

4-24-2015

Darkness of Draws

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Darkness of Draws

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M.F.A. Creative Writing, University of Missouri – St. Louis, 2015

B.S. Social Work, Illinois State University, 1986

A Thesis submitted to The Graduate School at the University of Missouri-St. Louis
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing

May 2015

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Style Definition: Normal

Style Definition: Heading 1: Indent: Left: 0",
Numbered + Level: 1 + Numbering Style: I, II, III, ... +
Start at: 1 + Alignment: Left + Aligned at: 0" + Indent
at: 0"

Style Definition: TOC 1

Abstract

“Darkness of Draws” is a collection of poems that I have written and compiled over a period of years before and during my time in the M.F.A. program. I have interwoven and overlapped themes drawn from my life, of mental illness and religion experienced within the tightly knit boundaries of family; to my dual life as a fine artist working in the genres of painting and sculpture; to the complexities of intimate love relationships, as well as my historical roots in Southern California and the settings of my every day observations where people, places and things become imagistic in form, otherwise standing the test of time through memory and recovery.

Acknowledgements

The author gratefully acknowledges the following publications in which Some of the poems in "Darkness of Draws" first appeared, sometimes In slightly different form: "The Pacific Review," "The Gold Coast Review," "Phineas," "Lit mag," and "The Writers Institute National Guild" of Southern California.

Many thanks to my professor and thesis advisor, Steve Schreiner for His patience, insight and ongoing belief in the work.

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Trees

If I were to hang
On only one extended branch
The branches of winter trees
Would cower,
Their frail arms becoming
Connected to worn shoulders
As covered hunchbacks
Pacing, like someone else
Who knew about this twilight I
would not have.

Darkness of Draws

Beside each red, neon X
My confined signatures dangle upon the page
Near the end of day,
Until an ominous latched door opens
To ward 1503,

Surprising my unquiet mind
Touched by moods rising rapidly
Then switched off to a reluctant fall
Of nightly solitaire,

The doctor's hand a dark draw
Quick to assemble an electric shock
Pressed above
My dome-shaped brows,
Leaving behind my throbbing apex,

As I lay on a used gurney
Wheeled through the sterile stench
Captured in foul, adjacent halls, Cluttering
a half-dead world.

The confused clock tells me
I'm not ready to awaken
Until I abruptly emerge
From my distressed gown And
wait to be replayed.

Unfinished Poems (Ode to Sylvia Plath)

Before your diagnosis,
You were led to London parties

Never revealing to Ted
Your softer side of flowered gingham.
You drew from gardens
Of fresh images
Flooding your mind To
create poems.

My mind became filled
With years of fading voices
Over hospital pay phones
As I wandered away
From the dangling receivers
The back of my gown Always
open.

My breakfast trays Followed
by lunch, then dinner Grew
cold.
During lock-up
I beat the walls,
Longing to be a true poet Away
from a padded room.

I represented myself Before
the asylum judge.
Sentenced to maximum treatments,
My brain became
The fuse box to my body, A
wire stemmed flower
Creeping along the corridor.

I lay on a gurney
And easily recall
Your films and letters
Books and poems,

The way you styled your hair Or
turned a phrase.

You remain so memorable
In my nightmares,
Those flashbacks of you
In endless reels
Leaning in a darkened phone booth Dialing
for help.

Your words reached publishers,
When you withdrew from the world,
The only light in your apartment Illuminating
a small, corner desk.

In England, you sewed drapes
For privacy and warmth
As Ted embraced his mistress,
Your children without food
Except the gingersnaps You
baked for them
That last Christmas.

After the second attempt
I know time can end so quickly,
Caught up in redressing Wounds
with words.
My memories of you
Become unfinished poems
Short as photographs
Hanging in the balance Of
my dreams.

The oven is vapor less now.
I keep you alive, to keep myself alive.

Winter Born Bones

If only I'd wished
Lucidly enough, to walk
Straightly away
Down the grey

Hospital corridor.

Teased the walls
As a ghost
Who forgot about
Daily repetition

Explored the insides
Of my every
Unlabeled ex-ray,
Like winter born bones

Protected by my
Swayed body
Of lazy, Fatty
white.

The Rorschach Inkblot Test

In front of me,
The doctor holds up white index cards.
They look like ink has spilled across them,
Leaving a series of unique abstract prints Open
to my interpretation.

I later learn it is a test,
I nearly flunk with wide eyes shut
When I describe one ink blot
“As a person caught swimming
In a pool of splashed blood.”

He challenges me to respond differently. He
tells me to try again.
I retract the answer,
While standing on his office balcony.

I exhale a breath of fresh smoke
That subtly disappears
Into early evening palm trees Shading
the scene of a new world, Where I
am a leaf.

Pills Preservation

The psychiatrist offers me,
White, pink, yellow and blue pills
Containing sedate personalities
That infiltrate my system
To take a journey with me
Over nightmarish hills,
And invade the fragile sling Of
valley's in my head.

The movement levels off
My highest highs,
My lowest lows,
Armed with deep voice echoes

Calling me to sleep
Promising my complex Mind
to keep.
I dream and levitate above
A spiral staircase,

Where I reach for a piece Of
red moon, falling.
I'm dressed in a feathered cloak.
With one dark stroke,
Soldiers trample
My bejeweled eyes,
My nose,
My mouth, My
papery throat.

