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How to Write a Poem

Start with a simile.
Maybe the wind moves like a crowd of businessmen, or perhaps October is like the last colored photograph before a series of black and white.

Better yet, forget the simile. The reader probably will anyway. What you need is an image—the brief bulge of a collar bone underlining the neck.

No, scratch that. It’s the metaphor that’s the bicep of the poem. You could say, for example, that your lover’s arm is a noose, and that will mean power struggle, vulnerability, suffocation. That will mean a fifty minute lecture in Poetry 101 about the implications of violence in monogamous relationships.

Readers like to feel entitled to their own interpretations, so maybe symbolism is your best bet. Choice A: the snow represents loneliness. Choice B: it is an escape.
Choice C: it is the point where someone rolls their eyes and says, maybe the snow is just snow — ever think of that?

Once you have the meat of the poem pounded upon the paper, alliteration’s an amazing adhesive. Quiet quivers, or languid lust. Hands hunting the hurt while clawing catastrophes out of a muddled memory.

Actually, forget the tongue twisters. This is poetry, not the second grade. Just remember to avoid clichés like the plague. Readers like to be impressed, and the good ones know all the old tricks: the heart as hollow, the rain as tears, the poem as possibility.
This would all be much easier
If one could locate its origin.
This being the relative pronoun
Referring somewhat farther
Back (space or time, you pick),
Farther than the moment Plato
Sealed us in a backlit cave. Though
Instead I think he gave the candle a wick.

At which Homer’s sons and daughters
Unstrung their lyres, their mottled eyes
Dilating in light, and became keener
For the stars and pallbearers to the skies,

Which is to say I don’t remember
When I began to write lightly. Or if I did.
Still, somehow even the two-faced skeptic bid
The idea of stars into his chamber.
late afternoon sun
glows like burnt embers on amber feline,
she lies unquaking,
contemplating a sparrow’s flitter,
on violent violet checkered table cloth,
ants animated as mahogany chess pieces,
india’s swirling black tea aromas are absorbed into flesh.

slanted perspective,
tilted light echoing on an oriental island of jungle threaded
leaves,
museum of autumn is a reminder of laughter springing head first
into piles of half dead leaves,
seen in the flicker of a cat’s second inner eyelid.

the time is now,
when the rhythmic thrust forward of the hand sounding as the
baritone cricket’s chirp encircles the sun god’s face,
the blues jive and jangle from Lou Reed’s head,
spinning like a candy apple on a drum stick,
in concentric circles the vinyl wobbles with the balance of a
drunken sailor.

top hat groove cat swerves to
neon orbs close encounters and jazzed doors,
pit pattering
on the windowsill.
Today I realized while I was eating a tuna sandwich for lunch, that time overlapped, that the world was weaving and unraveling as I ate. That time did that and then it did it again.

While I brushed crumbs off the placemat, cities were sprawling out like kudzu, then dying. Robotic arms stopped feeding children and there was no war. People gasped as artificial hearts were removed.

Man stopped wearing tuxedos and playing rounds of golf. Between bites of tomato, man stooped, walked hunched. Regressed to Cro-Magnon, devoured Neanderthal. Skulls shrank and spines bent.
The straw in my iced tea swirled
like a wormhole that churned
up the universe.
All roaring dark nebulae
and carbonation.
Each ice cube
an ice age.

Suddenly Pangaea.
Creaking continental divides
heaved and redecorated.
My plate rattled on the table
as café
became
Cretaceous.

Some single-celled organisms danced
a flagellum two-step
on the unwashed tabletop.
Lost bones and limbs and teeth
flopped about in
lava pools,
tar
and mayonnaise.

There, the empty plate
of the lunch
that took seven days to finish
and infinity to begin,
is just the void,
devoid of food.
Just a big bang
as it shatters.

Today I realized
while
I was eating a tuna sandwich for lunch,
time folded inward, took a flying leap and landed
flat on its back,
that the world was unraveling
and weaving
as I ate.
That time does that
and then it does it again.
Annie Belz
Late Fall in the Half-Imagined Museum
After Linda Pastan’s “Ethics”

Wyeth’s rugged cliffs are cold with granite
and painting and season are almost one—
a chill that surely sets in each night
in some drafty, half-imagined museum.

And painting and season are almost one,
as walls, painted in neutral tones, fall away
in some drafty, half-imagined museum
where a docent is asleep under a Monet.

As walls, painted in neutral tones, fall away,
self-portraits float, moaning of blue, phantom pain.
Where a docent is asleep under a Monet,
a coastal wind shrieks and it begins to rain.

Self-portraits float, moaning of blue, phantom pain,
bones aching in the damp, dark halls.
A coastal wind shrieks and it begins to rain—
no one will hear their calls.

Bones aching in the damp, dark halls—
a chill that surely sets in each night.
No one will hear their calls:
Wyeth’s rugged cliffs are cold with granite.
“You feel like a clock striking one,” she said. She was going to be a poet. He didn’t like her pre-fabricated conversations; she felt more like a scriptwriter to him.

