

January 2007

Small Fretful Passengers

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<https://doi.org/10.7275/296617>

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SMALL FRETFUL PASSENGERS

A Thesis Presented

by

AMY DICKINSON

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

May 2007

MFA Program for Poets and Writers

SMALL FRETFUL PASSENGERS

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by

AMY DICKINSON

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PREFACE

At seven years old, I planned to harness a team of huskies and trap lynx in the Yukon. My peregrine falcon would accompany me. A pack of wolves would adopt me. I would commune with dolphins and occasionally live in the hollowed husk of a burnt tree. At twenty-five, I planned to move to Manhattan, write poems with an abundance of exclamation points, grow wittier and campier, and infiltrate the metropolitan art scene. In between, I ate cheeseburgers and coca-cola and bemoaned the crummy people in this crummy world. I was an ambulance driver, stoically in love in Italy in wartime. I locked a child in the closet so she couldn't see the sun. I piloted a starcraft. I bricked a man into a wall. I was a man bricked into a wall. I watched the southwest turn to dust. I boxed before a crowd of ghastly howling white men. I was moral and righteous and awful and despicable and grotesque and wondrous and wonderful. I was and am an eager reader, ever-ready to be destroyed and remade.

Most books do this to me. The books I remember do this to me. They reveal new ways, of writing, thinking, living, laughing, questioning. The books I love most exercise my imagination and expose possibilities.

I spend a lot of time being confused by the world. Remotely piloted aircraft fly reconnaissance missions over nations. Fish genes are spliced with corn. My brother joins the army. My mom buys sixteen pairs of sweatpants. An Indian farmer must buy new seeds each year because his crops have been engineered to produce infertile seeds. I spend a lot of time in

a state of wonder. I can send a letter to Kosovo! An ostrich swallows stones to aid in digestion! A Venus Fly Trap actually eats flies!

I am not naïve. I am overwhelmed.

In Donald Barthelme's "The School," the children say, "please, please make love with Helen, we require an assertion of value, we are frightened."

Rimbaud "became a fabulous opera."

Frank O'Hara is "not depressed anymore, because Gregory has had the same experience with oranges, and is alive."

When the "wheat leans back toward its own darkness," I, like James Wright, "lean back toward mine."

Pablo Neruda wants to do to me "what spring does to the cherry trees"! Tomaž Šalamun eats blue imagination! Borges speculates that "on some shelf of the universe there lies a total book." After a load of raccoons is tire-ironed to death, George Saunders' 400-pound CEO types invoices and cheery post-burial paragraphs for Humane Raccoon Alternatives.

The word "possibilities" does not imply empty reassurance nor does it necessitate hopeless bewilderment. The books I love most expose possibilities, give me a glimpse at another way of

thinking, making nearly possible the impossible: inhabiting another's perspective. Sometimes I use these spaces to order the world, to upend the world, to laugh at the world, to gaze in awe at the world, to grope for affinity in the world, to distance myself from the world. Sometimes I want the muchness of the world straightforwardly reflected on the page: I have read and loved Tony Hoagland, Lucia Perillo, Frank O'Hara, Barbara Hamby, Allen Ginsberg, and others, for their passionate ramblings. I have read and loved James Wright for his insistence on precision and his willingness to aim for the transcendent phrase or image, Elizabeth Bishop for her sharp and sensuous intelligence, John Ashbery for his intimacy and ceaseless attention. I adore Neruda, Šalamun, Rimbaud, Saunders, Russell Edson, and Dean Young for their invention. Joe Wenderoth's *Letters to Wendys* will have me posing questions until I die. Yusef Komunyakaa manages to meld the concrete and the mythical into a hybrid that sets my lungs on fire. My first reading of Sylvia Plath's *Ariel* produced a similar reaction. I read some writers for their humor, some for their humorlessness. I read the New York Times Science section for the sheer joy, and occasional terror.

Books make, for me, the world bigger. More known, less known, grander, more horrific, stranger, less strange, resonant with history and memory, confused by history and memory. Books do not take me from the world but make me want to move through the world. If I must mention writing—always, I will identify myself, more honestly, as reader—then writing is one more way of moving through the world. I am looking for my best way, will be for a while. And in the meantime, look, here, a man sprouts the

antennae of a cockroach. Look, here, the sea has risen and washed away the facade of Jefferson Davis' Biloxi home. Here, a war rages in the desert. Here, a battle occurs on Mars. Someone's mother has gone missing. Someone discovers a whispering wall. A coyote is playing tricks. No one has enough to eat. All but one have gone blind. Someone is lonely. Someone is trapped in a McDonald's drive-thru. Someone is content. Someone is quizzical, and preparing to ask why.

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ONE

The Wells of Western Arkansas

Good morning, churchmen of Texarkana.

For three hundred years, I have loved your bullet-shredded
shoulders.

I could baptize you in magnolias.

I could straddle your marbled lungs.

Upon closer inspection, divisible mouths, already your teeth are
tiny flowers.

Here's What We Do

You be the Wild West, I'll be a tire swing. You map glaciers,
I'll pilot cruise ships. You banish wristwatches, I'll dismantle
microscopes.

Sneaky and extravagant, we
will despise miniature things, scorn rapid movement. The Cascade
Mountains? May stay. Also stilts. Symphony orchestras. Engine
ladders. The North Pacific Octopus. Ink. Pearl-handled
revolvers? Must go.

We will sleep in tired
volcanoes. We will kiss the cheek of cold lava and whisper, We
understand. We won't care if we don't understand, understanding
the reassurance necessary to geologic shifts. Let's reassure
ourselves:

we are
Egyptian pyramids, we are Baptist churches, we are Brachiosauri,
saguaro cactus, fountains in shopping malls, the Alamo, we are
incapable of certain kinds of division, we hug dull machetes, we
are frightened by diseased aspen. We never saw that photograph
of the Ferris wheel near Chernobyl,

the empty carriages, the town without town, we once thought all
dinosaurs were slow-moving creatures, we wondered what existed
when we shut our eyes, who took that photograph we didn't see.
We didn't see was he outfitted in armor, did he dress like a
spaceman, did he wish himself smaller or quicker, is he grown big
and sad.

Lurleen's Interactive Museum of Ornamental Catastrophe

Lead me through your garden of lost explorers, Lurleen. Ice picks, oxen yokes, sunken ships. Magnolia blossoms tucked like shy moons in the tree. May I hug

Amelia Earhart? May I scratch her bronzed spine? Let's feast on the Boulevard of Norwegian Polar Expeditions. Let's perch the lunch basket on the crumpled propeller of Amundsen's plane. I will juggle the hardboiled eggs. You will perform with your grinding jaws. To aid digestion, let's scale the Andes replica that peeks over the hedge. In the high elevations, we will think clear thin thoughts:

the uncomplicated goodness

of journeys, the idea of undiscovered. May we sway with cast-iron Shackleton in his cast-iron lifeboat? Our near-death amusements, our Tuscaloosa ocean breeze. I know our afternoon's lack of danger is dangerous. I know the Sweet Fern is native to New Brunswick. I am confused about origins, Lurleen. I think we can grow anything here. I think we can mail-order anything. Let's use the kudzu as flight scarves, Lurleen. Let's take on new shapes. Let's learn firsthand about the gray vines of winter.

Population Explosion, In Which the Census Takers Grow Confused

I am thankful the corpses have not awoken in anger. They display manual dexterity and excel on basketball courts. How light their movements, how unweighted with gloom. Mom moves more gruesomely in the mausoleum of the grocery store. The corpses have spent their fears of death on quail feathers for their caps. They are so polite and dandy. They have not assembled their differing states of decomposition into hierarchy. The corpses delight in the corral of llamas in the morning fog. The mountain looms as an obelisk. What prompts such revival in a small New England town? I am a good student and frightened by flesh. What mandates haunting? Corpse of eighteen-wheeler, corpse of hunger, corpse of reality TV, corpse of insulin injection, corpse of small arms, corpse of Canadian glacier. O, fresh corpses of the 21st century, why do you follow the residents of Amherst in lines like ducklings? Children teach mothers how to mother. I never believed my boyfriend Jimmy about the witches in 1997. Cauldron of handgrenades, cauldron of imaginary quarters, cauldron of sanctions, cauldron of myself. We graduated high school and broke up and Jimmy lives in a Distant Land. Waxy dates, monolithic palms. The corpses tend garden near Emily Dickinson's grave. Their squash are rich and sweet. They share everything they create. They are teaching something about the Cave of the Living. Residents have begun inviting the corpses into homes for tournaments of board games and dishes of custard pie. Nobody even made custard pie before. Nobody called bowls "dishes." The corpses do not like the term "zombies" but understand misunderstanding, and are gentle but persistent in all rebuke.

The Researcher's Assessment of the Coming State of Affairs

She traipses the neighborhood with her Geiger counter and shuttlecock, she's stitched a jumpsuit of doom. Fashionable Olivia, garnished in needlepoint, awaiting the next trembler with lawn games. She brandishes Lemon Tarts on croquet afternoons, twirls her mallet as if a majorette. Is Olivia too airy to bear the sad opacity of her future specter? Olivia's insistence on plumage, her earrings dangling as escapees. I have taken her involvement in garment trade as code. I am charting her niceties. She grows heavy with lace hankies and patchwork coveralls. She has been taught to move lightly. I am inclined to predict a trajectory of shovels, more durable fabrics and heartier cuisine, response to disaster rather than ornamentation, but I am inclined to my inclinations and am unfit for research.