The deliberate sweep blows out
What I have left
Of my inner tomb of light, Scaling
my wooden,
Petrified face of night.

I carry this hollowed grey stone Into
day, but I keep
Swallowing them anyway.

I'm held captive
By this mood altering, Psychedelic
hue,
A white, a pink, a yellow, a blue.

During

During the hours
Of my
Darkest frailty,

I beg
To be left
In solitary

Prayer,
A candle relit
Flowing with tears

Drips over
My own hand,
My own existence

A simple shadow,
Formed- To
draw,
To write,

At the borrowed
Desk of wood
Weighing me down

With my memory.
With my want, With
your should.

The Visit

I am the daughter
Of the man
Sent to the psychiatric ward
For six months,

A visitor on waiting room's doorstep
During Easter Sunday,
When I hand him A
blue-faced egg.

It stares at the clear plastic band
Curled around his left wrist,
His name inserted as a jumbled, typewritten noose
Standing above his watch Strangling time.

His fingers carry traces of faded paint
Sucked into the recesses of unworked cuticles,
Holding bits of his dark colored message
He brought home on canvas later that year

Framed and hung in the living room
With broad brush strokes
Madly swirled in evening's eerie brilliance
Of double suns, moons or U.F.O.'s
Hovering over an open corn field He
once had me run from.

Sunday with Father

The bible passages weren't new to him,
But he hunched over their gilded pages
Like they were, as he studied
Occasionally glancing at the grey filtered light,
Slanted across his black check book
Placed closely to his left side,
Needing the numbers to balance.

Then, his relationship with us
Appeared far removed, vast
Like walking alone through the desert,
Where he didn't seem quite thirsty enough
For his thoughts and perhaps his prayers To
return.

He prepared the mahogany table
In the dining room anyway
With its heavy extension
Of loose leaf,
Ready to be pulled out
To create extra room for Sister,
Who would arrive by Greyhound In
the afternoon.

Next, he went to the kitchen
Filling a crystal glass
Saved for red wine,
The symbol of his Sunday ritual.
He casually stood for a while
In front of the door

Leading to the porch, Where
he always met us.

When I made my way
To the bottom of the staircase,
I suddenly met his eyes,
I had chosen the wrong garment to wear.
I quickly changed my clothes,
From a short skirt Feeling
like I lost my father, That
day, to the Lord's rules.

My Father's Future Sunday

At twelve, I never understood Sunday's.
There was something about the contained
Afternoons, the strict church rules and the Blare
of Chicago radio, compact as our bleached
House set upon a distant village hill.

My father read his favorite local paper,
A special time to half-way recline in his
Duct taped chair. There he would smoothly open
Each freshly printed page upon his ready lap, The
tip of his rayon tie barely touching.

When he somewhat slumbered, the news
Became a papery blanket he hunched over
Snoring in tune to the heat of steel floor ducts, Clicking
on and off to barely keep us warm.

I carry memories of my younger brothers
Always circling around the black halo
Of my father's crown. The boys passing
Their imaginary Nerf ball, making an effort To
draw his attention like a loyal fan.

Instead he reached for a silver yard stick, Once
higher than my brother's smallish heads.
He seemed to accurately measure slices
Of distance between their twin asses And
the lull of evening air.

It was a risky winter day when father
Pulled them out onto our slick porch,
Devised to cool down their conflicted ages,

Now in want to share a shove
Against father's lesser stature
When they no longer lingered
For his damned demand for them To
wait one behind the other.

Ritual

The clock's black pointed hands
Reach for each number,
Straining like an old man To
press past twelve.
My father and I chase
The other numbers
With our wide eyes
Around the fake moon face
Glowing against the kitchen wall,
As if we had taken it
From the empty sky To
keep us awake.
Like the ticking that never stops,
We hear over time
Each other's tales of
Restless dreams told During
this weekly ritual.

While I Talk With You, Father

At the phone booth
I shut myself in
With a cherry shaved ice
That stains
My lips,
My fast,
Colorful words

Measured by a handful
Of change
As the operator requests more,

While I talk with you, father

I reach for the slots
And hear each quarter
Ring through the static
That travels the distance
To connect for three minutes
Across cities and states,
Knowing my calls
Will not always
Be answered.

Father (on a twenty year absence)

Through the willows
I see your slices
Of blindness,
As you sing in
Silence
Notes that carry
Your masquerade
Through masks Of
darkness.

You with
Hunched back
And no candle
To light,
May wait
Years

Before my door
Of heavy Cloaked
night.

Dinner with Mother

Her dishes are eclectic, once manually spun On
a wheel by me.

As I touch an imperfect piece, I
slowly recall most of my rough past
When I crafted them.

Their dark, glazed forms are never ending
Placed on the table, One after the other.
Some are on the verge of disuse,
Their trim of dainty flowers Faded
and chipped.

As I cook with her she watches, Seems to
search for a memory Probably something
about the rebel in me. She is particular
about the way Our food is prepared.
She studies nutrition labels,
Reads the contents aloud
Deciphering percentages
Of what is harmful,
Of what is safest to consume
Perhaps in an effort to prolong The
inevitable we all face, death.