“How so?” he went along with the trap because he liked her.

“It just seems like there should be more. Like when you talk. I’m always left thinking that, I don’t know, I’m waiting for something that won’t come.”

“That’s a little harsh, you know.”

“Sorry.”

He didn’t want to take what she said seriously because he knew that it probably wasn’t what she felt. She was testing an image, and he just happened to be the victim of her experiment. Still, he wouldn’t ever be used to it.

“Maybe you’re two o’clock.” He waited for her to go on since whatever he said was only to allow for that anyway. “Yes, you’re two. You’re not quite as on edge as one, but not so nice and complete as three. You’re two o’clock with a good pause in between the chimes.”

“Thanks, then.”

They sat in a leaf pile at the edge of the library lawn. The October smile of a sun made him look at his friend with more crispness than usual. The colors made him think in sparks the way that she did, and he felt dangerous. They watched a bicycler trip-wire himself with a terrier’s leash. She trilled like an actress with her throat tossed back and sparrowing out loud notes.

“I’d love to be that bike right now—I’d be having a good laugh,” she said. She wanted him to ask her a question, and he acquiesced.

“What about the dog? I’d rather be him, I think.” And her eyes
glinted the way that they did when she was about to prove him wrong.

“Of course you would. But the bike got to toss him. Now its wheels are just spinning by themselves. I’d have more fun just spinning.”

The dog’s owner kept apologizing to the cursing bicyclist as both tried to untangle the startled animal from the whirling spokes. Every time that the puppy moved, the leash made the wheel spin out of control.

“Why don’t they just unhook him?” he asked. Apparently, the bicyclist was suggesting the same thing. In a moment’s time, there was a brown blur loose on the lawn.

“Look at him go!” she said, clapping her hands. She did that when she wanted to look like Holly Golightly. He knew this because she had told him so.

While the bicyclist chased after the dog, the pet owner struggled with freeing her leash. Politeness or guilt had made them switch charges for the time being. The library clock chimed in with the hour.

“You’re eleven o’clock,” he said suddenly. “You want to be as many numbers as possible, but you’re just uneven enough to be one short.”

The dog’s owner yanked the leash out hard sending the wheel spinning into a blur. She held her prize triumphantly and looked about. Both dog and bicycler were nowhere to be seen.

“I’ve got class,” he said and walked away.
Megan Collins
A Triptych of Mourning

’Twas thy voice, my gentle Mary,
And thine artless, winning smile
That made this world an Eden.”

-“Mary of Argyle,” a traditional Scottish song

The moments after: a crescendo of blue

The word is immense within our throats,
gathering weight as the tears lick our lips.
We all have our own regrets, sitting here
amidst the crumpled tissues, discarded the way
the old writers would a false poem.

And no, I didn’t say goodbye, which is a word
I picture at train stations or airports
as two hands clasp and then divide.
I didn’t kiss you in the hospital either,
but merely rested my cheek against yours,
your lips landing on my earlobe,
my eyes straining to stay stiff
within their sockets.

“Tell me a funny story,” you said,
and I shrugged, my voice gutted,
unable to reach a place as far away as humor.

And that is how I left you,
wrinkled and weak beneath the sheets,
each of your breaths a stilted step
towards sudden white light,
the sky taking you in its hands.

the funeral: white into gray into black

We are all thinking,
nobody knows you or loves you
the way I know you and love you,

and we are all correct.

any given moment, any given year from now:
yellow and yellow and yellow

Daisies in the grocery store, and I think of you,
remembering the garden of your grave that day,
all the flowers matted together
through a lens of tears.

And there are other things, of course—
the way your laughter came in punches
like a typewriter making an ellipsis,
the courage that was a freight train in you,
your hands always shaded with ink
from your crossword puzzles.

These are the things that enter me
during the tiniest moments of a day
(softer than rain, but just as poignant),
pulling me back to that place,
your place, where we bowed our heads, our shoulders shaking in the sunlight.

And here are the words that I will say, my fingers grazing the edges of your name.

Here is a funny story that I would like to tell you…
Tyler Gumb
Simultaneous Infinity

The man on the bus turned to me and said,

reality broke in my hands today, I must have played with it too roughly.

What do you mean?

Your attention;

I was listening to Mozart, no Beethoven,
and my audial layer of reality was awash with stimulus,
as usual so was my visual layer.
(In these Homo sapiens bodies of ours we do partition reality so,
don’t we?)

Now you see, on my audial layer there was a slight stimulus in
the lower left,
by my amygdala.
The slight stimulus ostensibly puttered about this region
just barely there.
It felt as if it were sort of chipping away at dirty bits of plaster
and mildew
in some far reach barely caressed even by light.
Because of the remote location of its work
I barely recognized the nature, let alone intricacies, of this
uncanny impression.
I thought about perceiving it very hard, meaning in ontologica
terms, I actively tried to perceive it very hard.

