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The Work of the Living

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THE WORK OF THE LIVING

by

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BA English/Creative Writing, Hope College, Holland, Michigan, 2016

Thesis

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Creative Writing

The Work of the Living

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The Work of the Living

poems

Tommy D'Addario

contents

1 Anniversary

one

3 Imago Before Dawn
4 Some Substitutions in Gladwin, Michigan
5 Another Parable of a Lost Son
6 Each Cloud
7 The Key to Happiness
8 A Delicate Balance
9 Mayflies
12 Requiring a More Articulate Courier of the Gods
13 In Meditating
14 Poem with Hematoma
15 Upon Reaching the Age of Reason

two

17 Conditional
18 Amy's daughter sees the ghosts
19 Enlightenment
20 Somewhere West of Here
21 An Exit
22 XXV
23 Self-Portrait as Twice-Exorcised Child
24 Absolution
26 Territory
27 Rodomondo, They Tell Me You're in Heaven
28 Inherited Luck
29 Bullet Points
30 Some Substitutions in Holland, Michigan

three

- 32 Resurrection Poem with Petrichor
- 33 Like Verrocchio's Angel I Am Humbled
- 36 The Work of the Living
- 37 I Find a Different Dead Sparrow Three Consecutive Days and Counting
- 38 Whether the world had grown larger or smaller
- 39 Backyard Woods in Shelby Township, Michigan
- 40 Poem with Pamplemousse
- 41 I'm Making Neat Piles of Your Ashes
- 42 Marching Band in Street
- 43 Zealot

I have done all, you have done all,
That I, that you, that you, that we,
As I was, you were, we were,
Could have done as doing was.

I have said all, you have said all
That I, that you, that we,
As I was, you were, we were,
Could have said as saying was.

Now comes a blessing on us,
Close all our eyes on us
And let us bless us thankfully
That we have been and are not.

“Benedictory”
Laura “Riding” Jackson

Anniversary

A man and a child go where the water meets the sand,
where the water meets also the air, and the gulls who slip

the seam between all three. And the gulls are cotton
snared among the dune grass, or they are kites cut loose

into the air, or they are buoys bobbing out to sea. And the child
points at the gulls and cannot take the point back,

and runs among the gulls, who slip the seam between
the child and the clouds, who cannot take the winds

back. The child names the clouds and cannot take
the names back, and lies face-up to watch them pass.

The man breathes it all in and tastes salt, and with the salt
he remembers, and he cannot take the remembering back,

just as he loves the child and cannot take the love
back, and slips the seam between the two.

ONE

Imago Before Dawn

I was young enough to command legions of spiders. Black dots peppered the bedsheets, moving under measured exhalation. Young enough that when I hummed, garter snake answered with tongue, spooning scent trails to my feet, cooled in my calf-shadow. My formidable gaze daunted the small voice peeking behind my uvula; I relished this. Isn't potential what they try to kill in us? They asked me to sit and I obliged. They told me to wake up. Demanded obedience with voices creaked, old doors yielding to weary hinges. As a gesture of good will I did not cast the creatures of the river upon them. Things cannot stay this way, they assured me. Here we desire order. I did not laugh because I pitied sober conformists. But it was enough that they spoke one shift into being inside me. Insecurities accumulated, doubt mixing, dust motes in a glass of water left out overnight. When I called, paw and talon ceased to hasten to my side. For unchartable time I waited in darkness, fingers and toes tuned to the strands of web spanning my dominion, waiting for the slightest tremor to bring news of the world outside. While all was silent, my convictions turned to contradictions, and it was then I began to die.