Our course of meat and vegetables Turn
out bland.
They lack salt and other seasonings.
The potatoes taste half rotten. Butter
lies as a soft stick,

Forgotten beneath frosted glass On
the end of the counter.
Leftovers are sealed
With transparent wrap that clings,
Providing a window in the fridge
To view choices of what We can
heat up later. The night the
microwave breaks, We dine out.
As I eat with my mother
My taste buds celebrate At
least for that meal,
Lingering awhile.

Mother and Roses

Roses' rock garden- Soil
my mother protects
With pink-seamed gloves
She scrubs dirt
Rich as chocolate
And de-weeds my father's affair
With one two-handed yank
That is overgrown
Flooding the soil
With rain sprinkles
She drinks parched
In prayer pose
Her polished nails
Pointed toward
An angry sun- God
breathless,
Like a double-fisted cloud Beating
flowers.

Mother and Child

The unrolled scroll,
A cheap duplicate
Of "Mother and Child,"
Painted by Renoir,
Hung high above My
parent's bed.
I remember well
That laminated picture

Somewhat hidden
Beneath layers of Oily
dust.

Even though I
Never touched it
I knew the smudge Of
colors,
Without my thickly
Mirrored glasses
I laid upon the
Thin, blue blanket
Inviting me to rest
Uneasily,
As my mood became
Too low to play outside.

There was a time
In spring when
Mother thought
She caught me
Raising my head
Just a bit,
Before the cracked window.
Her plain voice forced me To
join the other's
Who were so lively on the lawn.
Final Edition

In the front room,
Grandfather wore brown bed clothes.
They hung on him like dingy ghosts,
Surrounded by a graveyard Of
stacked newspapers, Folded
pages of words from 1923.

He forgot easily,
After sipping whisky
His voice faded from lips,
Lightly parted
Tightly pressed
Slightly opening
Without rest
Toward my grandmother
Who motioned for me
To come meet him
Lying gruffly against Starched
white sheets.

I dizzily inhaled
His warmly brewed breath
As he reached for me;
I wanted to pull him through
The disappearing crack
Of his small universe-
After the paper
Was flung in the midst
Across the porch floor
I got the gist
Of what he wanted to say,
“you’re beautiful”
As he let me go,
Knowing I was the feature In
his final edition.

Season Of Beauty

With her touch of a brush

Grandma strokes my brown strands,
A rhythm matching her words
Trails to the tips of my waves,
Moving like pictures in my mind,
Her short stories of youth
Each memory mirroring a part of me- Her
hands a looking glass past
So heavy against my hair
Relax into a softness
When she withers into fall- Becoming
fragile like the leaves I held one day in
the palm of my hand.
Her body quietly turning in bed
Along the edge of winter,
Flakes of snow melt on her doorstep,
Soon bright spring blossoms
Dare her to fade,
When I find her lying over white tile
My hairbrush in her hand
Her glorious silk bun undone
To spread its silver fan Across
the unswept floor.

Sudden Depths

I tremble as I tip the teapot,
Shaking deep, brown wells
Of four cups I fill.
The fifth, I turn over,
A ceramic butterfly caught
In a yellow –glazed flight
Brushing the stillness
Of once winged tongues
That move hesitantly

Against the night,
Separating our thoughts
Of hard to reach words
Stolen from
High shadowed shelves,
Now weakly strung together,
Unlike the noose she hung from
Wrapped over the beam in the barn,
Neatly tied with
Tightly woven threads, of our
Individual entanglements
Choking her burning world away
Singeing the tips of final breaths
And sealing slits of hazed opulence
We lowered into our arms like
cautiously serving ourselves
Scalding tea,
Initially too hot to touch
But later taken in slowly
With the safety of daunting memories
Left repeatedly on calendar pages
Filled with invisible, monthly
“post it” notes,
Sticky, tea stained butterflies
That reminded ourselves
How she wanted to be free.
In Hiding

He was standing outside in pouring rain banging on the door.
I saw him through a curtain slit.
I kept quiet.
Drenched, his clothing stuck to his body.
He wore yellow polyester pants, A
multicolored Hawaiian shirt
And worn white running shoes.

In that moment, I barely recognized him. He
looked as foreign to me now as he had been
The last fifteen years, ever since he became ill.
He sat beneath the small area of roof,
Fingering a sheltered clay ashtray
He made on the psych unit last Christmas, a gift to me.
He picked butts from dense ashes,
Wiping them off one by one, Selecting
the longest to touch his lips Giving it a
shaky light, inhaling deeply.
He put the rest aside for later, I assumed.
Must have run out of cigarettes again. He had a
brief smoke, running his fingers through His
short, wet curly hair.
He put his right hand in his pants pocket, Ringing
the bell a couple of times.
I caught myself observing his every hand movement.
I heard him mumble and couldn't make out what he was saying.
I hoped he wasn't hearing voices again.
Probably took the bus over part way, walking the rest.
I told him before not to show up unannounced.
I hadn't seen him the last two months, ever since he struck my face.
I didn't want him to live at the Wooden Indian Motel, Picking up
odd jobs that he could keep.
So lost and didn't even know it.
I wiped my eyes.
He called my name, "Cat...Cath...you home?
Silence, then he turned away facing the downpour.
Brother in the Bean field

Your wet brow beat me Each
ray of noon day sun. I felt your
madness Every time you
turned my way.