And as I did this, as I did this!
Reality broke!
(Reality in a partitioned Homo sapiens sense – which is, quite a bastardization of what the word *should be*, in all honesty)

As I did this, my vision, the visual layer connected with my left eye began to merge with the audial layer connected with my left ear.

At first, it was just a crack,
just a hole, where sound was sight and sight was sound,
for you see reality is ... like...
a veil...
no, what I mean,
it is more like...
a projection.
Well not exactly, but in some sense
I had spent my life,
watching a screen,
and separately,
listening to a speaker,
without knowing that the two are coming from a single synthesized source.

Of course now you see the weakness of this simile, humans do not just partition reality into sight and sound, a perfect simile would also incorporate my, and separately, feeling popcorn, and separately, smelling that popcorn, and separately, tasting that popcorn.
Now as I was saying, listen!
As I was saying, at first it was a crack, a crack in this absurd fragmented mess of existence we now inhabit. There existed something behind this crack, I cannot even put it into... Words.

(Language is largely a grandiose reference game. I say a word such as “white light” and you know I am referring to a certain experience that you have had. There is no value in the word itself per se, value only comes in affixing the syllabic structure to a given experience. Since the experience I wish to refer to has, that I know of, not been had by any other Homo sapiens (not even a remotely similar experience has been had) there is no word or set of words I can use to adequately refer.)

Behind this crack...
well for now let us just say the crack grew larger, consuming my entire being.

My entire being!, was consumed digested and regurgitated and now you see, no longer partitioned. Or perhaps I mean, no longer received partitioned sensory input... no I mean, my being was no longer partitioned. For if we can be said to exist as the comprehension of what we receive then we exist in a partitioned form. We comprehend sight and sound, perhaps simultaneously, but nonetheless think of them as
eternally
separate.

In this new realm, in this over-reality, what I was seeing and what I was hearing became stimulus on the same layer of reality. Perhaps it is incorrect to call what I was experiencing stimulus exerted on a single layer. This stimulus was exerting itself on something with depth, perhaps a rectangular simultaneous infinity. For not only was there not partition of stimulus in this realm but there also was not a sequence of stimulus in this realm. The Mozart I had been listening to in reality, I’m sorry I mean the Beethoven, had been transformed from a stream of sound into a canvas of stimulus, ultimate stimulus, universal stimulus. All of the notes in the composition existed simultaneously, but not only that, they existed along with an infinity of stimulus, all the potential stimulus, or should I say all the stimulus to exist and to have existed in all eternity.

I must stress that this is all simultaneous, simultaneous and infinite. Emerging from this simultaneous infinity into a fragmented sequentiality, has it been only a day, is that what I said,
has been a nightmare.
How can you take a vast novel and crush it into a period without doing harm?
I want to die!
This inelegant fragmentation!
This illogical sequentiality!

What was he talking about?
I was scared.

I did not want to die.
Emily Sullivan
Photograph of Saint
Kristin McKelvey
Casting

Let’s sit here
you and I,
your bottle of booze
to match my soda.
And we’ll smoke
those cowboy cigs
and laugh at our destructive
behaviors.
We might not catch a thing,
just some algae
wrapped around
our lines…

I’ll take that pole out from
the dirt and cast off my
morning thoughts
as the loons interject
something I shouldn’t
have ignored—
the place we are.

Tie your line,
looping two lures
onto the end
two-and-a-quarter inches below
and double knotted.
Listen as you throw it out—
reel buzzing as it spins
and snaps with a quick release.
Look how your line bobs.
Tighten the slack.
Change the bait over
and get rid of that thing
in your hair.

The full moon is growing,
becoming more brilliant
as it pushes its way over
the ripples and feeding fish,
where a silent exchange is made—
a symphony of crickets
begins calling to the thin air.

The crawdads want your toes,
creeping out at night
scooting backwards to
flee the place
once they realize we’re here.
And it’s getting too cold
for me to be so happy.

So let’s take the wayward road
and I’ll roll down my window
and you’ll have a smoke,
both of us will be looking outside—
scanning the landscape
thinking to ourselves
and not speaking to each other,
thoughts drifting out with
the lines of smoke
leaving our heavy eyes rested.
I stood at the mouth of the most sacred church in the world as the worst kind of sinner—a disbeliever.

A row of metal detectors, clever inventions of man, could not detect what I imagined the divine could—my heresy—setting alarms off at heaven’s gate.

My hand recoiled from the font of holy water as I recalled the time I caught chicken pox from holy water at my grandmother’s church. I could be risking a worse fate under St. Peter’s watch.

No one seemed to notice that I was trespassing on their sacred ground. I stared blankly at the pure white statues of saints lining the walls and took pictures like everyone else, but I was not like the woman next to me who had to stop, cry, and compose herself before she moved on.
I was in the Vatican, one human step away from Him, and nothing in this church was built for me.

Then I saw the dark figure chiseled into the back wall of the cathedral—no eager tourists stopping to capture this sculpture’s aura—a dark red, marble blanket engulfed a bronze corpse with an exposed ribcage and skeletal arms—one bony hand reached out gripping a golden hourglass, empty.