This Calendar

Last Tuesday a nine-year-old graced my doorstep
lowing "In My Solitude" with six decades' experience.
She carried a one-eyed koala under her arm
and refused invitations to join me inside
for brown-sugared oatmeal. Hers was the grace
of the unrequested, like last Tuesday
which no one asked for but everyone
expected. I expect intimate knowledge of infinite
equations, and last Tuesday daily. More
of its adolescent mourners, its bleached gourds
pleasant and heavy in my palms, its angels'
reincarnations as soap bubbles. Divine beings
are reborn last Tuesday amidst the thankless motion
of people, for which I am thankful, but not
last Tuesday. Last Tuesday's thanks were reserved
for the small indignities of those in costume,
the man traversing the town common as an upright
frog-giant. I only knew he was a man because he bellowed,
Can't you see I am a frog! An unwillingness to be moved
last Tuesday moved aside, motioned pain ahead
through the heavy doubledoors of the early weekdays.
Perhaps last Tuesday someone should sing gravel-throated
to costumed men, perhaps me, perhaps song
is an affirmation of existence. Last Tuesday
affirms the existence of universal expansion
because I could see things getting farther apart.
Matter was static but the bicycle repair shop
was noticeably more distant, the ivy-curtained
letter-drop no longer footfalls away.
The farmstand two blocks over requires six Tuesdays'
travel, but oh the arrival, the glory of movement
necessitating hang-gliders, Neptune-ready kites.

Small Fretful Passengers

It is hard to trust pretty girls with pretty names. Always ready to smear your lipstick, steal your pet canary. According to Gretel, *No such thing*. But my suitcase is smaller than your suitcase, and haven't we eaten too much fruit cocktail? According to Gretel, *No such thing*. This is not to say trust me. I have a mole with its own set of eyes, but I'm not asking any favors. *It seems to me the butcher knife*. According to Gretel, *No such thing*. It is hard to argue with pretty girls' pretty logics. Always, *Have more fruit cocktail*. Always, *Look at this necklace of bees*. But my suitcase is smaller than your suitcase. According to Gretel, *No such thing*. Where is my canary? *No such thing*. But my canary twanged beautiful bluegrass. But this pineapple is the color of my canary. My pet brother was a canary. My suitcase is heavy with canary seed, and is smaller than your suitcase. *Have more fruit cocktail*. According to Gretel, we are starlets in the arsonist's commercial. We only matter for how we burn. *Look at this necklace of bees*. Maybe I am not a healthy person. Maybe I don't care for more fruit cocktail. Once, I had a canary. *It seems to me the butcher knife*. We traveled dry riverbeds and performed songs for lonely stream-dwellers who plucked their braids as if guitars.

Choreography with Peach Groves

Olivia's in her cheerleading uniform, the leaves of gum trees pirouette. A solicitor of Hank Williams relics telephones. String tie? Tongue swab? Olivia's imaginary lasso, Olivia's jutting hips. Performance! Olivia and her Great Dane swagger down the block. Flipflop. The big lonesomeness of little bits of big stars, the little spectacle of hooded white supremacists at the big state capitol. On Tuesday, a gathering at the gravesite. Banjo, trombone, mandolin: "Your Cheatin' Heart" as the evening thunder gathers. Little musics for big hurts. Big pageants for little ideas. Olivia's cartwheeling, Olivia's Great Dane's trotting away. His leash flutters, a kite tail, not necessarily unnecessary.

Thumbnail

Sometimes breakfast with the ventriloquist grows tough. The waffles belt show tunes. *Hallelujah*, hums the milk. I am not an unholy daughter. The tubers in my garden see that I believe. Bring me a spade for resurrection. Spare me the feigned harmonica of lips. The ventriloquist is every warmaker I've ever known. Mom cultivates ballpoints and pens acrostics about *quantity*. Casualty counter. Shopping carts and time machines. The ventriloquist spoons oatmeal for his dummy and I grieve. Mom is every cave of echoes I've ever wed. I have watched the dummy tap dance. I have seen his fingers purple with cold. Is the dummy unwhispering whispers? The newspaper is shadows and lost ink. Mom loves orthopedic shoes. She can tread so quietly even she doesn't know she's arrived.

Let the Tired Sky Sleep

She is ready with her brief but outlandish anecdote, Mr. Quiz Show. She is ready to introduce herself to the crowd. She was born with gills in the desert beneath a mesquite tree beside a Texaco station during a petroleum shortage after a long war. There was a new moon. Her mother possessed high standards for despair. Of course she needs your help. Of course she was in a position to empathize with the family who bore the faces of people and the bodies of worms. They burrowed through her bed of hyssop. Their smiles under the magnifying glass broke her heart. They were weary of dirt as she is weary of clinging to wind turbines. She wants proper carnivals in this new southwest. She wants no concession stands. She wants no steaks on sticks. The family has no arms with which to grip popsicles. They cannot wield lassoes. What does a Conestoga wagon mean? She will devote her winnings to the construction of a Ferris wheel on the outskirts of an Air Force base near the grounds of an atomic test site. Her lights will blink as distant stars. "Radioactive" will be a campy adjective. Her technology will allow her amusement to avoid detection by radar. Colonels will assume they suffer collective calliope delusions. Her pockets will be warm with loam! This, the first family vacation, will be accompanied by steam organ. The family will engage in disputes of no consequence and snap sullen photographs on park benches. She has studied her trivia well, Mr. Quiz Show. She is wondering if ten thousand factoids make a truth here in a starting place she thought was no starting place. Who dreamed these television studios in Tonopah? She needs audience support. She needs viewers to pay attention. Can they hear after a long war applause in the desert from an attraction peopled with partpeoples as the landscape shifts colors below?

Watch Me Run

I am the straggler in ill-fitting shorts as the middle school P.E. class clods past. I squash crocuses. I sweat profusely. I flip you the bird. You want to love me

in a very small way. You want me to preside over role-playing games clubs. You want my lunch tray upended. Sad, smart me, eyeglassed, smeared with tomato paste.

Look at my pale belly.

Soon, my hair will be long. I will wear it in two buns at the nape of my neck and lift weights. I will eat peanut butter protein shakes. I will thrash to Turkish pop.

You will not trust this combination. You will not believe I shoot quail on purpose, steal war medals from my grandfather's cigar box, call sweet girls "sluts." You will celebrate my trebuchet victories in physics. You will cheer me huddled alone in a bathroom stall. You desire only earnest scribblers in Salinger. You do not like loving difficult things. You want me

momentarily, awkward as a pony, a passing sullen thunder. Anyone

can be veiled eagerness in the instant. Anyone can cringe in a pleasing way. I am running, my shirt wet with revelation, my fingers fat and unjeweled.

Musket, Muslin Shirt, Fried Dough

Sandy gecko, collards quiche. And now Mom's stiff in plank position, tonguing a lozenge, radiating mysticity and ill health. Who strums that dulcimer propped in the corner? Who manufactures selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors? Who senses the shamanic power of the kidney-shaped swimming pool?

Our trivia of household, our lady of Mexican heather and doom,
our city's noose of past.

The first White House of the Confederacy receives a powerwash, the road to Selma shivers with heat. Mom says, Here is spiritual peace, and grills potato wedges. Offering for our unrecognizable ancestors?

Weren't we smaller? Aren't we big

with fear, aren't blooms crouched in our magnolia like doves, don't we honor multiplication, aren't we students of sometimes. Sometimes the reenactors fool us. We are too many years in too many uniforms convinced of too many methods for sad. Mom wants to remember better. Lemonade? Fish and grits? Biscuit and syrup at the Wagon Wheel Café? Our child of scorn and remorse, our cryptic ways of I'm sorry, our updated petticoats, our upholstered past. Exhale, shift position. And now Mom's brittle again with hope.

Excavators of Local Waters

When I was a fat girl I lived
in a pink building beside a pink building
beneath a drawbridge on a regional canal.

I photographed leisure
pontoons. I built a canopy above my bed
and splashed among my sheets

and was a waterway when I was a fat girl.
When I was a fat girl I smiled. I hung
my blouse with amulets against a regional

canal deemed toxic and in need
of rehabilitation by national authorities
who patrolled in regional visors on leisure

pontoons when I was a fat girl
and mystical. When I was
a mystical fat girl I performed

handstands against an arthritic
railing behind a pink building
beside an arthritic friend who completed

shoulder rolls to enhance his range
of motion and died when I was
a mystical fat girl. Then I was

a fat girl who conducted
drawbridge symphonies. I stood
at dawn in summer at attention

in coattails beside a pink building
with a magic wand and invoked
structural adaptation when I was fluid

and a fat girl. When I was
a fat girl and fluid I knew how
to mourn. I followed a sad mermaid

with a terrible cough into a regional
canal and fluttered through mercury
when I was a sad fat girl between locks

for months. When I did not emerge
a sad fat mermaid but a sad fat girl
with little fat and slick with sewage

my skin cracked as a glacier
and as a glacier a horrible moaning echoed
between pink buildings on a regional canal.