Not knowing your intentions,
I shielded myself
With the sweat of no protection,
While you pulled tall weeds of butter print
And jumped over rows of beans
To lash out at me
In the middle of fifty acres
Where you sliced hot air
With giant roots
Cutting my forearm, Leaving a
line of curved crimson, An open
mouth of stinging swells.
You pulled back in retreat
Running frantically with your hoe
Level to your side,
Destroying the beans That
were your guide.
I watched you
Through the glare of light
Knowing you might not Have
taken your medication.
I made my way
During the rest of our two miles
By bending back the leaves
That brushed my sore
Unready to meet you at row's end
Where you stood stiff-backed,
Safely recoiled, Waiting
for me.

Beans

I have worked in bean fields

The summer it rained
Like a monsoon,
Flooding the rows
Battering the plants that grew
Big as elephant ears,
Their leaves itchy
Brushed against exposed skin
Arms dangling
From plastic garbage bags
Clinging to our sinking bodies
Being sucked into the earth
Caked thick,
Deeply burying
Strong roots of weeds
We yank or hoe
Entwining me beneath the beans Slowly
choking.

My Summer Tale

We cut back the debris-
Branches of leafy oak that lie lifelessly stricken From
the prior week when lightening shrieked Through
my father's front yard.

I wore cotton seamed gloves
Tailored to fit the hands of men
Who did work I knew
From my childhood and adolescence,
My gender mistaken as male
By field hands and neighbors,
Their eyes cutting my flat silhouette
I hoped would grow with years of impending days

Closing like curtains of fading blue silk And
drawn into my dreams:
Fashioning a gown blowing around my body
And carrying me down a monotonous maze
Of aisles of beans and corn I imagined ended in an altar.

All this during our strewn crew's fifteen minute breaks, When
warm water contained within a single, silver canteen
Anointed words that never touched my lips.

My hoe reached the world for now,
With the simple wish of a wild flower,
Blooming as a natural weave
Through my cropped hair and a bit of cleavage To
catch the dew of its scent.

Cynthia

My tan, leather moccasins,
Stained with the juice of blackberries
Carried me softly to the end Of a
tense summer day.
Our family of nine
All sticky and hot and hungry
Crowding in front of our
Only box fan, its silver blade
Slowly turning like slices
Of tart lemons in mason jars
Of sun tea brewing With
sun down.

We worked with our broken hoes
In bean fields of local farmers,
Rich from the dark soiled chaos
We tracked in, attracting a quick
Circle of buzzing fireflies
Forming an infested halo
Above my sister's golden crown,
Ratted ropes that swept Over
mismatched eyes.

I coaxed her and we soon left,
To stop beneath a stretch
Of greenery standing boldly
Against a watchful sky,
When her arms danced
Like puppets, pulling free
Stems of purple balls that Fell
on us like dyed rain.

Brother

While my parents
Played rummy,
My brother roamed
The split halls
Of our farmhouse
Sleepwalking
Past the television
Turned to "Creature
Feature" That Friday
night.
I wanted to wake him
Against the backdrop

Of black and white ghouls-
Instead, I passed
The ominous screen
And followed him closely
Wondering just what his
Nightmares might be-
If his papery eyes
Would shine like
A lit jacko'lantern
Beneath the hosts Of
candelabra's.

Sister Maura

Soon, I know you will come stand by me, My
feet posed improperly against the grain of
Smokey floor.

Yes, I see your willowy walk across the notes
Of black and white keys and tight strings
Calling for a dizzy headed champagne dance
Highlighted beneath tiers of chandeliers That
penetrate your revolving partners.

You offer yourself at every turn, Timing
your minuets.

Your legs drift easily
In pumps that press you above
Pale headed men
Trading your silhouette
That touches them for extended moments,

As my eyes blur into hours
Of your incoming blooms,
Fingerprints that have pulled your silk pastel
Through the blue drowning crystal
While you glide to my side

Perfectly weaving your way, Past
possible suitors.

Sister Maura Contemplates O'Keefe

In Santa Fe Sister cannot tell me How
bronze crosses disappear
Onto a range of cutout clouds.
She searches for a single prayer
To create comfort in
The snowy desert night
That shifts shape onto a canvas
Brushed with light blooms
Of red poppies that reopen
Like her hazel eyes,
Glancing at the altar
Of forgiving hothouse flowers
Later saved to study
As paintings in dim studios
Where one Eulogy describes
How stars had been revived
To shine upon the dark beauty Of
distinguished cow skulls.

In a Santa Fe Art Class

The Mexican artist
Disrobes, agreeing to Share
her beauty
For the very first time.

The backdrop of wool blanket
Provides warmth
For the radiant chill
Of ready hands,

Seeking her breast and nape
Eye and curl,
As brushes glide
Across colored lines

Rendered in the same way
That light falls Like
faded silk Across
fragile easels.

New Drawings

Our new house
Grey,
Like my charcoal pencils
That draw
Cracked windows
I see
Taped with cardboard cutouts
Like jagged icicles

That hang low
From the eaves of
High gutters

I wrap my arms
Around me
And wonder If
the spider Is
just as cold.
It is black and brown
And the number of legs
Are endless
As I soon lose count
While it struggles back
Up the Broken,
slippery pane.
I draw the spider too.