I imagined the face hidden beneath the blanket transfixed in a scream, the skeleton’s empty fingers twisting toward my head. I stood beneath the figure in awe of the one thing, a magnificent warning, built for me.
Trisha Carr
Childhood Woods

Silence serenades the woods with its cool melody, as smooth as the wind that carries it.
I breathe its song while strolling through the Birch trees, saturated in serenity, my mind wrapped in their branches.

Then,
a splash- of
walnut fur- disrupts
the stillness.

Its hooves not disturbed by the melting molasses mud, it runs swiftly into the depth of the forest, the forest that I used to think started in my backyard and continued to the farthest edge of this spherical earth.
A forever of trees and tranquil space
A moment of illusion
A flash

Back when I was younger my childhood lived in these woods. My own Narnia, Terabithia, Neverland. The forest that snowed magic and shimmered cinnamon sunlight. All just for me.
I’d hop from this tree root over here, to that rock over there, to avoid sludging through the mucky mud.
If I slipped then I lost the game and the stubborn slop would stick to my skin in those sweaty summer hot days.
Spotting a deer was always a lucky treat
though it never stayed long enough,
always running away…

I am tempted to rush after the deer,
to follow it into the pocket of vanilla birches,
escaping further into my fantasy land.
But, it runs from me like I run from my backyard,
and its legs are faster than my own,
even in my childhood woods where magic veils reality.
If only I could walk barefoot in the winter,
My toes, wandering immigrants in the foreign snow
Flirting with the frozen soil.

If only I could yell out silent screams,
Purging myself of bitter frustration,
Being able to simply press ‘mute,’

If only trees were furnished,
Thick trunks of hollow comfort,
With toasty fireside stories
Keeping me sane and warm.

If only God was in my grapefruit,
Staring up at me with a smile and
All the answers.

If only fireflies lived forever,
Friends, in a jar by my bed lighting
Pages that a December moon can’t touch.

If only my dictionary could talk,
A blind leader with an open mind,
And an incapacity for bias
A politician who never forgets your name.

If only I could step hard onto the pedal,
Driving fast, forgetting myself as fields become
A piece of green construction paper.
If only I could change the world
With a sandwich, lemonade, and poetry,
Curing famine and destruction with hopeless words in a black notebook.

If only my pen never stopped moving,
Ink on the pages as natural as the spit on my tongue,
Seeping slowly through boundaries, marking its territory.
Kristin McKelvey
Her Virgin Train

*My voice was drowned in the roar of their voices*
- Richard Wright’s “Between the World and Me”

And then I became moved, the gait of the girl releasing petals onto the floor was weakened by a boisterous organ—it awoke her thought of trampling on a virgin train, smashing it with her heel into the bloodied carpet. My eyes leapt from her budding flower to a row of people engaged.

The chapel doors swung open, extending their arms to admit a china-doll faced woman. No one noticed the already wept upon handkerchief crumpled up in the palm of her hand as she waved goodbye to an etched-out audience sitting as they once did in her dream.

My eyes were affixed to the bleeding red floor that poured its way out from the rear entrance up to the soles of her shoes which were hidden beneath layers of lace. Chests filled with air as the virgin passed each row, releasing it later to take in a kaleidoscopic image of the light beaming into the stained glass windows and then shedding its color onto her white dress.

Noise polluted my own thoughts: a creaking sound of an old man pushing his back and weight into a pew. A woman opening and closing her make-up mirror
to entertain her daughter and coax her interest not into the event—but her own reflection…
The shifting of hips in dolled-up taffeta, so faint but nevertheless present. A boy whimpering for his mother, hugging a hymn book to transpose her frail body into an inanimate object.

And while I listened to these sounds I had a mental conversation. Mindful not to provoke the air. My face was on her, gazing up on her brilliance; her hair, an auburn glow with no unruly strands leaving the head—flawless. I wasn’t looking at a familiar scene.

The march was quick—a black and white film, with a child lurking behind the altar not meeting eyes with the camera— A recessional of heads tilting, ignoring the eyepiece viewing them.

The bell of her dress was ringing in my ear in its side to side manner and I knew that as the pace quickened she’d be gone.

And she did leave. The doors closed behind an empty room. All that took place, stayed there—the stale air preserving the virgin train’s impression on a carpet of blood…
A passionate English teacher, what a clichéd reality.

His shirt pink.
His cheeks softly contoured by acne scars.

“Two roads diverged in a wood, and I-”
He loves Hemingway.
“Catcher in the Rye... pure magic,” he says.
“I took the one less traveled by”

He had a wonderful edge.
To a distracted, distracting student,
“You look like you need to take a walk.
Go take a walk,
preferably off a short pier.”

I don’t know what it was about us then, what it was about me.
He told us about his small-town Long Island beginnings, the death of a friend to cancer.

Did he need us then?
In a Brooklyn apartment, he lived with his dog.
He told us, his observations, his ideas.
“The sun doesn’t rise.”
“It’s not about intelligence, but application.”