Good Night, Good Night

You built a catapult because this was one way to love in November. You stewed ginger root because in November this was one way to engorge with rain. You were looking for one way in November when suddenly everyone's incisors disappeared. November revealed itself a snarky magician, citing "tricks of the trade," scaring everyone from smiles. Then, the bank teller lent you porridge. Toothless kindness, and everyone slept suddenly in spider webs and no one was scared in November except you who failed to grow the requisite limbs. You had only seven, but you had a bat wing and a cup of ginger tea. You suddenly couldn't fly but you tasted like fog on Tuesday mornings in November where if you were looking for one way you wore sunglasses and a trench coat. If you were looking for two ways you wore lip gloss and wooden teeth. If you were looking for three ways you hosted a séance and invoked generals of the revolution. You made yourself a mosaic. You swung your drip torch above manzanita. You couldn't tell a lie, not to November where you loved El Dorado recklessly in flames. You fashioned prosthetics from papier-mâché. You wanted to fit suddenly inside a molecule of hydrogen. You wanted dead lovers. You wanted dead daffodils. You wanted Harry Houdini not to have died from a ruptured appendix. This was one way in November to love. Another way invoked terror and confrontation and you suddenly couldn't fly but you tasted like the hot metal of a tank on Friday evenings in November where if you were looking for one way every day was a holy day, where your bat wing was a trick of the imagination of genealogy. If you were looking for your mother you needed a satellite. If you were looking for proper definitions you needed a cave. Suddenly your television wasn't in love with you. November suddenly wouldn't stand up and face you like your nation. It was a November of sudden deadness and no ways and you couldn't love recklessly in flames inside your molecule of hydrogen because it was too easy. November didn't need to build a catapult because months are born with catapults. You weren't engorged with rain because in November water was scarce and November was always catapulting into November everywhere. In November incisors kept reappearing and nothing was scarier than the sudden sharpness in November of everyone's wolfish smiles.

Please, Follow Me

The sun sets on steel pillars in the Arizona desert. The colossal squid captured in Antarctic waters can sink thousands of feet beneath sea level, and rise. Johnny Appleseed refused shoes but did not perch a metal pot atop his head. Who argues we shouldn't build an embassy in Paris in order to intercept messages from our distant scientific creators? I hold hundreds of cloned thoughts in my head. I hold three apples in my hand, and I can juggle. I hold that my travels through time were more pleasant than my trip to the shopping mall for knee socks. In the Arizona desert I have bled from my thighs. Coyotes have wailed for extra sets of legs. People have been told, You are not people. You are exhaustible machines in false moustaches and masks of sun. Steel pillars are not beautiful in the Arizona desert. This moral judgment is not aesthetic. Creosote is the patchy hair of the desert, and combustible. Incombustible steel pillars are not good conversationalists. The tour guide at the Alamo wore a coonskin cap and could not answer my question regarding the six flags of Texas. *Remember the Alamo* is an impossible command. The human brain's hundred architectures need be multiplied by the earth's six billion humans, and still the equation for memory is incomplete. I have counted 92 steel pillars in the Arizona desert. I have seen uncounted babies born with shriveled wings. Johnny Appleseed's child bride never is counted. Who argues we can't love the colossal squid? In the Arizona desert the horizon is spilled with ink. The mountains are better conversationalists than the Elks at the pancake breakfast. This moral judgment is not unfair. The militiaman's rifle is always screaming, and what kind of conversation is that? *Taste is an abstraction*. Steel pillars are made of steel, and an abstraction. I ate too many abstractions for breakfast. I pinned too many abstractions in my hair. I looked pretty but people kept forgetting to respond to my questions. The letters I write to my friend Antarctica go unanswered, and I find this reassuring. The steel pillars glint like spears in the Arizona sun. They are always yelling about something. Crushed canteens keep blooming like inexhaustible flowers in the scrub.

Post-Introductory Parade, Lentissimo

Aquifer, pretend we never met,

The tired theaters of our hands, the discarded vial of pesticide,

The greasy-lipped woman with no route to Shrewsbury, the showboat
cardinal in winter, the rosary recited in Croatian,

The underground reserves of daffodils, the spiritual seizures of
mothers, the bellows of the healer in West Texas, the endearing
accordion down the hall, the mathematical conversion of miles to
kilometers, the turtle creeping up the stairs of New Hampshire,
the surfers freezing in Cleveland,

I have this refrain, aquifer, about loving everything,

The unfashionable palms of Hollywood, the naked landscape of the
pulpit, the unseen everything, the war fields of crippled
mesquite, the porcelain ghosts of sinks, the old insult of
Corinthians, the simultaneous dream of breaching whales,

My refrain of loving everything, aquifer, my refrain of goodbyes,

My fear of pipes, my misfiring memory chip, my closet of
engineers, my inability to distinguish fears of you from fears
for you, the distant machetes, the quickest rust, the shoeless
feet, the thirsty factories, the thirsty everything, the
mispredicting forecaster,

If you are schooled in scripture, if I might dress you in
history, if I might serve as your humble troubadour of hope,
don't take me seriously, don't weave ribbons through your rocky
hair, you are too pretty already, aquifer, for this refrain of
goodbyes,

For these men in the pancake house, the cactus bristling with
ice, the crashing helicopters, the grafts of apple trees, the
hidden hellos.

TWO

Groundskeeper

You cannot stop petting the precious tire. It hunches like Buddha between pines and baby aspen. A single tread engulfs your palm. You pitch your tent in the wheel well. Your hair smells of rubber.

You compose prayers, you chant at sunset, the trees bud in a rush.

You weave leafy hearts. Soon, the tire is prettier than a high school cheerleader. More delicate, more adorned. Through-hikers withhold comment, and you appreciate such solemnity. A tire like this needs

24 factory hours to cool, a full molten day in mold. You wonder, did the tire think, I will cushion tons of steel in Peru, I am a minor tornado born of Akron, Ohio, I will be abandoned in the Berkshire Mountains. I am taller than a grain silo. The tire needs sustenance and you

stuff pebbles in its hungry crevasses but it refuses to grow. You wrinkle with the sun and harbor resentment of your tire, its lack of acknowledgement, its refusal to evolve. Impervious tire. You do not know how to behave towards those who stand still. You were born of the gospel of enlarge and expand. You thought you recognized the tire.

The tire is so quiet.

You await the first blizzard. When the tire is nothing more than a mound of icy white, you can forget and escape. You hope, please, for the blank smell of winter, for record precipitation, for snowshoes to aid in your flight.

First Draft Index

The ceiling of light bulbs is not hazardous for the reasons you think. A dead writer's crutches haunt a bedroom in Georgia, and visitors weep. Still no snow in Pristina but the old coat of winter unravels and two bombs explode. I built a ceiling of light bulbs because your mouth is a map. One cardinal direction points to my father, one to a live oak in Alabama strung with crystal balls. I hope you have dizzied yourself in circles before, I hope you know what I mean. Sometimes walking on two legs feels unnatural. Sometimes a brother reveals his robot insides but he is a brother. When two bombs explode in Pristina not everyone is sleeping and they are not twins. A dropped crutch in Georgia might echo for weeks. You did not always love caverns but I always loved maps and I built a ceiling of light bulbs to say so. Pristina awaits definition and thousands of scribes create thousands of dictionaries with thousands of entries for *independence*. This is another way to write memory which is another route to a live oak strung with crystal balls. The trees of Alabama are haunted by Alabama. The way to your mouth is through a wormhole. I built a ceiling of light bulbs and I channeled photons. Two light bulbs burst but that was nothing, that was a trip to the hardware store for replacements. There is too much harnessed energy to count but who doesn't like counting. Two bombs, two crutches, 24 time zones, 46 chromosomes. Pile of window glass, mound of feet, mountain of shoes. Your brother is a twin but you are not. You are an echo writing echoes from Pristina. I am a ceiling of light bulbs threatening to explode. Dictionary of hazards, dictionary of mutant genes, dictionary of root systems, dictionary of fungal decay, dictionary of mixed circuitry, dictionary of hanging bodies, dictionary of failed apologies, dictionary of outdated atlases, dictionary of too serious, dictionary of too light, dictionary of bulbs illuming caverns obscuring dictionaries of forgetful scribes.

One Brother the Awkward

One brother evolves. One brother French kisses Baptist preachers. One brother builds windmills atop travel plazas in Arizona. One brother collects quartz. One brother collects pistols. One brother is another brother by prescription, and pistol-whips schoolteachers. He doesn't wear hats. He wears beards. He doesn't say, Let's bathe in dirt as chickens and as chickens roll in our awkward instincts. He says,

one brother passes the collection plate on Sundays. One brother spits in the collection plate on Sundays. One brother forgets how to speak. On Sundays, he is sad in his awkward instincts. Like a tear, his belly overhangs his belt. His sister does not know his children. His sister French kisses Baptist preachers. Baptist preachers evolve. One brother is a movie star in Bombay. One brother trudges

through the rain in New England. One brother pastes a wet leaf to his face and runs screaming into a travel plaza in Arizona. One brother is a pauper in Bombay. One brother is a pauper in a Baptist church. His life lacks ostrich sightings. He thinks instincts preclude awkwardness. He thinks one brother would never run screaming into a travel plaza in Arizona. Travel plazas in Arizona evolve. Brothers expand. Central processing units

shrink. What excellent tools for communication. Ostriches are bottom-heavy. One brother is awkward in the collection plate on Sunday. One brother is another brother by proclamation, and pistol-whips Baptist preachers. He doesn't wear grace. He wears girdles. He doesn't say, Let's peck to the death as chicken-farmed chickens and as chicken-farmed chickens grow susceptible to weak strains of disease. He says, one brother was born

on Sunday. One brother was born in a travel plaza in Arizona. One brother was born after a rainstorm in Bombay. One brother will be beautiful in the pictures. One brother will never understand ostriches. One brother will never stop screaming. One sister will never stop French kissing Baptist preachers. What does the rain in New England mean to an ostrich? An ostrich has no teeth. An ostrich swallows pebbles to aid in digestion. A brother swallows stones and doesn't understand how this gesture is awkward for all involved.