Mother brings hot chocolate
And fumbled steam
Finds my lips
While through
Foggy glasses I peer
At the edge of a soiled doily
And beyond that
Still
The window sill
Closed tight with ice

Mother says,
“the weather is blurring days
Future I am sure will not be bright.”
I didn't pay much attention then

Or even when The radio
announcer was speaking About
the temperature.

I spied a rat
With a long tail
Running around
Our back yard
And watched for a while
Till it disappeared into A
neat old tire.
I draw the rat too.

And then when
My drawings were complete,
Mother wanted
To give me a treat
For doing such
Great art work
In our house
Grey,
Like my charcoal pencils.

The Glossy Photo of Me

Becomes a memory
Sealed in mothball manila
I offer to your open faced hand
As we stand in our lost land With
no silver I.D. bands.

You draw me to the camera Flashing,
flashing, flashing.
Later our images collide

In dark room solution
Till they no longer hide
Our drenched likenesses,

Whole as passion fruit Hanging
in the rain.

A Private Life

I was walking and waiting
With my paper and pen
To write a poem,
Perhaps from beneath
The shady canopy
Of leaves
Where I mostly
Remembered Monet
And garden paths Then
thought of my life In
the city.

It was there I selected
At random
An anthology of poems
Inside a sooty thrift shop
And later
Pulled the book
From my tan leather bag,
When a yellowed
Birthday card slid From
between its pages.
With a glimpse of this
Readers' private life,
I begin to value my own
By sitting silently
In a country beauty

Attempting to write,
Even though images No
longer come.

The Hollow Inside

During the spring storm,
I memorized every body Of
white lightning
That appeared between
Each stanza I recited To
an old poem
On modern art.

I repeated the rhythm Of
words that flashed With
a staccato lull.
As I pulled my tongue back,
I hesitated and imagined
The magnitude of sound
In another language
I never learned To
speak with you.

Instead, I read your eyes
And questioned my
Final palette of day.
I remember your pupils
Were settled into
Unmatched emerald
Green, grey hues blindly

changing color Against
dark masses
Of trees,

Their small offshoots
Of twigs
Were lined up like Your
eyelashes,
So thick, as if they
Had been coated
With mascara,
Running beneath sheets
Of inky, erotic rain,
That beat louder than

The heavy weight
Of my hidden studio clock
Set upon a high mantel-
The slow tick, tock
Adjusted my gaze
To contemplate the way
A wet tarp stretched
Tightly over
Our old neighbors
Backyard swimming pool,
Where we always Trespassed.

Our footprints
Sealed the edges,
But we became
Strangers exploring
The hollow inside
Of it together,
Only as artists left with

An unfinished sculpture, Waiting
to be filled.

The Expression of a Stranger

I become a keeper of clay
Who molds each image
Between my ready hands, As
an ancient sculptor would.
One bust, becomes shrouded with veils of dust
Mounted upon a wooden base
Occupying the same space Like a
resident of a small museum.

When night is pulled like a window shade
Over my creation, it comes to life

With wild-colored eyes,
That see through Your
intrusive question:
“Is this the face of family?”
In my dreams I cross a field and linger
To show you the way I’d learned to relay
What I seem to know so well about
Capturing and remembering, The
expression of a stranger.

I Noticed

Before I began to paint,

I noticed the dark cherries
Next to my easel
Transformed,
When they fell
And scattered over the floor
Creating destinations
I imagined
Like those on a map,
That could easily be connected
During a sooty train ride
In need of an engineer
Or perhaps a pilot,
To equally position each stop
Between rows of aspens
Rich enough to tithe their cells
Into carbon printed leaves I
pressed, to last forever.

Today

something reminded me of the European
art show, twenty years ago, When you
leaned in for our first kiss.
I miss the way your curious eyes
Explored those expansive canvasses Depicting
bathers, ballerinas and bridge walkers Who
made an impression on us.

I recall how every lone figure
Was created to enter still white waters
With rippling rings, balance strenuous poses
On mirror-lined beams and cross a very
High arch, where on the other side I waited
And I wondered what we would have said

To those painted people by chance, After
we sipped fragile glasses of red wine In
rural France.

Would we have gathered as peasants
Posing with no pay, away from thatching
Wheat fields and beating rock washed Clothes
each day?

Would we have been left in society On
display as ancient history?

Would our hidden genius have been found In
mapped out colors that seemed so Natural
and simplistic?

Now, my desire is for you to be reborn From
my palette that has remained dry.
I dream to recapture your essential features, Like
your obscured eyes, your ridged jaw,
Built from how I plan to layer my strokes.

And moments when I know how your likeness Drifts about in my
mind just right,
I want to encase your portrait
In a modern frame, with that special
Built-in light. Perhaps I could make the way you looked,
More handsome, the way you thought, appear
As even more beautiful than before- By
preserving my last memory of you, As
if I were touched by God.

Artistic Composition by Pollock

Later that summer,
I became Jackson's anonymous friend
After I saw a film of his life,
An artistic composition
That quickly changes when
He appears on screen
Displaying familiar mood swings
That fuel his passion
For each masterpiece,
As I long for his self portrait
Of random black drippings To
hang above my bed.
When I light a beeswax candle
That night,
The abstract painting transitions
From my day dreams
Into an R.E.M. sleep
Where his hands become
My lovemaking mentor
Guiding my eyes across

An advancing body
That moves through
Smokey, interlinked strands, Showing
me the way.