I love him now, though.
And how can I express it!
I love him.
I love him for his sensitivity.
I love him for being alone.
I love him for being alone.
I love him.
He is the one who gave me literature;
I am the one who killed it.
Colleen Ganley
Photograph
Sarah Horowitz

Elle Marche Toute Seule

Elle marche toute seule
parmi les tas d’ordures
ses pieds comme l’argile sec,
durcis par la terre implacable

Elle respire soigneusement
emprisonnée par la poussière
qui l’entoure dans
l’air d’esprit longtemps perdu

Elle cherche avec les yeux cassés
pour le trésor caché,
l’or qu’on ne peut voir que par
l’œil de la pauvreté

Les choses semblent différentes
quand on est au fond

On apprendra que pour survivre
on doit se mentir;
ce n’est pas la vérité qui compte,
mais seulement le désir.
Enfin il devient de plus en plus
difficile de croire—
mais on doit oublier ce qu’on sait.
On doit feindre l’espoir.

Thavara, la petite fille,
l’a découvert si jeune
Elle vit chaque jour dans sa tête,
un monde plus sûr que
cela qu’elle connaît,
imaginant un endroit étrange
sans le piège de permanence

Elle se promène toujours
dans un jardin de fleurs,
les couleurs vibrantes
comme le soleil d’août.
Ici elle respire lentement, doucement,
avec les yeux fermés et le coeur ouvert,
reveillée par la chaleur

Au milieu du jardin il y a
un gemme de vert, le seul bouton
qui n’a pas encore fleuri.
Thavara, la petite fille,
s’agenouillant sur la terre,
recueille la fleur à naître
qui restera verte jusqu’à la mort.
Puis elle continue à marcher,
rêvant comme elle va,
dans le seul jardin
qu’elle connaîtra jamais
SCENE: A crowded restaurant filled with many couples.

AT RISE: GIRL and GUY are sitting next to each other at a table meant for four.

GIRL. (day dreaming, gazing up to the sky, smiling, totally lost in her thoughts) This is… (pause, sigh) digging your feet into the hot sand and then dipping them into the ocean… (pause, sigh) This is a relaxing massage after carrying heavy luggage through the airport… (pause, sigh) This is singing into hair brush handles with your friends at 4am.

GUY. (taking a bite of chicken) This is… a bit dry.

GIRL. This is a hot bath.

GUY. Ouch! (burns his hand on the candle in the middle of the table to reach over for GIRL’s napkin)

GIRL. …With lit candles. And sweet smelling bubbles.

GUY. Honey?
GIRL. Mmm? *(still stuck in her thoughts)*

GUY. What are you talking about? This is...*(pause)* just dinner.

GIRL. Love...

GUY. Yes darling?

GIRL. No... that’s what I’m talking about. Love.

GUY. Yes, pumpkin?

GIRL. Real, sincere, heart-racing love. L-O-V-E. Cheers.

GUY. Cheers?

GIRL. To us.

GUY. Okay...to us. You like your veal?

GIRL. I love the veal.

GUY. Love the mashed potatoes?

GIRL. Like ‘em. You?

GUY. Love ‘em. The mushrooms.?

GIRL. I’m not a mushroom kinda gal. How’s your wine?
GUY. Fantastic. You?

GIRL. Perfect.

GUY. You? Or the wine?

GIRL. What do you think?

GUY. I’m thinkin’ both. (*leans over to kiss her cheek*)

GIRL. So what about the keys?

GUY. Keys? What keys?

GIRL. Your apartment keys.

GUY. Ah, right. Haven’t gotten those made yet. (*Picks up knife, cuts another piece of chicken*)

GIRL. You what?

GUY. Hmm? (*looking back up*)

GIRL. You said you were going to today.

GUY. No, I said tomorrow.

GIRL. Yeah, yesterday.

GUY. Yesterday? No way! I said tomorrow.
GIRL. Yeah, yesterday. \(\text{pause}\) You said tomorrow, yesterday.

GUY. Why would I tell you I’d get you keys in the past when it was the present, even though now it’s the past.

GIRL. Tomorrow, said yesterday, really means today. \(\text{beat}\) Do you not want me to move in?

GUY. \(\text{trying to figure it out}\) Tomorrow… yesterday… today. \(\text{pause}\) I do! I do. I do. I do. I—

GIRL. \(\text{cutting him off}\) You’re not ready.

GUY. Well no, I thought we might order dessert?

GIRL. No.

GUY. Not even your favorite Chocolate Lovers’ Heaven?

GIRL. No. You’re not ready for us to take the next step.

GUY. I am! And I am also ready for you to order your favorite dessert.

GIRL. I don’t want dessert. You want me to get fat, don’t you?

GUY. What? Why would I want that? I want you to be happy. You love that chocolate.
GIRL. You want me to get fat so you can leave me and justify it with my being fat. *(acting out a conversation with herself out loud)* “So why’d you two break up?” “Oh, she got fat. I don’t know what’s wrong with her, she just won’t stop eating. I had to break it off. She’s just so… so fat now.” *(beat)* I know you.