Some Substitutions in Gladwin, Michigan

No Sunday morning passed without rain those summers. Oat squares in milk. Mud in the culverts. Pages of hymnals swelled in humid pews, drew my nose to the musk of their turning. The color leached miserably from stained glass darkened by storm. It's a fault how easily I fall in love; blame those sleepy Sundays. Those soaring, organ-throated melodies channeled off key. Wild turkey crossing road on the drive home. Scrolls of bark peeling away from white birch in the rain. I pressed pencil to those slates, gave secrets, and let them unfurl to conceal. Something to be buried,

cell by cell, and watched dew burn off the grass. A dog leap from dock to river, clamp jaw on tennis ball, drag itself to shore with seaweed clinging flankwise. It was no one's fault, your changing, my changing. Back then, our all-too permeable membranes swapped thought, desire. I wanted to tangle in the arms of the willow; you were impatient to grow up. Neither desire should be wrong. Our arms, braille in the shadows of clouds. Wet bathing suits plastered hips. I want the forest across the road to stretch

indefinitely, where the echoes of motors on water can be lost. Those two boys are gone and the known world reveals itself like a dog at the fence, as if nothing mattered but the ruckus as someone walks by.

Each Cloud

an any-moment science: a million pounds of water vapor hover overhead
endoscope for confession no probe of penetralia so efficacious

as guilt reticulated blueprint tabernacled desires runnel in the end
erode towards place of rest oh messianic fruition oh long awaited

until then scudding leashed thing made to urinate (figurative)
not there! not there! bad dog priapic fixations learning physics

in an all-boys high school phallic art rampant “got dicked”
notebooks textbooks bathroom stall anything unattended fair game

but light in full spectrum seen and unseen and potential energy
seeks resolve zero position a pliable logic in case of emergency

The Key to Happiness

The key to happiness is having a child, my brother says. And when the day's snowmelt refreezes over roads, have another. It's always winter. I mean it's always on the nose. My father says the key to happiness

is prayer. He and my mother fall asleep each night murmuring the rosary. It must be some small comfort to wash one's hands of that grime. God had a child, allegedly, or every child,

by proxy. I have no child, I do not pray, so that makes me what? It's worth noting my brother's answer changes. The key, he says, is to embrace the futility of finding meaning: you will find

what you lost when you stop looking. If you don't know what you've lost God help you. My mother prays for the intercession of St Anthony, patron of lost things, and never fails to recover the misplaced social security cards

and necklaces. Her ruthless household scouring stirs every hidden thing to light. But the key, she says, is knowing the difference between what can and cannot be found. My other brother says unpleasant thoughts

aren't helpful so he swallows to dissolve them. And conflict makes us happy. My friend Anthony, exiting rehab for the second time, went to Mass with his father. Upon opening the hymnal at his seat, a medallion

of St Anthony tumbled into his palm. It was only in Anthony's place the token was found. If I can hear this relayed and my spine does not prickle with the Holy Spirit, that makes me what? I want to fall

and cup my ear where cold cleaves root to ground, to gather signs like loose change. I want to hear my sister when she says the key to happiness is a clean diet. The body a temple until it is more than.

A Delicate Balance

A delicate balance maintaining sanity managing contents of the fridge
 expiration dates has this gone bad I will pitch it I will weigh
cost of purchase risk of consuming cost of conscience what I fear most

 loss of control and negative effects of my presence In the forest I ate
berries among wasps my friend pointed said we were safe like a good consumer
 I took his word he knew every mushroom by name the workaholic wasps

didn't mind violet blooded lips berry skin snagged on tooth I braced for paralysis
 or seizure but the body gracious host complied What is sanity oh
don't ask me to compare two truths will it hurt when they peel

 this husk from soul will there be windows to look back will there be
room for reminiscence a breath I can fast forward through would be enough

Mayflies

I

Churned in the early summer cauldron of the lake
the naiads molt, molt again, shed themselves
until skin glistens raw, when wings flex and break

the cracks of flesh—iridescent mosaics
cornea-thin, slick with the body's inner soft.
Our familiar plague. The wind collects them

en masse, a dense cloud tracking indigo on weather
radar. They choke the docks, stifle the skies, cluster
with urgency: only twenty-four hours after

nymph to seraph, their circuitry will short, each
fish-hook body stuck to walls and billboards,
pavement and dumpster bins, clinging with death-grip.