I'm aware

he wishes I were More like Audrey
Hepburn As we watch, "Breakfast at
Tiffany's," Together, by the way:

Her words flutter free from her lips
Like large wingspans of a bird
Always soaring,

Her diamond studded tiara
Shine's on screen,
Similar to a silver halo,

Her walk carries her petite Frame
with a type of class that only She
could know....

And her exquisite ability to easily slip
From a small black dress at A
moment's notice.

I don't need a wall clock
During my loneliest hour,
To indicate the time of day

To describe the way shades of light
Fall across the darkness Drawn
between us.

We embrace the morning we part,
Like collaborators in one of my
Unfinished paintings left to dry

With my brushes in the final scene Of
our silent film.
The Last of Him

Hidden. I squat
Then see my husband toss His
last earned penny
Into the deserted plaza fountain.

The penny soars to its depths
Perhaps answering a wish, a prayer,
Cutting the water's surface
Generating small rings
Like the gold bands we once wore,
Memories that soften his tilted face
Growing liquid beneath the mothy street light,

When he speaks her name
As if he had thrown in another cent To
make her appear in her caress of waves
Pulling him carelessly under.

Possessions

A petite moon becomes
An ancient dowry
Hung above my obscure face
Turned toward you

Like a displaced thing
Discovered among
Your other possessions, Hollow
and dusty.

Every Two Hours

He tilts a dark alarm clock Toward
him.

Tonight, his eyes are uneven,
One lid shutting lower Than
half-way, Mismatched like
a Picasso.

Entering Dawn,
The first filter of light
Caught between the curtain slit
Stands at attention before him,
A respect once lost During the
turnstile of night.

He becomes aware
Of perfumed traces
Dying like bruised petals
He would later collect
After finding Her rose of
dark cleavage.

It is then he notices
The other things She
has left behind.

Thresh-holds of Moons

When you were a stranger
To this blackened island
I was cast out
Waiting for glimpses

Of brief tales
Through nondescript
Postcards-

The ink waving over paintings
Of distant sunsets
Like pimped lined oranges
Your splayed brush
Sweetly taken
To reinvent the sea
Many times-

Lit by an oil lamp of midnight
Scouring thresh-holds of moons
You wandered beneath- Foraging
for the brownest wood
To keep temperatures A
certain warmth While
remembering me.

Love, Rain and the Restriction of Time

You sent me a vase full of tulips the week before we parted.
I thought of you the night I remembered to bring
My flower printed umbrella to school
Where I heard a subtle scatter of drops upon the roof.
I also smelled rain filtering in from the hallway, A
fresh scent that seemed to clear the stale air.

With the other students, I later learned it had been pouring
While we read aloud already engaged with concepts

Too busy to notice not only the body of water that formed
Restricting the flow of time, but my wrist watch That told
us when to return home.

I walked briskly to the metro platform, growing slick As
I waited for the last train.
After removing my eye glasses to rid them of water,
My surroundings turned blurry
An unlikely opportunity for me to see more clearly,

That you lied in a layer of my imagination
Saved with romantic notions of what
I wanted to believe as true,
My only reality being the way I am left longing for you, As
more than my muse.

Hitchhiking to Vegas
It had turned to snow when I decided Not
to show up at the cathedral.
Still dressed in white,
I attracted a truck driver
Who became my new companion.

He seemed lost clocking miles
From the weathered webs
Of Chicago freeway's
To an unruly straightness, Headed
for the vastness of Vegas.

As we passed Joshua trees,
I imagined white tigers
Trapped behind glass At
the Casino Mirage.

I longed for the door to freedom
That opened when we pulled into
An evening service stop.

We were close enough to see
The ribbons of lights
Laced like lit matches,
In an oasis of neon hotel signs That
eventually invited us to check in.

The grand bedspread was taut
Over corners of cool sheets, Where
I finally fell asleep.
In my inebriated dreams,
I gripped a plastic bucket
Full of change To gamble
the future With a one-
armed bandit.
The night winds of sand
Matched the movement
Of my quick hands reflected
In every machine that I played, Only
for me to leave behind all the
Mismatched lines of countless lemons.

When I woke with a fever,
I could hear your last syllables
Still pouring into my inky coffee
That you had left me Before
our hotel door Clicked
shut.

Our First Disco

I borrowed or rather stole
My older sister's orange chiffon
Hung behind our closet door,
Plastered with posters
Of peace signs and a
Glittery, "Fuck Art. Let's Dance," sticker.
We rode the unravelling web
Of Chicago freeways
To the very first disco And
entered with our
Fake I.D.'s and flasks
Of Boone's Farm Stashed
in my slim purse.
When I twirled the colored fabric
Clung to my thighs,
Brushing against the mirror ball,
Training a psychedelic tinge
Of thickly curled smoke
To sweat like rank chemicals That
made me want to release The
neon exit door.

Boots

In this bar,
I am just another
High steppin'
Shit kickin'
Knockem' flat on their ass
Bitch,
In black leather thigh highs
With steel pointed toes
And three inch heels
Elevating my stature,
Supple as a new mother's Exposed
nipple.

Nineteen Eighty (1980)

My last photo pressed between
The middle of slick pages,
Was a genuine pose
Before a final flash
Leaving behind the glare of
My approved departure,
The stated importance
Of another thing That
seemed to freeze At the end
of my senior year.