The Bugle Players Bid Good Morning

A pageantry of linden trees, the strains of New Age harp. Mom is sad and carts her Pomeranian to the Pilates studio. A woman in pink leg warmers flaunts her Screaming Pigeon. Welcome home

where every decade is every other decade

decorated in new pastels, garnished with new pastry. Brioche, kolache, apfelstrudel, the Fiestaware gummed with raisins. The river amphitheater hosts competitive clog dances. The calves of toddlers bulge, the chubby fists clench. Concentrate. Mom shares historical aviation statistics over Thai Barley Stir-Fry. She brandishes her badge: Docent, Museum of American Military Air Power. Smile. Might. Mom is sad and plays her breathing tape. Mom tunes the bread machine to Rustic. The memorial downtown honors a country-western singer with a reedy voice. A hubcap from his 1956 Ford F-100 glows. Backlighting. Glass case. Velvet pillows. Eternal flame.

Who inhabits this photo album?

Mom bids on eBay. Lancelot's toenail. A thread of Morgan le Fay's robe. Splinter of the true cross. Peace. Mom is sad and bids too low. The TV movie is brought to her by Hallmark Hall of Fame productions. The Pomeranian licks Mom's dinner plate clean. Mom smiles when she bathes the Pomeranian. The Pomeranian is wet and quivers, and pushes against her in need.

Thrift

What bargains at the Pentagon tag sale, what ample parking, what cappuccino froth, what tidy stacks of bunny skulls on the antennae of automobiles. What cherry blossoms, what canvas totes! How delicious, sunrise in April amid freeway's embrace. How unfortunate, no returns or exchanges on guided-missile frigates. Who guarantees our torpedo? And the wind tunnel, what warranty, what customer support? Sweetheart, look at the precise adjustment of my gauzy scarf. Look at my beckoning wisps and tell me you don't love shopping. Let's do it, let's haul the miniature Fighting Falcon to the front yard, let's declare our ornamental might, let's savor this ginger scone. No more margarine, no more pretense. I've packed the trunk with sand camouflage. What durable fabrics, what surprising animals shaped from balloons. Who envisioned a turquoise mastodon? It's fun to watch tiny tanks in snow globes. Do tiny tanks tread outside Moscow? In the mountains near Kabul? Shake, shake, shake, ever winter, ever wonderland, ever gleaming as the glass-encased artillery. You want that hulking howitzer, you rub it as you would a woman's knee. Come, sip a chocolate malt, calm down. The doo-woppers are snapping their fingers. We need a song and some poodle skirts. What an array of performances, what large sunglasses everywhere. Where's my hankie, and with no hankie, how will I manage my sweat? You tell me: can we lug the howitzer home? You tell me where would we put it, you tell me how would the neighbors feel. Excuse me my crankiness, excuse me my aching toes. You stroll the length of a decommissioned warship in pumps. Let's not stay for the late-day steals. The long shadows cast by sea-rescue boats depress me, and all the good weapons are gone. Tell me you don't love shopping. Tell me my bobby socks aren't a mask for unease. Tell me we'll get home, and we'll stare at our airplane, and we'll dream only of flight. Warm me a cup of cider, dear.

The Significance of Linens

O, Polynesian Night! We are famed for grand beginnings. Arc of ukulele, recorded wash of waves, exclusive rights to Central Alabama's pineapple supply. The hammocks hung as if crescent moons. The casual lean of papier-mâché palms. We lopped the tips of coconuts. We hoisted novelty flags. O Armstrong, O Aldrin. Who remains satisfied? How do you live off the moon? Our grand chandelier twinkled. Our steam trays gleamed. Our predictable schism, our banquet hubris. O San Andreas, O San Jacinto. The fault line of napkins: I championed Tent Fold. Its angles, its elegance. O Pythagoras, O Hippocrates, where is the geometry in Magnolia? Curvy extravagant haphazard pile! My colleague's self-indulgence, my colleague's misguided napkin style. I want to love everyone. I want to honor grace and etiquette. Ugly pseudo-flower, unthinking coworker, goodbye. I do not know if I am sorry. I have scrubbed my bludgeon thoroughly. O Einstein, what separates trivia from consequence? O Hoffa, you are not hiding. O Capone, my income taxes have been paid.

Decollection

You post the vegetable skewers and hydrangea tea candles to an arbitrary residence in South Dakota. Cheese grater, camel saddle, trowel. Goodbye. You thank whim and hoard boxes from the grocer's recycling bin. Floppy disks, potpourri, child's cedar rocker circa 1876. You affix photos of clerks to your refrigerator door: Mr. FedEx, Mr. United Parcel Service. You bow goodnight, stroke their eyebrows. You love them, competent and drably uniformed. Now, a puzzle, the large appliances: you contract, marvel at modern cardboard, bid your washing machine *adieu*. O diminishing superfluity, o shrinking self. You shimmy the Neutron Star Collapse. Aren't you weighty and compact. Aren't you achieving cosmic propriety. Beautiful, shed of trifle. You want a composition

of use and necessity. New and righteous, you

receive an envelope. It contains a photograph. You

witness a mound of belongings in a South Dakota backyard. Lavender pasques bloom. Aren't they dainty, aren't they partially crushed by cookie tins. You hunger for willed unfamiliarity. You are more unwieldy than you imagined. When did you grow so big with rusty mountains and forgotten recipients? What is the secret to scale? A letter accompanies the photograph. You are colossal and newly alarmed, and you must be willing to connect.

Improvisational Genealogy

I do not yet trust my terror expert, preening again on the lawn, stretching his hamstrings on the mildewed bathmat. He proclaims spiritual renovation and arrived on a galloping elk. Poor awkward elk, English-saddled, since released to violets and clover. O forager. Forgive my terror expert. He is new to this now. He sleeps with crochet needles, fears any missed creation, misunderstands, misses his elk. His anxiety is longstanding and understandable and I often misinterpret his intentions. We use his acupuncture accoutrements to dine on boiled corn. Does he understand

we've concocted new use for sharp things? I crack sticks behind his back and study my terror expert's alarm. This is a test. I have trouble with synthesis of results. I discovered my terror

expert constructing a fortress from hubcaps discarded in the woods. I praised his ingenuity. I questioned his felt need. I gnashed my suspicious teeth. Then I rocked him like a baby.

Slowly, we think in insteads.

Let's make a drum set, he said.

To the Man Masquerading as a Sandwich

I understand the musty sweat of advertisement, the ill-placed
eyeholes, the lumbering shuffle of the giant. I too have
frightened children

with my big awkward form.

Ballerina mouse, chocolate milkshake with straw, handheld digital
planner sporting clever T-shirt. I understand how, in costume,
quarters litter the ground. Between clots of bubblegum and blots
of tar, the ground's riches, the ground's tragic detail. You
discover every missed chance for good luck, the many things your
fingers cannot do: curl hello, scratch your mouth, shrink

to pockets. Pray. In costume, your fingers cannot hide. The
inflexible totem of you at the busiest intersection in town, and
nobody says, Thank you. Nobody says, You allow me

to swing my bags with abandon, you

blown-up version of that which I refuse to name. One fluorescent
holiday shopping season, a fearless toddler gripped my leg. I
was a half-torn cinema ticket, he had a mouth ringed in grease.
I'd been goose-stepping beside the box office. I am so sorry,
his mother apologized. Then she made him let go.

Cordial Invitation to the Unveiling of the New Fall Line

Olivia dances the BugZapper Dirge. Aren't we pretty in our citronella fog? The Mosquito Perfumery promised a pleasant sheen to unpleasant activities. Aren't we artful in our aversive couture? Our chiffon netting, our Milanese goggles. We accentuate the positive. We perform nightly calf raises.

Our needs produce needs. Already, we've sacrificed the cicadas. We concoct insects to repel. Leopardworms, pueblo beetles, sweaty brows: how difficult to sustain Swampy Chic. What is the life cycle of this season? Our resourceful fashions, our need for protection, our Electronic Cricket runway accompaniment. We replace replacements. We want badly for cocoons. We are having trouble distinguishing appetites. Do we desire soft synthetics? Do we covet pure lamb's wool? Does Olivia assemblé in ecstasy? Is this a funereal attempt to spring away? We curtsy. We distribute pet grasshoppers as parting gifts. We line each cage, with velvet, by hand.

Thumbnail

And if the family cuddles the Crucifixion Thorn? The kitchen already was half-desert and our thumbs are prettier when they bleed. Red: nature's poem for *grandiose*. Sure, we pity the postman. Swordless. Lone pilot of an ungainly automobile. Maintain distance: we've compiled a binder on this theme. Unbeknownst to the family, I exchange love notes with machines. The local anchorwoman shrills *astronomical proportions!* I whisper to the lottery dispenser, *Your gorgeous efficiency, your user-friendly facade*. Some lucky horse doctor counts his waterbeds. I crack my secret in the frying pan. In my dreams I am splashing. The local anchorwoman expresses *concern*. The family plays this game called *doubt*. And if the well water ran dry? Nothing stops the ballads of certain TV personalities. See family binder, section 14. In no way are we frightened Englishmen, slaughtering turkeys suspected of disease. Trust in the feedlot: we perform this skit on holidays. We adore repeat viewing. The local anchorwoman secrets insects beneath her suit. The insects resemble armymen. And if she is a Johnny Appleseed, half her head mauled by smile? See family binder, section 1. In no way are we loony misrememberers. Never will we perch pots on our skulls. Always we read the biographical accounts of heroes, always we catalogue dignity. Silence: the family's poem for *true*. *Doomsday!* screeches the anchorwoman. Unbeknownst to the family, I hurl beechnuts into space. I am wanting collisions. There is this ring of orbital debris. In the pantry, a splintering nest of brooms. In the kitchen, the family with needles, a growing pile of sweaters for the flood.