Our familiar, sad plague: they don't raze the crop, don't
worm into flesh. They take flight, briefly glorious, and die.

II

We fumbled with the lock the day they hatched
frantic from curb to porch, rain of their bodies
whirled in all directions, the lawn needled.
Claw foot tub, window to survey cars arriving

on the driveway. Who felt safest in thunderstorms
who leaned into winds and found them stable.
I have listened for your voice in memories, but
it's forgotten, the way dreams recede as the morning

stales. Rooms that held us as no two deserve, nevertheless
we curtain rods, we destined arc of fan blade. Outside
neighbors swept brick walls, pushed mayflies into storm
drains and trash bins. How we'd fumbled with the lock

like thieves of our own good hours. Everything in haste.
And doorways belong to a room as much as anything.

III

You don't die beautifully, but who does?
Swaths of your kin layered inches thick

on concrete, facades of houses, bridges
slickening roads to trouble passing cars.

Those of you that survive to shore, that is.
Bass feast the waters froth and your species

plagued across the desert of Lake St Clair,
diaspora without hope of promised land.

A story we know well. In other seasons
the lakes may freeze and thaw faster than we

do in a lifetime, but I became the permanent
season of storms, sky a canvas of wrath and all

the reckless trees that stand before the winds.
I thought I could embody the beauty in the terror.

Requiring a More Articulate Courier of the Gods

or at least a new medium. Voices ushered downriver and across it. Praise
to generous amplitudes of water, as the clutch of frogspawn
knows in birth throes. Or the bouillon's geometric dissolution. Think a broth
angel, uncanny arrangements in alphabet soup. *Hello,*

it spells, *You will become*—, before it runs out of the necessary consonants.

Better to dispense with angels altogether. But cling to winged
things: Hark! the crow found a recess on the building's brick façade, ample
enough to host a scrambling talon but not

its plump frame. It flapped against the wall, defied of balance

nearly a minute, feathers black and steeled for plummet. *Hark!*

it might have said, *Are you listening?* A crow will get attention. A crow will
catch a rumor and spread like thought across a page.

In Meditating

I could do anything but meditate: the neighbors' moans through the wall sips of water coffee jitters multivitamin Imodium with breakfast: I was a body the ghosts had bodies they didn't seem to know I was there: I could pass for one of them: I returned to meditate: my bones shaped the chair: callouses congealed: invisible strata: there was a fusion there was a pulling apart: I continued to try my best at not trying: to dispel whenever possible any notion of self: I stripped to bare skin and cried when the voices began to enter me: I hoped to lose skin altogether: I picked at the layers until blisters slicked the soles of my feet: I could not lose my skin altogether: the heat of my breath drew flies the dirt loosened from worms: the body asked to be free but clung nauseated: the spine the ulna the stale butterfly hipbones: the hubris of the mind in matters of the body: I wanted respite from statistics polls twitter texts grocery bill hunger leaking engine-oil sagging tires: I could not smother the fever nor its reciprocal relief: I went out in the snow to numb my feet: sweat froze the shirt to my chest the flesh of my groin became taut: I walked on my heels: my ankles became whispers: the deer was wedged between two fences in the yard: men came and worked it free.

Poem with Hematoma

he said it again and again
the boy bent over his shin
Don't touch my hematoma
at recess leaned on maple tree
wound inside stray balls bounced
passing runner jump rope swing
someone found a baby rabbit
in the grass smaller than a kneecap
he limped to see it
Why won't it run away they said
and lay beside it
all of them leveled in the grass

Upon Reaching the Age of Reason

Appetite winters in the hands, the pit of the groin.
An eye's harvest: ninety pairs of knees shifting
under white dresses, suit pants, the need to pee.

Is it knees, the bone cap of joint. Is it the children's
shoulders. What catechism, the flesh. Father Tim
hovers over this Mass of needing-to-be-blessed,
altar-raised between these first communicants

and their God. His is the word of God, his are the hands
of transformation. So when he tips the chalice, the children
know not to blink when the blood fills the corners of his lips.
They know not to turn when he holds the wafers to their open

mouths—they must say it. Amen, *We believe*. Amen,
So it is. They will want to say it. After Mass the children
will be photographed, one step closer to divinity. They will be
photographs unlike the ones tucked in his desk drawer,
photographs in which all of the subjects are smiling.