GUY. You know me? You really don’t know me at all if that’s what you think I’m trying to do.

GIRL. Oh yeah? So if you’re not trying to do that, what are you trying to do?

GUY. I’m not trying to do anything, Bridget. I was just suggesting you get the Chocolate Lovers’ Heaven. You wanna share it?

GIRL. I’m not hungry.

GUY. Okay, that’s fine. Coffee?

GIRL. Nothing.

GUY. What’s wrong?

GIRL. You don’t want me to move in. Yesterday you asked me if I would, and now you don’t want me to anymore.

GUY. Baby, just because I haven’t gotten your set of keys made yet, does not mean I don’t want you to move in. I do,
I’m just… I’m a guy. We forget sometimes.

GIRL. You forgot about me. You forgot about me AND you don’t want me moving in. So is this it? You’re gonna up and leave.

GUY. I’m not leaving. I didn’t forget about you. (realizing this conversation isn’t going anywhere) You know what?

GIRL. What? (sees him searching around in his pocket for something)

Oh great, now you’re gonna up and leave the restaurant, aren’t you? Don’t bother looking for your credit card. Just go. It’ll be less awkward. This one’s on me. (then muttering quietly to herself,) Just like all the rest. (reaches to get her purse)

GUY. Here. (hands her his set of keys)

GIRL. Your keys?

GUY. Yeah. I do want you to move in. I do want you around. I never forgot about you, I never will. Take my keys.

GIRL. But…really?

GUY. Yes, really.

GIRL. Well, how are you gonna get into your apartment?

GUY. I’m gonna need to borrow your keys for the night.
(leans over and takes the keys back) Ya know, until I make myself an extra set.

(GIRL leans over to kiss GUY on the cheek)

END SCENE.
This is not a powwow
    but the chairs are aligned in a circle,
metal to metal.
    The lighting falls on our
contours and is cancerous—
    complexions dulled.
A synthetic accordion door
    conceals us here.
And we will all be forced to stare at
the imperfections of one another’s faces,
    discerning matters of this and that,
and all the godforsaken shit you have all done.

That girl over there, bending over
her center of gravity, genuflects
into her stomach
as she bites with precision at the thick
yellow layer on her toenail.
    Her hair and skin are fused together—
by color, both strawberry blonde
the texture of a curl on her jaw
    makes the contrast clear.
She appears to have a pen
positioned in the socket of her eye,
    translating the memoir of her life
onto the faux marble white and grey tiles.
Next to her, a boy is violently shaking
    a beat out of his foot.
Thighs and jeans collide,
producing smooth white noise.
The eye’s aperture cannot
hold a frame—and the leg becomes a blur.
Head weighing from side to side—
strung out,
clothing drenched in withdrawals.
A buffet of smells oozing out of his skin.

I look over to you,
and you’re composed.
Your pursed lips hold
in color—
a bodily response, suggesting embarrassment.
A pink and white hue—
no breath can escape.

The diffusion of florescent light
disperses into blank slabs
of man-made dividers
and my eyes swell up with the
brightness.

Stay here—poised.
Take the light in
slowly.
The empty walls—unbearable.
Pass over the idiosyncrasies
that are just that.
And not you.
Elise Rodgers
Sestina of Early Intuition

She is scraping the mud off a boot when she notices
the hornets’ nest in back of the house
next to the hose lying in a tight coil.
A hive of buzzing grey paper,
the color of thick smoke.
Leaving it there would not be safe.

Her main goal is to stay safe,
to get away before those yellow furies notice
the incoming, sedative smoke.
Back inside the house
she collects matches, gas, and newspaper,
and binds them together in a makeshift coil.

The burnt paper wafts up in a tunnel of chaff, a dirty coil.
She knows it isn’t safe,
breathing in those floating bits of grey paper,
and hopes the neighbors do not notice
her house
has begun to smoke.

For thirty years cigarette smoke
snaked through her lungs in spiraling coils.
She remembers getting back to the house
calling her children, telling them she was safe;
for now. These things take months. Holding life’s eviction notice,
a doctor’s incomprehensible paper.
The hive collapses like crinkled paper, churning and belching black smoke. She hopes the neighbors do not notice. The hornets buzz and coil their legs up under them dying, trying to stay safe. Their house is on fire and its chambers fill up with smoke.