I never shared that gilded paged
Golden emblem book With
anyone.
It was considered an approved
1980 canon with its
Agreeable captions
Written like famous quotes
And filed in the school's library.

The content town
Of local graduates
I later learned were repelled
By my need to frequently move
From one state and university
To the next,
Where I always
Packed and repacked An image
I made futile attempts To
discard.

Moving

The last of my furniture
The smoky, velvet blue couch
And the plaid, duct taped recliner
Fit as lost puzzle pieces Into the
rear end of the U-Haul.

The lawn looks barren now,
As if I had buy buyers for my
Life's possessions At a yard
sale.

I pretend all of my customers
Have gone and wait
With anticipation
Behind doors,
With their new artifacts Peering
through curtains Wondering
when I'll leave.

With many twin eyes on me
I sit on cold cement steps
Till my butt grows numb,
When I stand to receive
My final mail from the postman
And pet one more time A
friendly stray cat.
From my pocket,
I unfold a new United States map
And retrace over highlighted areas
That skim the correct freeways From
Illinois to California.
I breathe deeply,
Watching my breath cloud

The fronts of other vacant homes
And quickly make my way To my
restless car.

Ladies Night

In the desert, we dance along
Roadside, neon stripes
Drink cans of leaded cactus juice
And shake the snake of chain smoke
From our new found Chevy we hotwired,
The tires in tune to the wind escaping A
traipsing moon.
We drive by stucco houses,
Stuffing their folic edges
Into our pockets with berries
Ritually re-staining our lips
Wanting to reawaken with a kiss,
Our early morning eyes
Half-closed,
Like groupies of sleepy China dolls That
have filed in to sit at tea.

On Waking

Outside the café,
Waiting on my
Apple pancakes
On Sunday,
I sat beneath
The blue awnings

Billowing like sails.

I remembered them
As being attached
To the steady curve
Of boat masts
In a fullness,
They appeared
One by one

Cutting the silver air
And sun
Like permanent
Fixtures
That twisted into
The endless
Horizon

Of California coast,
After I selected it
As a scene
I once painted
During the
Very last dream
I had in the

Month of October.
On Our Way to the River Inn Big Sur, California

John and I unfold the wetness
Of the evening road Tucked
into my blue Mitsubishi.
We recklessly pass a tired old van
And for a moment,
We drown in highlights

Of our blushed faces
Caressed by the steady fog Of
salted warmth.

We beam inside like nightlights
Gently guiding ourselves
Along highway one
Sealing each impending curve
Like conch shells
Pressed to our hearts
Echoing every beat of openness Found
on approaching raw undulations Of the
sea.

We share a dying cigarette
With Eric Clapton strumming
On the cassette, We sway
out of containment And
abruptly pull over.
Using the quarter moon
As our torch
Of shapely phosphorescence
We hike down steep terrain
Securing our footing
On subtle tufts
Of scattered green,
While pausing in between
On moist, sandy patches
Listening to the sea Calling
in such fury.
We undress as our bodies beckon
To the chill of an eternal dance Letting
the dark waves lap
At our luminescent thighs.

For A Cause

Beneath a watchful sky
We marched in San Francisco
For a cause I didn't understand,
Until the protest appeared On
the evening news.
I discovered my voice
On political views
Created a movement
That lasted more than
That moment,
An outcome I once prayed
To be as good as God
Who taught me the way
To skim front pages
Preparing me only for Small
catastrophies at home.

The Only Visible Stars

In Los Angeles, the early sunset idles, Withered
by the brown leather skin of smog.

Your teeth become the only visible stars
Aligned as a moist half dome,

Your lips a way to hold back the organic wall Of
your protruding tongue, almost forming words.

I find you unusual, in an ordinary way that fades
When the repeat of a heated summer sky

Is draped like a shawl,
Thrown over my stucco home.

We back beneath skylights that loom,
Overexposed to the sun drenched

Temporary happiness stripping us Of
our beach clothes.

With the changing current
Of Santa Ana wind and rain,

Our desires are like the last beads of water
Formed as natural bullets in toy guns

That shoot through us, piercing our nipples.

I'm waiting to Return Home

The coast of Northern California
Is where I learn it feels good
To deprive myself of what is bad for me,
When I grow tired of knocking on Your
ocean front door that never opens.

You watch me behind the chiseled peek hole
Designed to know the distorted way I once
saw rejection.

Your mail box remains half full
Of my letters,
Its socketed wind flag up

To signal the dream like need Of
a sea bird courier.

Before I leave to return to
The familiar curves of highway one,
I eye the loan trajectory
Of roped clothesline
Hanging like your unbelted pant loop.

I imagine it as a tight rope
I could successfully walk,
If I thought for only one moment
You could be revived like

The small plot of watered plants below,
Their organic, far reaching stems
Of outstretched arms Ready to
catch me.

Left in a Dream

I left you alone
Momentarily
Beside the
Window pane.

Your propped head
Rested on cotton pillows
Surrounding your Mahogany
bed.

You saw shadows
Of winter thickets
Standing like

Rows of kings,

Left in a dream
As you listened intently
To the winds sing Of
your past.

My Place in the World

Becoming round and complete
Like the evolution of earth,
I bite into a full-grown peach
Only to swallow its ripe opening Found
in a mouthful at dawn.