TWO

Conditional

If the house is empty when you wake. If they're coming back. If they're not. If it rains, if it doesn't rain. If an eddy of a day. If a pirouette. If you cross the ditch, if you leap the fence. If the field holds a thousand cows. If they keep their heads down as you pass. If the papier-mâché of them, if a plastered philosophy of cud. If you imagine a new house, a new land. If you knock when you reach the door, if you just walk in. If the hermits cough dust from the shelves at noon. If you crack their spines. If the chimney speaks. If a pirouette. If they're coming back, if they're not. If you lean the doorway in darkling light. If you tug the grass, if the constellations of dirt burst. If you shout their names. If they're coming back. If they're coming back. If you kick the well cover. If you pose an arabesque and the earth doesn't crumble beneath. Even if the sickle moon, were its smile to cleave the night in two.

Amy's daughter sees the ghosts

Amy's daughter sees the ghosts calls them The Funny People
 the Funny Woman stood in my doorway turning the lights on
and off babysitter says the house is no doubt haunted after putting
 the kids to bed she hears children laughing and running through the
upstairs hall goes to check kids fast asleep *the Funny Kids are kind*
 her daughter says Good, good *But Mom, I don't like the Funny Man*

Haven't slept for two days coffee late in afternoon sleep thin
 as spider silk I've never seen a ghost but respect the possibility
just as God in my state of delirium in early morning Amy could be prophet
 she goes to crystal shop asks for someone who can deal with ghosts
Oh, sure, Pam is great at that thank God for Pam asks Amy to place palms up
 lies her palms atop them *I've seen your death* Amy: *I just want you to lose my ghosts*
Oh. Okay.

I wake each night need the bathroom? hungry? psychological unrest?
24 and need a pep talk to cross dark rooms

Enlightenment

Online chakra test: still need to open
my third eye, as soon as someone tells me
how. I can't think of anything more subjective
than perception. When the doe in the yard steps with

shaky ankles onto the sidewalk, I see my three-year-old
niece's first steps in high heels, the length of the hall,
the chandelier's luminous arms. But am I obeying
the moment, or eternity? The problem,
my biology professor posited, is that I don't know

the right questions to ask. Fair enough.
That was evolutionary biology, riddled
with speciation, the cleaving of lineage, one
trembling step after another onto uncertain
terrain. So I went full Sagittarius and shot

the other way. Online chakra test: under-active root,
associated with survival. Open this and *you will feel*
you have sufficient territory. The deer once bed in the yard

but no longer. Mornings of dew on spotted hide, gasps
of bright pink tongue. Come back, I haven't asked
the right question yet. My territory is sufficient.

Somewhere West of Here

Whose mountain is this? Parched and ambering in the summer's last pulse, it's rooted with tamarack, shivering gold before the needles yield to winter. And everything must have a name—this moon the harvest moon, a faded stamp in day sky, even this thrust with flagstaff—whose mountain is this?

On the geography of paper
I drew a border the flightless beetle couldn't seem to cross.
On the Mountain of Bold Turkeys my scalp drew two ticks, became
Mountain of Imminent Burrows until my timely scratching took it
back. And everything must have a name, or else it is nothing. Now,

our boots trace the scalp of this mountain, but whose mountain
is this? We have no pen or paper. The borders have all but disintegrated,
names hardly seem to matter. What's to keep the spears of sun from
running straight through me?