The Certified Hypnotist

does not wear centrifuges. He appreciates the local museum of paleontology as much as the next guy. The next guy stores his heart in a mason jar. In the cellar of the certified hypnotist, the heart of the next guy pumps beneath apricot preserves. When the certified hypnotist cannot shake his gloom, he cans. Cinnamon apples? String beans? What does he know of banjos? People expect a lot from a certified hypnotist. The next guy does not wonder how a keeper of hearts might feel. The next guy weeps over his Golden Rule. He got it mail-order and cheap and it refuses to sprout. His Golden Rule is supposed to loom over sequoia and bare incisors. In the soil it seems a navy bean. Quiet child. What good is a heart substitute if it will not substitute? What good is a heart keeper if it will not keep? Sometimes the certified hypnotist thinks to paint his sweater with spirals. He longs to be that certified hypnotist for me and you and the next guy but he has no room in his cellar for paint.

Escapology

You have never climbed into an iron coffin. You have never plunged beneath the icy Niagara. You know nothing of shackles as you dangle thirty-two stories above the metropolis. You sport no devilish smile in the face of danger. Watch me levitate. Watch the tusked African elephant disappear. Reach into my pocket, retrieve your diamond earrings. There is so much you can do without

without noticing

I have spent days submerged in bathtubs. My well-trained lungs, my weathered straightjackets, my tuxedo of chain and steel locks. Collected absence. When did peacocks grow insincere? The spiritual frauds I have exposed were easy to recognize as frauds. Candlelit rooms do not manufacture ghosts. My final illusion will involve the automotive plant near the discount furniture retail outlet.

Will I escape? I have begun

to question the word. There is no charge for admission. Look closely, you will be amazed, I will be accompanied by the 1934 Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra. Watch the woodwinds shiver, hear the oboes moan.

Come In, Sit Down, Have Some Tea

Olivia in her rhinestone goggles and conquistador commemorative blouse, Olivia's turkey vulture chained to the palm tree near the front door. Collecting Olivia, our Olivia of Collections, neighborly visits accompanied by candelabra. Olivia honors

atmosphere, her binder filled with skyrocketing property value, hair teased into crowns. Almond barquette? Personal steeple? Bowling center cum retirement home? No one shuns Olivia, her nomadic medley of care, her making of instant magi. She lays fancy carpets, introduces fancy pets. Our cage of cormorants, our bathtub of Chilean Sea Bass! Our many days spent weeping at our pre-Olivian plank walls. Splinters, knotholes, blankness, despair.

We are much shinier

now, our pastries more intricate, our bellies stenciled with detailed replicas of architectural masterpieces. We sometimes mistake our neighbors for the Alhambra or the Palace of Versailles. We have adopted petticoats of red velvet rope. We are too exquisite

to touch, Olivia says. Unbeknownst to Olivia, we have formed a quiet Society of Architectural Exchange. We are pretty and we are interested in the insides of buildings and we are certain structures might be better used.

Pacific Malady

What to do as the honeybees disappear?
The almond groves reconfigure as ossuaries.
The traveling beekeeper weaves blossoms
among his ribs. The grave of his body is less
sad than the most distant planet but the most distant
almond farmer weeps full her bathtub and scrubs
sadness from her ears. The honeybees spiral
as downed planes. The honeybees sink as luxury
ocean-liners. The overtaxed honeybees suffer
lessened immune systems and insufficient healthcare
infrastructure. Exhausted honeybees, bureaucracy
of fruit, and enter the fantastic archaeologists,
parade of pickaxes and fancy trowels. Unearthed mine car,
unearthed prototype of the American celebrity magazine.
Vanished gubernatorial candidate, California, circa 1952.
Here is Pluto's happiness, crusted in mud. Here is
the beekeeper's blackened fingernail. Here, the remains
of grafted apple clones, diseased. Here is
a can of soda. *Here* lacks honeybee corpses. The almond groves
reconfigure as ruins. The traveling beekeeper
does not travel. His chest is the most beautiful
garden. His face is the most lost sailboat. The almond
farmer hides the Bermuda Triangle of her head and is
ashamed. For what to do as the honeybees disappear?
Honeybees arrive from Spain singing Spanish songs. This is
lovely but never lasts. The traveling beekeeper's
tent is made of wood, like the almond farmer's
sadness, like the missing honeybees' wings, like the teeth
of George Washington, like the false panel in the farmhouse
shielding the passageway to the former Pacific coast.
For *here* means honeybees disappear. For *here* is
there reconfigured. For the almond farmer wants
to feed someone and the traveling beekeeper has
sacrificed his stomach and cross-pollination is taxing
and colonies collapse. When the almond trees blossom
they are sometimes mistaken for the traveling beekeeper
and neither misrecognition bears fruit.

The Possibility of Heroism at the Fancy Gadget Store

She pipes in music from the Plutinos. Her inventory of holographic back-up singers dwindles. She paints her awning in stripes. She weaves a hooded shawl of proprietary benevolence. It resembles her mother, her customer base inflates, she enjoys ancestral kindness. She powers her weaver with bio-diesel recycled from area cookeries. Why has her arborist fled? She sold her lawn vacuum, forsook her distensible rake, bowed to the wisdom of decomposing leaves. She understands the necessity of the vertical trench, crafts sculptures textured with mulch. She adores the word "grow." She misses her traveling arborist, rural forester, satchel filled with the bark of live oak. Her hip is reinforced by a titanium plate. Her father was half-android. She totes an automatic whisk. Her arborist professed devotion to Sitka spruce, adolcesced in a limestone cave. O repeated history, o star-crossed love. Rejected limbs and rain forests of Washington. O hybridity. If she trekked to the base of a Sequoia, would she know how properly to behave? She wants to integrate her wants. She referred to roots as circuitry, he needed a paper bag to help him breathe. She can be historical and hopeful. She can envision breeds. Her lungs are one-quarter iron and strong and will power her for great distances, if great distances she chooses to go.

Day in the Life

You suspend bridges in Tokyo.

You map the molecular structures of parakeets.

You raise gardens of Voodoo Lilies from winter.

You discover the last leaf in New England while lazily stirring spaghetti bolognese on a campfire stove.

You put NASA on hold so you might reset the bones of a neighbor's bulldog's hind leg, without distraction.

Renewable rocket fuel propels your motorbike, which broke world speed records at Phillip Island's Motocross Finals and was crafted, by you, from discarded candy wrappers.

Yesterday, a gift arrived from the boy whose life you saved during a Nepalese peak expedition. It was a wallet-sized photograph and a stick of strawberry gum, which you chewed while examining his smiling face, and did not shed a tear.

You split atoms. You rearrange physical bodies by welding strands of DNA. You compose original songs with fourteen separate stringed instruments but have failed to master the Celtic folk harp, or save my life. Don't worry. I do not mind. I am content to watch you hunched over the kitchen table, rewiring the remote starter for your personal spacecraft to Centauri, which at 4.2 light years is, even for you, not close enough.

Fred Astaire's Unusually Large Hands

my unusually small canary, your unusually hopeful kidney, our unusually extravagant postman, his satchel of gold lamé, their dustbowl despair, your stained teeth, my shiny shears, my prune face, your crooked spine, their diseased shrubs, our midnight, Prague's skyline, and Fred Astaire's unusually large hands. The museum's unexpected pathos, the magician's unusually doomed grin, your belly of flowering gardenia, my ivy-overgrown braids, her blouse of tortoise shells, our distaste, our prune faces, and Fred Astaire's unusually large hands. Our swift feet, his impossible sadness, Our Lady's revelations in fingernails, her impossible robes, his crooked top hat, their impossible sadness, our hideous impossible selves, our peg legs, our bee-stung necks, our flapping jowls, and Fred Astaire's unusually large hands exploding in unusual formations. The migratory routes of Fred Astaire's hands, the Roman candles of Fred Astaire's hands, the unusually large possibility of Fred Astaire's unusual appendages, the many ways of "hands." Your hands, my hands, our cave of hieroglyphs, your steeple, my monarch, their fists. Their prune faces, our crooked skeletons, the unusually dancing facade of the Nationale-Nederlanden, the totem of partners, our impossibly collapsing selves, and Fred Astaire's unusually large hands blooming for an unusually brief moment on an unusually dim stage as the cereus opens in the desert like something we want always to never see again.

Tour for the Lepidopterist in August

Might I escort you beyond Brownsville, Mr. Nabokov? Here, the snout species clogs the grilles of eighteen-wheelers. Let's wade through the carcasses of butterflies, the stalled Peterbilts. Let's catalogue our gorgeous interstate catastrophe. Aren't we cute and unsure of ourselves beyond Brownsville.

Aren't we without our machinery.