She walks back to the house. The hive smolders behind a safe windowpane now. That smoke that kills, twilling out in fine a coil. She thinks about dying and wonders if the neighbors will notice.
Photograph
Emily Sullivan
Trisha Carr

An Image

A silver dime
on black pavement

Waiting,
like a spotlight
on a bare stage

Embroidered to the earth
like the moon
seems stapled to the sky

A young boy,
quiet as crickets,
pockets the reflective puddle

A toothless smile,
like a pirate biting his gold treasure,
twisting jewels between his fingers.
Moving faster, higher, stronger,
We zigzag side to side.
With windy hair and breathy eyes,
A smile for old times.
A stretch, a build, a sigh, a laugh,
We try and touch the sky.
But trying is in vain, you see,
The moon can’t hear our cries.
I scratch the dirt, I brace my chains,
And try to synchronize,
The waving and the pulsing of
The movement of my thighs.
I hear the creaking, scraping of
The weight upon my seat,
And let go fast—to test the air,
And if the two should meet.
Two shadows like two careless souls,
Fresh yolks before they’re beat,
Mark helpless sand with brush strokes of
The way we want to be.
These shadows pulse inside my head,
And summon secret smiles,
The child I had left for dead,
Is here to stay a while.
Annie Belz
Boating with Avedon, 1959

I would wear a scarf—there would be a breeze—around my head. The scene would be distinctively Mediterranean, so you could taste salt and olive oil just looking at it. I would take up smoking cigarettes—just for effect—and the sun might catch the edge of a silver cigarette case and I might look coyly or not, glancing at an unfulfilled past falling off the horizon.
No, it is the future that falls away.

Perhaps the scarf is all wrong.
Azure water is smarting with sunlight behind me. It is a candid. I would wear large sunglasses to keep from squinting.
He might say my name, releasing the shutter on the last syllable. I should not look straight-on into the iris. Either way, there should be strength in my jaw line, and my lipstick could be called “Pomegranate Stain.”
Gabrielle Kappes
The Elephant and the Idol

I sit down to a clash—
gun
powder
green
tea,
a bare breasted geisha
sticks in her hair and napkins
in her mouth plastered on
withered weathered clay pot.
a spirit has joined me;
the candle’s rapid
jump rope mimes
its mute arrival.
Amber Gailitis
Hephaestus on Main Street

History spreads through Gloucester like gasoline. It’s only a matter of time before sparks from the present cause the past to combust.

Like an Indian burial ground this city is owned by spirits and myths older than documents in historical museums and microfilm scrolls.

Before mortal settlers the gods divided the land and waters among themselves, and Hephaestus claimed Main Street. In “The Great Fire of 1830” he torched the walls of Mr. Samuel Gilbert’s home and made a bonfire of dwellings and workshops that encroached on his property.

In 1864 all it took was a small ember from a hot stove to provoke the unmerciful deity to kindle the largest fire in Gloucester’s history — over one-hundred buildings reclaimed by a territorial god.
Even now, he waits in the same hot spots for that stray spark to send him crawling up lace runners in the new curtain shop—that timeless tendency to prove that a place will always be yours.
If Richard Were To Paint Us
For my Sister
After Richard Siegelman’s *Sisters and the Sea*

We’d be flying shades of white and black,
washed by the wind.
Reflections of one another, sharing something beyond the grasp of a paintbrush.
Tickled by swarming gray and murky amber, we ignore his choices.
I would let her wear white, and carry the weight of dusk on my own—
she’s not ready.
She spins—
echoing the cumulus she claimed.
His oil hugging curves would cast us into—
what we’re meant to be, wrapping us in a lonely wind.
Laughter— hidden in the waves, would seep back into us through our toes as we both understood—
No one should hear our secrets.
And so we’d dance
beyond his view
leaving him to paint
the shadows of
two wandering sisters.
Silhouetted by tired light.
Faceless—
because we dance
with our eyes closed.
Alec Barnes
Photograph
Aspen James

Return of Glass Winter
(Format based on Ginsberg, “Return of Kral Majales”)

This crystalline anniversary much braided iceless adorn my head and I am the Queen of Winter

And since I am Queen of Winter my howls and proclamations are felt by the world's swift airwaves.

So the Queen of Winter I serenely swept through Heaven while briefly adjusting my icy crown

And I am Queen of Winter with high blustery storms, hail, sleet, snow, ice and crystal breath

And wear the sleek crown of dignity without arrogance no ignorance anymore no fear in a shimmering silver dress and twinkling snowflake jewelry

No laughing matter the loss of the season next hundred years to greenhouse effect

And I am the Queen of Winter returned with a wisdom strong as the glaciers an artic world

And I am the Queen of Winter resplendent in Cold with elegant sweeps of motion

And I am the Queen of Winter Essential Divinity of Seasons crooning Many Many Hallways Before I Rest.
Elise Rodgers

Hoochie Woman

After Legiardi-Laura’s “Trickster Rabbit”

I am temptress.
I am succubus: lying, evading, game-playing woman.
This is the role you have assigned me
    and so I play it with ease.
I will be forever nagging your fool ear off.
My dress is the shroud of Turin
    and I wear it out dancing.
I am the limber backbone of a snake,
and though I tango through the valley of the shadow of man
I am
the twisting snap of a broken ankle
the one begging you to look back.