An Exit

Aspens rise pale and angular, bone of the mountains
jutting white into moonglow. Roots of a single grove
probe for miles—and did the worn earth give where
one such arm could emerge and cause to stumble
the sleep-stupored gelding? Femur snap scream
and all the valley distorts to accommodate. This night
and every for weeks. In the sheep wagon where
I'd slept, I wake to laughter: coyotes whoop across the river
over fresh kill, wash lip and fang between tugs of carcass.
How can one hold the two in one space: that cry
against which all pain will be measured; that laughter
against which all the sanest hours will subtract.
The horse had to be hoisted by crane after the shotgun's
muzzle, borne to the field where it had bent to the tall grass,
the clover, earth once familiar and forgiving to the press of hoof.
I'm told, in snowfall, the wolves caught stench and gathered
to raze the memory down to bones. Beneath their laughter, bones.

XXV

I wake to a quarter-century and the god-send
of bacon and chocolate chip-banana pancakes. I did not ask
to be born so you smother me in banners, fill my mouth with
butter and fat. You Capricorn, sea-goat of pragmatism,
“sharp of tongue,” but loyal as rainwater to
a slope. No eyes for the dead, a good thing. We diffuse peppermint
and eucalyptus, burn incense and leaf
to enlightenment. In every room a fruit fly’s speck between
us. Finally some Italian—Ciao Mambo for dinner,
tiramisu on the house. The ladyfingers too flat, something
learned from *The Great British Baking Show*, but you
have the Nonna, not me. Is it bene? We aren’t supposed to
get along, say the stars and charts. But the fig tree, resurrected,
doesn’t mind. Posters lose grip on walls too, but they press back in place.

Self-Portrait as Twice-Exorcised Child

Should've known the demon wouldn't leave so easy. Perched on the dresser it wears shadow, won't let me see it directly, just claws and fangs, pale tongue like a serpent reaching for the floor. It tries to confuse me. "They said of Agatho that for three years he kept a stone in his mouth to learn silence," and, "Climate change isn't caused by man, you know." "I'm just a child," I remind it, mating two Lego bricks.

It follows during daytime, too. At Mass it says, "Don't take that," when I stand before the basin of holy water—"Germs"—but doesn't mind when I sing along to hymns. It especially likes the parts when we kneel and bow our heads. "I could get used to this," it says. "Me too," I say, and my demon and I laugh.

Absolution

No patterned veil to sieve my transgressions: we sit
chairs facing in a corner of the church. Robes shroud
the shape of him, the mass of him.

Bless me Father

I have sinned. Correct words like keys to unlock
the power of the ritual. But what intelligence
does one hope to garner from a child? We sit so close

the knees touch.

Robes shroud—

What have you come to confess?

I confess the milk thick hour

of the night. Crumbs flecked under chairs. Silhouettes
in the kitchen-dark, whisperings beyond
the hour of my waking.

Knees touching

I confess the coliseum

made of the white bucket

two garter snakes
handful of frogs:

cruel design of my hands.

His hand—

Now, that is very serious—

takes my hand

asks me to describe it.

The older boys urged me to drop

the frogs, one by one. Snakes turning

their faultless heads,
their sable hunger.

Make this right.

I confess it with my mouths
my mouths turning
my mouths making disappear.

Territory

fat bee slams window spiders each week
 hurry across the floor one's cute help it outside
 big ones I'm sorry need to die a week of frost riles
Tomas Tranströmer: "so much that can neither be written
nor kept inside!" to live in comfort with futility I move my hand
 as if through cobweb catch fruit flies over moldy pie
 watch my phone on walk to teach almost collide with deer
 sorting mulberry from grass we startle back a pace
 neither willing to cede no worries friend never fired a gun
I always say but that's not true almost forget Peter and his .22
 potshots at ground squirrels digging up the lawn he passed it to me
brown fur on log bullet from hand hand from lawn's reach me from heartbeat
 I missed missed again but that's not me a one-
 timer like butter in coffee deer eyes liquid sheen
the insects die a drowsy death bee rests what I call forehead
 against glass to live in comfort with POWER OFF
 almost walk into spider hanging
 center of living room more silk it tells the body
and the body a factory churns