Hungry for the red-eyed seed
That covers the length
Of my left, sweaty palm,
I discover each morning
My place in the world Is
predictable.

I begin to wear a glove Of
white-stained juice,
Like a second hand novelty
That seems to fit,
Until the repetition Breeds
a sense of boredom In me.

Where Waxen Apples Fall

My slender fingers find no fault Around
their perfect sphere.
I curiously cut open
One taughtly parched skin
To find the curl of ivory juice
I suck from within
Its hidden kaleidoscope,
Plucked seeds I throw To
a single gust of wind.

Earthbound Gladiators

Centipede's legs are the clipped wings
Of earthbound gladiators
Born beneath dirt
Sifting their way to the surface,
They implant babies
Caught in the middle of heaven and hell
When night becomes
A type of purgatory,
They invade fields
Made of slick, polished wood
As an army
They may plot their advance
In numbers,
Or remain single
And advance alone
With no militaristic defense at all,
Except to wait for my bare feet
Between the mismatched shoes In
my closet.

The Train Station

She sits with her hands clasped
On the gold footlocker,
A ticketed nook
In the corner below graffiti On
the lower wall.

Her hair alone covers half

Of the random design Shining solidly
around her shoulders And over her
breasts like black onyx.
On her skin of soft egg whites,
There blooms a tattooed flower Sprouting
from her right cheek.

She looks like an Egyptian street queen
Perched on her throne
Longing for her loyal subject,
Some king of the night or perhaps
The ticket man
To carry her away From
this city.

Instead, as she lowers her head
Her shaded cat eyes reflect
The bustle of commuters passing by
And finally the floor of trash,
Shuffling feet and her full fishnet stockings
That she casts and crosses On the
grimy tile in front of her, Waiting
patiently for the next train.

The Blue Hat

This month,
The blue hat
Conceals one lazy eye,
The other is mascara smudged,
A raccoon rim
That reads straight into night

As she stacks books high
Like a forager,
Fumbling with a crumpled card.

I slide each dusty binder
Through the sensor light
That reveals when
Each of these reads are due,
But her mind is depleted Of
red, stamped dates.

We have her on file For
past violations of time.
Offender!
Among the whispers
The blue hat knows
We speak of her
And just the same
She will remain
A recluse
Until she has leafed through
Centuries of art, poetry and dance
Where she will paint and write
And perhaps even practice Her
pirouettes.

The Mechanical Man

The man standing at the corner
Of my street has cement feet. He
appears mechanical
How he stands day after day
Next to his full flower cart,
Stiffly waving to every car That
pauses at the stop sign.

He hopes for unrolled windows
And a flurry of thirty-second exchanges,
Money for bunches of stems
From his dying but brilliant display
Of unlikely blooms in array
Against grey-sooted store fronts
That draw the locals who steer Past
him and enter instead
The swinging door of Red's bar
Or a tattoo shop or the iron-gated Thrift
store that may leave them Penniless
before sunset.

Always, the mechanical man will
Leave behind a strewn pile of petals
To be whisked away with the early shadows of night
Floating into the ditch of tall grass
Where he will exist sweetly saving a single Flower
to weave around his cap.

Winter Evening

The landscape lies in ruins from the frost,
Building up strong shoulders of trees
That grow heavy
Appearing to balance weight
From the horizon of day
Slowly breaking away From the
roof of my house, Camouflaged in
translucent white. The cold has no
remorse For imprisoning me.
Like a guard stationed
In front of my barricaded door

He paces,
Wearing his hollowed bones
As armor,
And I can hear him whistle
A type of tune that trails off
Leaving final notes to haunt me
Like the way the amber tip
Of my last cigarette sings my lips As
I whisper your name.

Missing Person

Against the bruised, desert darkness I lost
my way along dusty, unmarked roads.
Everywhere I walked,
I paused upon needles from Joshua trees Pricking
my feet, like beds of warm coals The way blooms
of summer rays last touched me.
Beneath a leathery sky, I found
bases of petrified wood Woven
into the landscape.
I compared its beauty to my tangled body,
Stiff limbs once spread across Stained
versions of used mattresses.
When I became aware
That red pillars of ants
Strapped heavy debris
To their flaming shoulders
My miniature shadow
Became complete as a winter thicket
Standing like a queen, Who never
looked back.

To Reach For Infinity

At mass, I see no redemption for those less saintly.
My feet are stones, striking the marble floor,
Leaving behind hardened marks
That only a custodian of Christ will clean.
The pews fill with women who drift in like origami swans.
The men stand stiff backed as cardboard cut-outs On a
shooting range.
They all become diagrammed props With
drawn on hearts that bleed.
I hold two copper nickels to toss into the collection basket.
I chase gum down my throat, With the body and blood of
the lord.
Later, the priest possesses a dark glance at my tee-shirt, From
the other side of the confessional window.

I worry about death,
The way I've come to reside in a single-wide
As a wild dog traps me each night,
Waiting to knash my crossed bones
Reclining in a plastic covered velveteen chair.
It's cold as a tiny department store stockroom,
With inventory that includes figurines of a manger scene
Who have metallic eyes, unable to see a way out, Waiting
for a new owner.
I escape, but the moon's search light finds me Wearing
the stoic face of my mysterious church.
My limbs become long enough to reach for infinity Only
when I am no longer guided, by what I have forgotten.