Might I offer you a cold beverage, Mr. Nabokov? Let's wait along the highway for Jesus. Impromptu tent fellowship offers zucchini casserole and spaghetti pie. After supper, our chefs pray for mechanics come like magi. Slip into the refrigerated truck. Eat some canned pears. Might we return to Brownsville from this overheated interstate, Mr. Nabokov? Let's fashion wings from wings, butterfly nets from discarded cans of fruit cocktail. Tell me about acceptable uses

for plagues, tell me how the insect hobbyists arrived here, how they are happy and without fear, if butterflies do not gnaw rubber. We cannot think

past our standard means for movement

beyond Brownsville. Too much pretty alarms me, too much stillness. Let's give thanks. To butterflies? wheels? what comes next? Where do you come from, Mr. Nabokov, how did you hear of our butterflies, did you know of our need, did you know we decipher signs in divergent ways? Tell me this is fruitful, Mr. Nabokov, tell me of the necessity of signs, I have trusted you before, tell me you have a new method of travel and, please, bring me along.

Let's Watch TV, Jimmy, and I'll Unbraid Your Hair

Because the police telephoned, Jimmy. You laugh, okay, and then request circuitry pie because I made circuitry pie. Let's slice wedges and look how pretty. Red wire, white wire, yellow wire, blue. Let's not eat circuitry pie, Jimmy. Because the flag needs lowered. I am mourning the passing of October, okay. I am scared of electrocution. Didn't you notice my shawl of gourds, didn't you notice my decomposition? I am practically naked, Jimmy, and cold, and winter's coming, and it snows. Because no one drinks vanilla cokes with ice here, okay. I owe \$4000 in parking tickets. I have no car, Jimmy. I stand at a meter and smile and the parking attendant scrawls love notes on his little yellow pad. We wrote you a sonnet, Jimmy, about our terrible selves. We like kissing but not each other. I want to move to that place with that pink sky in that magazine. Lick life like a lollipop, okay. Let's smile falsely with our watermelon rinds. When the police telephoned, Jimmy, I told them the pumpkin patch in my belly was ripe for picking. I told them our electronic keyboard was challenging because it refused to follow directions. One officer said his name was Officer Rapunzel but I didn't believe him but he gave me his badge number and sure enough our upstanding police force confirmed his existence. Officer Rapunzel made me an offer, Jimmy. He said there are closer ways of being with the world. He said he buried his gun and holster beneath a birch tree in Nevada but I didn't believe there were birch trees in Nevada but he gave me their badge numbers and sure enough our upstanding police force confirmed their existence. Because you wear incredulity like a bear suit, Jimmy. You look sweet and inauthentic. I would make a television program about you. I love you that much. I want to love you that much beneath that pink sky in that Nevada. I like kissing, okay. The electronics here are unruly. I hung up the telephone on the police, Jimmy. They were kind but they wore incredulity like skin. Maybe we should hightail it out of town, okay. Talking mice confuse me anyway. I just wanted something to be excited about. Your ligaments are beautiful. Your joints make me swoon. Jimmy, let's pedal our legs till we're half-windmill, half-unseen.

Trapped in the Cable Car

The former chorale director led us in rounds: "Yellow Rose of Texas," 1980s arena rock, an Air Force hymn. The kindergartener urinated in a 64-ounce plastic cup. People contrived

final meals. Bloody ribeye, goat cheese soufflé, strawberry milk. The operator questioned his contraption's existence. Where, in the hierarchy of novelty, does the plains cable car lie? From above,

stunted mesquites resemble unbrushed heads of hair. Outside Amarillo, Cadillacs protrude from the ground, a sheaf of spent arrows. If it weren't for the adolescent pep squad captain, we might have hurled ourselves to our deaths. She gave us

new hairdos, a dozen variations on braids. I requested three, newfangled triceratops. It seemed important to honor lost things. I would've shaped my hair into Atlantis, woolly mammoths, Mount St. Helens, steam locomotives. The city councilman's close-shorn head mirrored the Venetian skyline, the flight attendant's the unraveling thread of a spider's thorax.

Weren't we beautiful? Afterward,

safely grounded, we yanked elastics loose. We became people again, survivor people in the midst of reporter people, with people hair and people responses, people memories, people ways of returning to our people homes.

THREE

After James Nachtwey

The war photographer somehow maintains hope, as does the Sudanese man smiling while a skull lurks in the tall grasses near his feet. The Sudanese man, perhaps, is unaware of this skull, but that is not to say he is unaware of skulls.

Recognition and response characterize much cognitive function.

I do not know the Sudanese man's name.

Look, out the window: November air collides like a thousand birds of physics.

Hysterical Podiatry

O, Mallouf Boot Shop, circa 1943, where do you store
the signed sneakers of former President Lyndon Baines Johnson?
O, former President Lyndon Baines Johnson, you fail
to trod Connecticut Avenue in primitive athletic shoes.
O, Dallas, TX, we the young people of Congressional District 19
are wary and share this commonality with former Presidents.
O, young people of Congressional District 19, I like your pointy
boots
and their pointy reasons. O, Mallouf Boot Shop, circa 1943,
I have visited the former Footwear Capital of the USA. Pardon
my disloyalty. Pardon the boxing shoe of Primo Carnera.
It stretches longer than my femur. I am not so small
as to make this unfabulous. I am like and like the young people
of Congressional District 19 who refuse to stretch
the truth though stretch their belief to aid the Mallouf Boot
Shop,
circa 1943. It is fabulous to believe in the greening cash
register.
It is fabulous to stand beneath glowing neon on Cypress Street
in west Texas at night. It is hard not to believe in the pretty
revolver
in the green velvet case in the heart of the beautifully restored
downtown. It is hard not to believe in cowboys. In 1843
it was hard to believe the train would travel
beyond Congressional District 19. It was hard
to believe in Congressional District 19. O, young people
of Congressional District 19, I believe the Quick Beefs
necklacing the Dallas metropolitan area are terrifying. I
believe
you might mistake a photograph of Riyadh for your hometown.
Dust storms are fabulous. Former President Lyndon Baines Johnson
appears in wax in the highlands of New Mexico. The Kingdom
Center shopping mall appears a sewing needle
on the Riyadh horizon. The armored cars appear to be
armored cars on the Eskan Village Air Base. No one is
fooling anyone. The adobe bread oven is
fabulous. The beautifully restored downtown
of Congressional District 19 is deserted. O, Mallouf
Boot Shop, circa 1943, this is not for want of trying.
Your hand-stitchery is fabulous. O, Dallas, TX, your 1.1 million
ghosts own so many recreational speedboats. O, young people
of Congressional District 19, it is hard to fathom chains
of events. Former President Lyndon Baines Johnson is
dead. We do not eulogize. We cluster at Mallouf's Boot Shop,
circa 1943, in the beautifully deserted downtown of the future
Congressional District 19 and finger the 27 varieties of leather,
the plank floors, the pedal-pump Singer, and the shoehorn
that eases the fit of shoes in need of feet.

Plot and Graph

Your body makes its own heat.
Titan boasts an atmosphere conducive to hydrocarbon rain.
Two protesters were shot in Pristina which boasts
60% unemployment and an atmosphere conducive
to hydrocarbon rain. Your homeothermy enables
your independence which enables your illusory
notion that groceries resemble independence.
Certain theorems make your lungs catch fire.
The grocery resembles your most-loved shopping mall
which resembles your most-loved mother who resembles
an exiled fairy tale. Titan's atmosphere is thick
with nitrogen and expectation. A reindeer will never
get frostbite, and your body makes its own heat.
Seventeen men discovered in Baghdad, seventeen men with bodies
of maps with conflicting legends. Twisted munitions truck,
composers of television anthems, crane shot of blue heron
with gracefully tucked leg. You wear dozens
of graceful screens but you are clumsy, though your body
makes its own heat. Outside resembles the margins
of old maps, sea-monstered, clumsily sketched. The Hydra
pokes its heads through waves. Sepia tones indicate ancient.
But the great blue whale is greater than three
cargo cars filled with oranges destined
for Pennsylvania which is sharply sketched but less than
or equal to a hog-nosed bat whose body
makes its own bee-sized heat. Titan's interior is
frozen. The sidewalk before the patisserie in Pristina
is frozen. You do not know if blood freezes. Certain
questions melt your teeth to daggers. You are
ectothermically unsuited to freezing. Your dictionary
of misused words is greater than your bible of belief.
You are doing your best to love songs that are awful
but sincere. Your skin smells like garlic and this is enough
wonder for any one, any day. You only once have touched
a rifle. Certain equations for luxury make
pocked limestone of your skull. There is a room
in which sit numerous cartographers whose work
will never be complete. Does this make them
human? The map of Titan resembles an exiled fairy tale.
Exile indicates gone but not forgotten. The ancient remains
of Ulplana lie near Pristina. The modern remains
of Prescott lie beneath a reservoir in Massachusetts.
Your body makes its own heat but your extremities
especially are susceptible to frostbite.
Does this make them human? Certain potions make you
smaller. Certain helicopters relay images of tanks
necklacing a city. You have seen humans
walking in places where humans aren't supposed to be.

Welcome Back to the Flatlands

Your buffalo was no wilder than my own.
You plaited his shagged beard, rivered braids
with turquoise ribbon, whooped

past the Dairy Queen at noon. Your bottles
of buffalo foam rainbowed the sill. The light
illuminates his effort, you said. I want

to elevate this strain. You rested your forehead
on your buffalo's snout. Your inevitable relationship
with your buffalo made you sad. His hooves curved

as crescent moons. Your collection evaporated.
You stamped your clumsy foot, swung your head.
This escape to the atmosphere! you cried. Nothing

remains! Your buffalo scraped his back
along fence posts. His eyes rolled wild
in bliss. You rushed to assist: your wire brushes,

your satchel of backscratchers. You'd purchased
all the buffalo accoutrements. Your buffalo waited,
did not paw the ground. I knew your patient buffalo

would leave. Forgive me my secret. You fed him
Prairie Grass, blade by blade. My collection
tainted his effort, you said. You collected your hope,

I replied. We must honor reintroductions,
you insisted, or face replication of doom.
I failed you when I said, Take my buffalo.