Rodomondo, They Tell Me You're in Heaven

I don't want to begin thinking about heaven yet, not even as a comfort. I'm suspicious of their comfort, even as I want to embrace it. Or embrace something like it. I put my faith in the dependable chaos. But goddamn! Now I can't help it I'm thinking of heaven. Or maybe I'm just thinking of you and calling it heaven. Either way I picture you in Ofena, bare feet pressed against the sun-warmed face of a rock. As you might have stood as a child, watching grey clumps of sheep saunter down the mountain's slope to vanish into olive groves. I never liked olives, but perhaps if I tasted one with your tongue. But it must have been something to stand with all of Abruzzo laid out below you! It seems we can never learn enough from one another and then it is too late to try. But I'm suspicious of even this platitude. For example, I'm remembering a dream I had shortly after you died. There was a party in the house I was raised in. I stood outside the house, looking in. The wall that should have faced me was gone, so the house looked something like a diorama, and all of our family walked inside. They couldn't see me, even though the warm orange penumbra cast from the house touched the grass at my feet. I liked it that way. It feels good to be invisible, for a short while, at least. Anyway, you sat at the kitchen table, Rodomondo, spearing *il tortollino* with a toothpick, trying to laugh with your lips closed. I know it wasn't heaven, but I know why I wanted it to be. It was only a dream. But you closed your eyes when you laughed, just as you did in life.

Inherited Luck

Valerie researches genealogy online the stories we take for fact about our lineage
all we get wrong great uncle Jerry famous in Detroit gambler that one's true
his name rumors all over city won a hotel chain lost it the same night who's to say
family stories gambling addictions thrill's not in the losing but

rare euphoria of a win what a concept there are Catholics by choice converts
another concept sleep elusive Amy's ghosts still in my head want to meet them or
ghosts of my very own Tommy's ghosts I might never sleep again
I want something to shake up my worldview I can say

this really happened something I don't have to take on someone else's word my own
theory of everything my third eye chakra little more open each day little more
closed kind of blinking or winking our little secret I'm good with secrets
don't have impulse to tell you anything open closed if I desire

Bullet Points

If others had not been foolish, we should be so.

-William Blake

(1) The boy used a bullet to write, dragged the tip across the page leaving a wake of lead and creation. He wrote of caliber and kickback and magazine capacity. (2) If others should talk of capacity, we should talk of capacity. As in: *I didn't know he had the capacity to do this.* (3) *City* inhabits the word *capacity*. The boy used the bullet to draw a city, bird's eye view. (4) *Cap* guides the word *capacity*, the lid of a container, reminiscent of the head. The boy used the bullet to people the city. Narrow street jostled with heads, heads swelled like balloons, heads clustered like soft eggs a frog lays on the river's edge—stuck together and clinging, static and slime. (5) I drew myself into the city, my head one of many with capacity to be emptied, capacity to lose capacity. (6) If others had not been victims, we should be so. (7) A bullet is cylindrical, its body a circle. A circle is the shape that travels the greatest distance, that travels a cycle. (8) The *cap* at the head of *capacity* lives a verb form meaning *to cover with a cap*—to complete, consummate, bring to climax. (9) The boy wanted to detail the city. He lifted the bullet to itch his scalp, swirled it in the whorl of a cowlick, circling. (10) How to complete, consummate this city? One head at a time, he lowers the bullet to paper. (11) The act of creation introduces the act of erasure, introduces a cycle.

Some Substitutions in Holland, Michigan

In place of a god, I resurrected an American
robin that struck the window headfirst. Grass
sky grass sky the house resonated
its reality. In place of a god, my hand

reached from above to console, but puzzled.
In place of an answer the wind tugged dry leaves
through the mulch. The bird shook
its head, flexed feather, delirium.
In place of understanding I

gave it space bird grass air hand.
In place of understanding I am given
observation. Where is the conclusion, where
the voice calling all to order grass
root palm of dirt on rock. I resurrected

nothing, not the robin, not even the desire
to remain by its side when its heaving chest
stiffened sky sky sky

in place of something—the darkling air, the blue
twilight hue for lamp and TV glow. In place of a thought,
I would speak. Whatever shape my lips took.