I can’t read but I’ve got a tongue twice as thick
as that paperback romance
and three times as sharp
as any gasping breath
in a whalebone and velvet ribcage.
I am your romantic comedy’s
mouthy broad -
Some men say:
    “Such a challenge!”
Others say:
    “What a bitch.”
I’m a wasp, an hourglass
except I will never stop to give you the time.
I was born into this world shrieking,
with a rolling pin in one hand
and a runny red fruit in the other.
No man is my brother
I am Mary Magdalene
    Potiphar’s wife
    Medusa
    Madonna.
I’m a paper cut between your fingers
I am hoochie woman
    I will pin you down
With one black stiletto heel.
I’m the burned casserole,
    the late-night jeopardy;
    I will fix the stove and I know the answers.
Go on and knock me down a peg.
I live to give men the runaround,
I live to get them all wrapped around
    my defiant middle finger.

I wear my scarlet S on my sleeve,
or tattooed on my heart.
Deception’s the ruse of my gender.
You won’t realize you’ve offended me
‘til you find yourself sleeping on the couch.
I lie down in moss valleys and wake up
bleeding on linoleum.
Our Divine Lady of the bruised eyes and raw knuckles;
I am the bum wrap
    the prison sentence
the kick in the crotch.
I’m a low cut red dress
that was
just
begging
for it.

I am that pumping heart under the floorboards
Marking time with every time you
Beat and
Beat
  Beat and
  Beat and
Beat.

I want to say it is beyond me—
that unexplainable forces
take this love I have for you and force it

    apart like magma boiling its way
to the surface.

The earth is restless,
but earthquakes occur in the same spots
year after year.
    The present is the key to the past—
    you should know my fault lines by now.

You said it was a catastrophe
and I believed that
    until it happened again.
    It’s not just one catastrophe—
a flood of poor decisions
or an argument that erupts—
    but the gradual movements
    the ones we don’t notice

that separate.

In order to evolve,
    we’re told it’s natural
for pieces of our lives to break away,
yet still we move relative to one another,
as if we fear too much ocean
    coming between    us.
Maybe we are the fragmented pieces
of a former whole
or maybe we were never truly
together at all.

How is it then, that so many pieces of my life
were found fossilized in yours?
Trisha Carr
Reversal of Anger

My eyes, sharp as cinnamon,
have difficulty focusing on his,
which glisten creamy silvers.
They divert, flit here and there,
like a nervous bee.

How strange it is to be the guilty one, deserving of blame.
I’m prepared for anger, slips of the tongue that will be regretted later,
though they carried as much honesty as if the heart itself shouted the words.
And yet, silence.

If a person is stung they will swat back,
but he just looks at me with those calming, pathetic eyes
which whisper “I love you anyway.”
And for the first time I feel anger instead of him.
People gather around your body as you lay there just spinning. Through closing eyes you see a stretch of pale clouds as you lie beneath the sky and above the verge of death. Crooked snowflakes fall on your body, melting into the blood. You can’t move, but you’re experiencing everything, absorbing your surroundings, feeling them slide through your senses. Every breath you take feels rich with color, like you’re inhaling yellow, and then blue, and then gray. And all the while the red is leaking out from under.

It’s overwhelming enough that you forget, for a moment, that you’re dying, and panic at the fear that you might fall over. And then you remember that you’re already on the ground, in the street, sprawled out in a designated space for your and only your death. For you, traffic stops. It’s the compensation you’ve been waiting for all of your life. Today this lane is closed.

It’s funny, almost, and you kind of want to laugh. Your body, your insignificant package of flesh alone is occupying the entire stretch of roadway. You’re untouchable, lying on your back in the middle of the road like this. It would almost be fun, if you weren’t dying.

You lift your head off the pavement and a waning sunlight gleams into your eyes. It’s that kind of bright January sunset that doesn’t change colors, but just stays white and pure and blinding, if you stare. Your let your head drop, your cheek resting on the other side of the yellow line, your eyes staggering between a blur of shapes and colors. You close them, then open them again to see a child walking beside her mother, holding her hand.

When you’re dying you expect to see the world through a lens of complete and utter clarity. You expect time to stop as some-
thing profound happens, as truth sinks in and the answers to life reveal themselves in a sudden flash of light, everything instantly making sense.

But instead, you see the ordinary. You see simplicity. You see life as it goes on without you. You have spent your life traveling from one disappointment to another, only to find death the biggest let down of all.

And then, something happens. Something changes. Time exists. You’re still dying. You know why you’re dying. You still don’t know why you’re living. But something is different. It’s an absence that you notice. For the first time, you feel like you aren’t looking through a lens. There is no window. There is no divider. For the first time, you are pressed up against the world. Are you dying? Feel something, you tell yourself. You should be terrified. But you aren’t. You’re fascinated, amplified, tranquilized by this feeling. Your eyes have never felt so large, or so cold in the tiresome winter air.

The little girl and her mother. They’re looking at you now. Their hands melded together, knuckles locked into each other. This is all you see.

The fingers curled in a familiar grip, the tilted wrists attached departing in opposite directions. This is the last thing you ever see.
A rushlight, flickering and small,
is better than no light at all.