I motioned out the historyless window,
to my green-braided buffalo, grazing in the moment
without moment, like any old buffalo, in any old time.

Against Avatars

Your robot burrowed in moss and was taller than my robot. My robot slept with his TV. My robot purchased a 2,347-square-foot single-family home. My robot wanted to be part of US census data. My robot affixed a marquee to the front door and denoted his residence "Fort Salt." He feared iodine deficiency. My robot was teaching himself to cringe. Your robot said my robot's insistence on breakfast digi-puffs bore no fruit. My robot did not appreciate puns. My robot told your robot a big house was equivalent to big hope. Your robot strung my robot a necklace of Plutos. My robot told your robot it was the saddest necklace. My robot asked your robot how to cringe. Your robot produced a catalogue of mistakes. Wasted electricity, fringed vests, papier-mâché suns, impossible caskets. Hallelujah. Catalogue of galactic improprieties. Your robot demanded to know why every robot carries cheat sheets. My robot said he did not order that catalogue. That catalogue just arrived. According to your robot, that catalogue was a bunch of little catalogues. According to your robot, the proper arrangement of catalogues meant catalogues would no longer exist. Fourteen capsules of Mom existed in the medicine cabinet. Fifteen capsules of Brother grew cold in the pantry. Our robots kept logs and were organized but had disorganized dreams. Bats exploded from bridges. Canary skeletons performed waltzes. Your robot reminded my robot to reevaluate locomotor strategies. My robot said, This is the thirty-second consecutive day without sun. Your robot asked where that catalogue came from. My robot removed his false eyebrows. My robot admitted the holographic nature of his home. Your robot offered to stew some maps. My robot accepted. He was hungry. Your robot wielded wooden spoons with grace.

Thumbnail

According to my churchman, I am a righteous maraca. I have the Holy Spirit shakes. Unsurprisingly, Dad is a wrecked fast in a cheerleader wig. Our options? *Mitigation, adaptation, suffering*. I sleep with a computer named Tony. My pet glacier calves and I sob in my pillow. Sure, our backyard is a repository for extinct things. Dad: patron saint of endangered fabrics. We are maestros of *larghissimo*. *Misdirected*, my churchman says. Our Paisley Dirge is icy and beautiful as the Arctic Circle. River Dolphin Hymn, Lament for Low-level Seas. My churchman bellows proof of our eternal mistake. Once, Dad opened his mouth and released 5000 hummingbirds. Twice, Dad swallowed fog and perched in the crowns of pecans. Skeptical grackles. Spare-part people. My churchman doesn't even know what *nanobot* means. He drove in from Mukewater Cemetery. He is sweet but ignores the coyote in my ribs. My warless churchman has been engineered for resistance to disease. He alleges evidence of the spotless. Dad arranges vases of ganglia. I believe thousands have died from exposure. I believe in ice-encased cactus. I have never met a tree I didn't forgive. I have never met a woodcut I didn't misinterpret. I want to call myself a cobbler but my churchman says, *Inaccurate*. This morning, Dad looks pretty, like a field of unbroken snow.

We Will Wait Until Everyone Is Quiet Before We Begin

Copy my words. Handwriting counts. For six years I studied calligraphy in an austere hut in the mountains. I vowed silence. Vow to brush your teeth. I will tell Jesus on you. The state bird is the Common Grackle. It commonly devours smaller birds. Zoologists call this cannibalism. The outbreak of West Nile Virus is occurring amongst the American Crow population. The carcasses behind the playground are American Crow carcasses. If you touch the American Crow carcasses, I will tell the Center for Disease Control and Prevention on you. You will be wrapped in plastic. Plastic bags are made from polyethylene. Polyethylene is made from petroleum. You will run out of plastic bags and what will Mom do then. Remember the Alamo? Remember the way the Aspen leaves glint like quarters in the sun. The Aspen are diseased and scientists do not know why, and if we do not know why we can only pretend to fix things. The grove beside the playground in front of the carcasses of the American Crows is a grove of mesquite. I do not know why you are sad. The thorns of new mesquite puncture sneakers. Keep your immunization record in your cubby. I will tell Nurse Nancy on you. Mesquite regenerate from a piece of root. Starfish regenerate lost arms. You regenerate with the assistance of the American Orthotic and Prosthetic Association. Wear your bike helmet. Wear your kneepads. If you cannot afford protective bicycling gear, wear your frown upside down. Today is Breakfast for Lunch. Who doesn't like sausage patties. I will tell Lunch Monitor Chuck on you. Two times two equals four. The human population of the earth has doubled in the past forty years. The West Nile Virus currently afflicting the American Crow population clustered near the mesquite grove has not reversed this trend. Drinkable water is scarce in areas of India. Crisis means a crucial or decisive point in a situation. Eight ounces equals one cup. Drink 64 ounces of water in one day. I will tell Dannon Natural Spring Water on you. I will administer a 400-question essay exam. You will run out of answers and what will Mom do then. Petition for a new state seal? The state animal is the woolly mammoth. The state plant is petrified palm. I do not know why you are sad. Your penmanship has improved, your sense of history matured. You have killed two birds with one stone. I will tell the National Rifle Association on you. You may put down your pencils. You may form a line against the wall. Do not forget your jackets. Do not forget how the playground grows cold with the wind.

We Gallop in Herds on the Island

We gallop in herds on the island.
We sleep rarely and when we sleep we sleep
lightly and so seek other ribcages as anchor.
We wish to mourn as elephants but we

are tuskless and without appendages
in which to store our grief and small.
The island crests big
with dunes. We gallop between one dune

and one more dune and the island
explodes with dunes and the dunes
are magicians. Now we see them, now
we see madrona. Now we perch

in crooks of madrona and whistle
popular songs for madrona and wish
our skin to peel as madrona but we
are smooth as livers

and as livers we must retain big
portions of our small selves
to regrow our small selves. We cannot afford
to slough in this small life on this big

island as the deer bob past in sea water.
We want little release when the deer
bob past in sea water. We think livers
resemble little whales. We take

a show of hands. We declare
our abdomens little oceans. Now
we cradle them, now we
skim krill from sea water to satisfy

the inhabitants of our little abdomens. Only,
we cannot drink sea water and we worry
for our little children and we wish to mourn but now
especially we have little space to fit our grief.

Pecan Bayou

where brother dimwit tells mister sun *my love is atoms thick*,
where his rifle is a magic wand, where peafowl scream river
themes, where sales of rubber tombstones exceed projections by 22
percent,

where sister righteous fears teacher moon, where brother dimwit
dusts false boots with snow, where winter leads the bison hunt,
where inefficient wranglers herd memory, where *half-machine* means
brother dimwit remembers someone's face from before the
interactive saddle behind Trailburgers, where brother dimwit
tells sister righteous *quit recycling your eyeballs*, where
recognize is a statue in the basement of a bottling plant,

where peafowl gulp tree frogs, where peafowl brandish spurs,
where empty shells crunch underfoot, where the pickup shivers and
is scared, where brother dimwit investigates rotten
refrigerators, where so much has spoiled, where empty lunch pails
sing sad songs of the drive, where sister righteous bares her
bouquet of cactus, where brother dimwit positively visualizes the
hunt, where *misinterpretation* means gift,

where feathers half-time mean flight, where a slide rule salvaged
from the Goodnight-Loving Trail charts the growth rate of angels'
wings, where brother dimwit half-time appears holy, where sister
righteous half-time smears her false face with mud, where peafowl
burden the earless with histories of the shift, where brother
dimwit and sister righteous half-time recognize pathology in
pretty ribbon, where brother dimwit and sister righteous
everytime swear they have seen cactus grow mouths to swallow
plains full of snow.

Thumbnail

The latest robotic weaponry resembles my brother. *Here, I say, eat some sausage pizza,* and bullets rush my face. A girl is doomed to misrecognition, offering pizza to all the wrong machines. You should see my splits. Family calls me *microprocessor* for I hold the speediest reaction time. My necklace of munitions burns is delicate and faint. *Queen of the electronic graveyard,* says my brother. *You look pretty in your prom dress,* says my brother with his sad eyes that droop. And don't we adore figure skating competitions on TV. Triple axel, toe walley, double lutz! Family practices in the kitchen on Thursday. Says Dad, *Figure skating is the most useful skill I possess.* Nobody has skates. I have never seen snow and don't want to. Our linoleum smells like daisies. Our freezer makes ice in the shape of bumblebees. Long time ago, Dad was an Olympic invitee. Long time ago, Dad wrestled in tight pants and called thunder from the sky. Family of heroes and winter readiness. On commercials we flip to coverage of the war, we don't know which. My brother has two mechanical parts but he says, *You look pretty in your prom dress. An enhanced me,* he says. He has sad eyes that droop. He loves sausage pizza but that's hazardous.