THREE

Resurrection Poem with Petrichor

he watches white trilliums pestered by rain
the family dressed in pastels they spoon cereal
milk runs down chin this morning
the dog shook a rabbit in its teeth
pawed it when it did not stir awake

The dog killed the Easter bunny the father says
the children laugh *The dog killed the Easter bunny!*
The dog killed the Easter bunny! Worms turn earth
or gutter water rushing toward the curb

Like Verrocchio's Angel I Am Humbled

I

THE CASE FOR HIGH ART

At 13,000 feet the streets of suburbia, curving and turning
over themselves, steam like the heat emanating from
mitochondrial folds.

The pilot: Next stop's Detroit. And if you shouldn't be
on this flight, enjoy the ride anyway!

We all softened a little after sharing a laugh.
The pilot's generosity endeared her; jokes became
possible in this space.

The flight attendant: I like your sweater!

The woman beside me beams at him. Nothing to gain
for this kindness, the whirl of our nuclei. We humans
drone with possibility.

A fly had breached the TSA.
It orbited
my head twice before
landing on my knee.

II

THE DROP

Arrhythmic engine stutters and flames, or the churn
of turbulence slushes the currents and spins
the plane into freefall.

There is nothing romantic or exceptional
regarding the fall of the CRJ-700, as any
metal carcass simply
makes for the earth again.

Seeing everything: the zippers turning up on baggage as though lifted by invisible fingers;
complimentary pretzels loosed from plastic bags into the shared air; and there! clinging
to the knee with the grips
of a thousand sleeping infant hands
the fly refuses to let go.

III

MY LEONARDO

Lake Michigan welcomed us with soft waters, nobody harmed.
After paramedic inspection all-clears, carry out meals
and thank-god-you're-all-rights, we simply go
home to our families.

Family: Why won't you eat?
Why won't you sleep?
Who is this changeling?

They speak through the buzz.

My cells grip.
I am hummed.

The Work of the Living

The last bees form a cloud that fills
the sky. One dies and then
another, little motor of the brain
kaput. One by one they fall,
humless against the street

below. Children step from doorways,
jacketed and booted, doing the work
of rain, turning soft earth beneath trees.

If I call you *honey* is it sweeter
by the property of scarcity,
or am I tying knots by the window
before you set to work putting
flowers to sleep? Bee-rain

patters through the day. Children gather
handfuls and try to place them back
into the sky, defied. If I try to place you
in the sky, is it stringing the knowns to the knowns?
It is kinder if you turn my hands
to all of the rooted things. The last

bees quiet on the street, the grass, the rooftops,
and the children wade home for dinner.
We move to stand closer together. *Honey*, I say,
and it is sweeter or it isn't.

I Find a Different Dead Sparrow
Three Consecutive Days and Counting

I was hoping for a sign to take me forward. Is this
my mystical experience? My burning bush, my
road to Emmaus. In spring I moved among dogwoods,
floating the sidewalk in bloom. Hard to sieve

the bark from the divine. But that was then and this
is Montana. I can learn to love the quickening of autumn,
brace of cool sheets and frost on headlights. I drive to
the orchard but the gate is shut. There, something new

for which the eye can marvel: apples in the tall grass,
pulped in fists of yellow jackets. They bore and work
the chambers, slickened sweet, sugared into reverie. I will not
take the fruit today. I'm compos mentis. But I reminisce

the orchards of Michigan. Hot cider pressed into mugs,
noses dripping in steam, and ribs of vaulted trees over all
as a cathedral. In everything a useful harvest, I know.
But I'm in the hands of slower gods now, and I was hoping

for a sign to take me forward. They rock as if the wind
could carry them off, these omens in the grass. As if
flight was never more than frame of mind.

