature of other things. Cause
of the soft-swelling dough. Something could

have happened any day of the week.
A lawn daisy morphing
into a clock. A lawn daisy always has been

this ticking clock. The gears and the morning
and my graphite tongue.
And by cupped palm, I mean:

something's resting. Telling me
there are measures to be taken.
This bending body: rain. But slight breezes.

And by storm door, I mean: the bright
color of knowing. And by pinholes,
I mean: one color that can't run.

On picking a blackberry

What if no one ever told you it was
and so you lived

never knowing but held on
like stubborn spring snow

against which this cell
this jewel this tiny planet

would stand in such stark contrast
and perhaps you would wonder about its origin

more often than your own but
it wouldn't matter

this token this egg this ancient spider eye
might just reveal its truth at any moment and that

would be your world for the world
is a perfect fit for the palm of your hand

if you know to pluck it
from the bramble without

blood and what might be blood or juice or song
glistening small against skin

know that even if you know
or even if you never learn about

steps and stages unripe ripe and ripening
they will happen anyway.

Don't count on it

Submitting to math, I calculate
the flattening of soda, rate
of bubble-wither.
Watch also the slow fade
of pasta water removed
from heat, headlights dissolving.
You know what I'm going to say,
that recording these things
takes a needle to my
balloon-sculpted brain, that I wince
at the thunder
of leaky faucets, that I
am exhausted. Oh just admit
you're exhausted, tally-mark for every
dandelion spore's escape.
There's only so much
graphite in the world.
And I mean, it's erasable.

The spider is made of glass

But what does this have to do with fractures

of bluebird, I mean fractions
of bluebird, I mean the way they brush

occasionally against car doors?

Or otherwise: pebble
in my boot, rocket of breath
escaping dream

in which you love sushi and darker hair.

Exact nature: on hold until
further notice, we decide
with our hands in our shoes,

and exact nature is subjective,
depending on curve of beak.

You're not the one
who needs to hear this.

Are these twelve different cornhusks
you offer?

This head too cluttered
to tell leg from pencil. Figurines
for eventual attic.

You're not the one who needs
to hear this. The fly-rattled curtains, the scab.
A bike brought inside from the rain.

Don't worry— just brushstroke
the foptail, faux rivers.
A thumbtack could shatter this web.

Loosely translated: looking at you

Pincushion moon, I fret unending your small
unassailable wounds. How much iron inside
you— has been, will be, current. Perpetual
tattoo footprint: no wind, scurry of chipmunk.
Why was I so late in arrival? Picture a plastic-
wrapped glowing, salted surface, Tupperware
moon. Picture an orbiting hand with a knife.
I am gluing together these cottonball clouds,
sticking to every table. Will command myself
atmospheric: perspire, blink lightning. Stand.

Annex, overflowing

Though we added to my small collection—
mugs with broken handles, faux-suede sheaths
for reading glasses— I wanted more.
The furrows in a wheat field. Drained lakes.
A crater on the surface of the moon.
Has no one ever thought of this before?
I was not made large or curved enough, not made
of solid material— cupped hands let sand
strain through them and are left empty. The whole
of me, a porous pocket. This body, a sieve.
What didn't I look at, seeking out a something
to expand myself? I could not feel warmth
heavy at the base of a valley the way I could
when it rested on my skin. Could not store it
in a vase. I wanted more but learned
I had only a finite number of ways to hold you.

The spiral staircase, the fox den meet

I've written the book
about fish scales,

extolled guitar-pick
iridescence. Had enough

of the art of star-drenching.
Photo, torn, of a glittering

cactus; tile, torn, mosaic
chicken-feed scattered.

I'm awaiting a dusty hand
in the dark, or else

mud-caked. I'm this type
of craver: socks, tree bark, and skin.

What I mean to say is I don't
fall through the air. Anymore.

Convinced that this
is the reason watercolor runs

down a page, stains
thin curtains. Now I'll be looking

through nothing: not
glass. Not even glass.

I built the house made of maple trees

Lashes blink against piano lid til walnut

clunks cathartic. Crocuses are cooked
from dirt and I

also unfurl

by the toolshed. Antonyms keep
jousting in colors of birthright,

always annuals raptured
away while mums stay mud-sweet. Blister
begins as swatting. I practice

collecting echo and oval and spill baskets full
all over the golf course. Velocity

and long division.

Who built the house made

of maple trees? Voices carry in the hall, wedged

into fists. I could have swallowed
an atlas. Like lamb down python-throat,
square bulging, paper edge rakes

esophagus. Could be filled
with those winding red highways.

Certain stars unchart
themselves, burn until wickless. But it's mouse

and mousetrap, happenstance.

Let drift, crinkle leaf. I came back,
omniscient piano,

because the truth turned out

only true.