Proxemics

Who didn't love you in your Twisted Sister cardigan?
When the meteorite decimated Bucolic Hills Gift-Mart
you thrashed your cittern in the well of smoke.
Chest painted with myths of the flood, you aced
your long division. Fucking your octahedral boyfriend
hurt, and you said, *Mom, make me unangled.*
We all agreed this was unfair. You can
only demand so much from the clerk weighing
your bananas at the Super Duper on Treadaway.
Your mother already came back from the dead,
remember? She smelled unnice and was
no mathematician. She was trying to do you a favor
but you thought she'd be happier in the field of lunatic
poppies. She was, and good decision, and no one
begrudges you this choice. Who didn't love you
in the chevron in Madagascar watching the world
ruin itself in a southeasterly direction? In a Chevron
in Mississippi you ripped out your lungs
and bellowed for digital replacements. Who didn't
recall Scarlett O'Hara and plantations and hierarchies
of pain? The things you found in the refrigerators
of New Orleans you weren't supposed to open.
You weren't supposed to open New Orleans, remember?
She smells unnice and is no mathematician. You were
trying to do a favor with your superb long division
but something hurts. Who didn't love your sign
for "unequals," even if the mathematics conferees
shooed you from the complimentary buffet? We all
agreed this was less than generous. We all agreed
you are greater than biscuits. Thighs embroidered
with myths of polar caps, you tracked a wolf
through the alleyways of Alabama. You coined
a new term for "winter." You said, *Mom,*
I am melting, and who didn't recall Oz? You wore
a pair of burlap wings for two weeks in December
and no one couldn't cry. We all agreed we were tired
of being wet and moldy. This was the year
water was scary everywhere every year. Metal bands
weren't actually made of metal. We discovered
this hammock of false equations and tried to rub away
ropy imprints from the backs of our legs. This was when
you revealed your saxophone and counteruinous plan
entitled "Old Seeds and Simple Addition."
Remember? You gripped your cardigan tight.

Mother of Invention

The man who pulled the model T by the strength
of his ringlets understood necessity. The sea monster
who wove kelp into a winter parka understood
restraint. Massachusetts understands pumpkins

and reserve and reserves the right to loneliness.
You are thrifty with reservations, a reaction
to Massachusetts. *Algorithms are small but beautiful.*
The leatherback turtle is large but inhuman. Loneliness

is large but two-dimensional. You cannot live
in loneliness as you live in the shell of the leatherback
turtle. You might have been eaten by avian giants.
Terror birds understood necessity. "Terror birds"

is not a euphemism for "airplanes." Tommy from
Elsewhere understood persistence and in September
penned multiple declarations of devotion. "Tommy"
is not a euphemism for "desire." In September Tommy

misunderstood restraint and lived in September
in loneliness not Massachusetts. Pumpkins ripen
in Massachusetts. Sea monsters weave in Massachusetts.
The man who pulled the Model T by his ringlets

is dead. You calculate reservations grown
with algorithms harvested in Massachusetts. Therefore
in Massachusetts you question your decision
to stitch wings from corn tassels. You do not want

to be understood as someone who longs
to fly. You want to be misunderstood as someone
who understands necessity. Massachusetts makes
no guarantees except those regarding pumpkins.

Algorithms are small but beautiful. Loneliness
is large but sea green. The forecast calls for sun
but makes no guarantees, not to Massachusetts
or you or sea monsters of September. You make

no guarantees to Tommy from Elsewhere.
The leatherback turtle eats jellyfish. You cannot
live in cold sea water as sea monsters live in cold
sea water. And Massachusetts? The "leatherback turtle"

is not a euphemism for "sea monster." Massachusetts is
small but rectangular. Massachusetts beckons
with a crooked finger. Loneliness is uninviting
but small but beautiful.

Poem on Various Cartographies, Religious and Moral

You have been eating jellyfish again, your mouth
a cave for stings. Consider the loneliness
of your Himalayan, an echo in the stairwell.
Consider an echo on Mars. The necessary
atmospheric conditions exists. Goodbye,
San Francisco, goodbye. Shanghai, Boca Raton,
Ellis Island. The Netherlands, an echo
in the stairwell. The surfers of Cleveland
strip icicles from their wetsuits, Lake Erie an echo
in the stairwell. I could say, I am a turtle,
loved for my clumsiness. The necessary
atmospheric conditions exist. I am a turtle, loved
for my iron heart, and you have mistaken
plastic bags for jellyfish again. I could say,
your belly will sprout plastic vines, but this
would be untrue. I could love your cave of stings
because I am good at that. Consider the echo
in the stairwell, the stairwell as a museum, the museum
as an echo of an ice sheet in a history before history.
Gnawing plastic is a sweet mistake. I could hope
for the surfers of Cleveland to develop iron skins.
The necessary atmospheric conditions exist. You
could sit in a cloud of coal smoke and feign
translucence. You could swear surfers glow
as torches on a post-ocean in a prehistoric past.
I could smile like mercury. Listen.
The oldest turtle tromps down the stairwell, echoing
of coasts.

Thumbnail

I hope my slow-motion scissor inspires the android in you. Jimmy calls me *walking talking hope machine* and don't I love binary soup. Yesterday I painted myself gold and crouched behind the hibiscus. I pretended at rising sun for passing automobiles. Folks here get suspicious and I get sad, for the girl who plays cumulonimbus is better trusted. But so. Cumulonimbus doesn't fry eggs on her forearms and what kind of beautiful is that. Eggless, a girl's nothing. Look at this sunny smile. My soul's thrice polished with wax. I've got a grandpa who cracks pecans all day even though he's got no pecans. My family tree's twisted with imagination. Jimmy sings the boll weevil song on the toilet. Mom's one-half scarecrow, and isn't hugging her an adventure. Which appendage will deflate? She screams, *the sacrificial trail of straw!* Twice, I became an owl, for I wanted to see more. When Jimmy feigns moon, he orbits the sofa and is dead. NASA screams, *the shuttle launch! The shuttle launch!* But so. I maintain my ardent support of the International Space Station Mir. Jimmy calls me *Cape Canaveral* and don't I love immortal manatees. One day, it snowed for eighteen days. Restuffing Mom is difficult because then she's new. According to my studies, folks here answer the door one ring out of four. Percentarily speaking, this will have to do. I like holding Jimmy's hand, for our fingers possess telepathy, and I can trust his to scream for pancakes, and breakfast's a healthy way to start the day.

Small Fretful Passengers

Then I lived ten healthy lives, purchased sixteen TVs, and loved each as I would a child. I had an equable system of rotation. I harvested pea shoots in plastic cups and wore denim. My TVs were swaddled in 96% pure lambswool. I was only 4% negligent. This seemed acceptable. My boyfriend Jimmy called me very accepting. My tiny concessions included aerosol hairspray and Styrofoam cups. My brother had no colon. I plotted beautiful graphs of beautiful body parts. The hole in Mom's sternum meant nothing. The hole in my face was a fifth mouth. I photographed beautifully healthy machines in my ten healthy lives. When strangers visited, they thumbed through my family album. My strangers assured me they adored chrome. I fed them biscuits. This seemed acceptable. My TVs called me very accepting. I was frightened of canaries. This was inexplicable. Explicable fears included corrosive acid and poisoned lace. Do you love your mother? Do you bathe your brother's feet in tubs of lukewarm water? Have you swum in Lake Fort Phantom? I thought ghosts would occupy less space. I thought ghosts wouldn't care for sunbaths. Ghosts never made room on the sand. Ghosts never shared beach towels. This didn't seem acceptable. My boyfriend Jimmy massaged oil into my shoulders. I begrudged ghosts their hauntings. My TVs called me very accepting. I was only 4% hungry. My tiny snacks included beautiful graphs of my strangers' hopes and corroded screws. I understood myself as metal. A Russian intelligence agent died hairless in a hospital of poisoning. I tipped my umbrellas with memories. There were eight Major Wars. There were sixteen Lesser Conflicts. The margin of error was +/- 4%. My TVs called me very accepting. My boyfriend Jimmy massaged oil into my shoulders. I smeared my belly with self-tanning cream because ghosts hogged the shoreline. I had an equable system of rotation. Acceptable fears included terrorists and dark. The hole in my face projected images. I photographed beautifully healthy selves in beautiful healthy lives. My boyfriend Jimmy resembled a hero of the Wild West with his handlebar mustache. My strangers assured me they adored exaggerated machines. I fed them crumpets shaped like platitudes. Do you institute equable systems of rotation? Do you garden pea shoots in your windowsill? I was only 4% negligent. I was frightened of canaries. This seemed acceptable. I said I didn't hoard my healthy lives. I said I would look closely at my beach towel and I would share.

Travels with the Undead

We were a fabulous opera. I was a teenage werewolf. I concocted jingles for my Arizona mummies, whom I discovered in Scottsdale, quaking from the sun, fearful of local broadcasts. O Scottsdale, o nightly anchors' teeth, o militiamen. I was childless and sad, lone commuter en route to Alabama. I was four empty seatbelts. I was hairy, possessed of too many appetites. I was gunless. In my trunk, twelve bushels of turnips, each turnip a face. We were destined for the Museum of Wonder. It housed an olive that resembled world peace. My mummies and I paused at scenic vistas and wept. We gazed in the trunk. Each turnip seemed a younger sister. Longago, Faraway. O the sodden rags bordering my mummies' eyes. I distributed beach towels. I loved them who mourned so well. We departed borders, we approached borders. Then the ocean and we sang in unison, aria for boundaries we understood. We were capable of such praise. We were capable of kindness. We did not eat the flesh of human beings. We spied the thick arms of the live oak. We deposited the car. We filled our rucksacks with produce. We entered the foliage, only partially recovered from the storm.