Whether the world had grown larger or smaller

how could we be children after all in the carcass heat
of summer deep breath of fish pine and smoke clung to
wind off the river frogs we were after wet emeralds
peeking through the murk but we would not step

in the shadow of the culvert wide yawn like a snake
we have our fears we child-angels you carried
a white bucket I struck up to my elbows in frog-thick
waters these frogs once bucketed sought a corner not to be found

this bucket with round-bottom soon set the bucket in the shade
and shot some hoops the rim haloed a net we tugged with fingers
we tore it the ball found itself in the ditch god it's hot
the grasshoppers kick up dust on the road we wondered

would someone call for dinner wondered maybe
the frogs piled in the bucket and hunkered low emptied
water bottles over the bucket pinched ants in the dirt
dropped ants into the bucket for feed none could know

our frustration it was summer and we were children
we lifted the frogs by the neck wiggled their arms to make them
wave pressed their faces together to make them kiss and when
that bored us too we carried the bucket down the slope to the river
sat the edge of the dock the bucket between us and one by one
scooped and threw the frogs as far as we could

Backyard Woods in Shelby Township, Michigan

we were children canopied by voices in dissent
a plant in the woods it isn't there
sassafras the sweet boiled from root I could never forget
its dinosaur-foot leaf how the old majesties

never truly left earth great blue whale sieves krill through broom-bristle teeth
or anaconda's mouth expanding into the shape of its desire
exactly there were signs all around there were days you

exited the world through messes you made seized words
climbed through them the way others would hoops on a playground
you would admit seductive in utterance the journey of tongue

my face riddled signature of your body not claiming
but being an openness you hung above I below
the strength of your limbs your throat when you laughed
remained until water could sift us to sleep

Poem with Pamplemousse

after sex he talked too loud
after movie theaters didn't talk enough
from far away the mountain snowmelt
seemed to disappear but on the slope
it squelched beneath boot and soaked
ass when sat upon up there the wind
all that could be heard it never ceased
it cleared the ear drums but from afar
the trees the brush had looked so still

I'm Making Neat Piles of Your Ashes

with a toothbrush. It doesn't matter that you aren't dead yet. Teeth decay while you're alive but not after.

I have one wish for when I die, that you gather my teeth. Give one to the river that wanted my life

when I was young, say I forgive it, bend and kiss the water if you feel gracious, it's only water. It doesn't matter that you aren't

dead yet, but it matters that you're alive: I push your ashes with the bristles, slow strokes, into many tiny pyramids of you. Please

place a tooth in the shallows, so the heron I loved might find it, the heron that walked without ripples those quiet mornings, so I might

learn to not disturb. You may disturb the water if you must, when you place my tooth, it's only water. You aren't dead—I haven't learned yet

how to not disturb. Place a tooth on your tongue, imagine how it fit into my mouth, in this way becoming me becoming you. Carry me

for a while. When it's time, let me go. I say this to your ashes.

Marching Band in Street

No need to rise and look from the window. I can feel the heat
forced through slick throats of brass; undercurrent
of mallets rolling on bass heads; splash of cymbals
clapped with gloved hands: Anything is possible on a Tuesday
morning. Wake up, sleepy houses! Wake up, dog at neighbor's fence!
We're getting ready for something. The band moves along,
a clamorous serpent dragging its belly. Flurry of flicking wrists, fingers
straining. A tambourine's frenzied rattle. No need to rise and look.
Good morning, car alarm in the distance! Hello, mercy of new day!
We haven't yet had coffee. No paper lies at the door.
We're getting ready for something. We don't know what.

Zealot

If *attention is the beginning of devotion*, you have
made me a hand, puzzling. You're a divot in the gums

and my tongue is too big for my mouth: inscrutable lightning
rod, fulcrum of thought. Does it fit, this piece.

I ask it to fit. Erected in my thoughts
is a shrine where you take geological shape

amalgam of all the names and shades
others have given you in me. That's why I turn.

This does not hold. I'm raising the pyre
I'm striking the match. If I am to hold you

it must be *tabula rasa*, cleansed with fire. Already
the pages and bindings, withering. When it's done

I will sieve the remnants, construct a nest
with room to dismantle, reclaim as need arises.

A crow bending beak to spare earth: sift shine from ash.