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For That What Didn't

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For That What Didn't Fit

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B.A. General Studies, University of Missouri-St. Louis, 2000

A Thesis Submitted to The Graduate School at the University of Missouri-St. Louis
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Masters of Fine Arts in Creative Writing
with an emphasis in fiction

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ABSTRACT

The work of this book was pursued with the objective of exploring psychological and sociological causes and effects of the human condition with themes including family, love, solitude, loss, abandonment, estrangement, maternity, sex, and gender power dynamics--especially that of male dominance of women and varying female responses to this sociological organization--using characters, animals, settings and voices in the artistic medium of poetry. The assembly of the book is in the style of novel structure, but neither story nor chronology were considered in the order of organization as each poem is an independent piece. Epigraphs were used at the beginning of each division to help set a mood and direction for the new section. The poems of Part I were chosen as a sort of novel introduction and to establish setting, provide character development and to introduce the protagonist, background, thematic nemesis and thematic antagonist, and tensions. Part II is organized according to the pacing and rhythm of the story-telling tradition of novel structure, including the effects of rising and falling action, crisis, and epiphany; effects created using both content and in individual style and form of each poem and its placement. Part III presents recurring falling action in continuation of plot, subplots and themes arisen within. Part IV is the conclusion.

The pursuit of the objective of the work for the writer was achieved as intended and the method of organization helped objectify the areas of study. Further results of the work are possible, if read, and would be concluded by each reader.

For That What Didn't Fit

Poems by Sue Britt

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Part I

The whole process seemed terribly slow to me: house by house, death by death. Ten generations, ten houses. Then it would take just one person to gamble all those houses away, or burn them down with a match and then run down the street with his balls in a fruit-picker's pail.

Now I was looking for a house I really didn't want and I was going to write a screenplay I really didn't want to write. I was beginning to lose control and I realized it but I seemed unable to reverse the process -- Charles Bukowski

The Cure for Insomnia

When I was little in my bed in the quiet of night I'd think on Chinese in rice paddies
probably thoughts drawn from images of Vietnam I saw on television every night
watched on my belly
chin on the back of fingers interlaced or
stuck pointy in the cup of the palm or
doing a backbend
watching upside down
protesting in streets
cops throwing smoke bombs
at crowds or close-ups of
people with tears streaming down cheeks
over assassinations or some other mayhem
but when I saw the Vietnamese
I'd sit up and wonder
eyes wide fascinated watching from the floor with conical hats woven of straw and straight black
hair so easy to care for that moved like water not tangled in a matted mess of frizz that mothers
would have to rip through
clothes all looked the same
no one would know differences between them
but when I thought of China and imagined people there
those folks weren't scared
like those I saw
in Vietnam
on the living room screen
in my mind instead they were working contented
busily pulling away at reeds harvesting rice like I read about in our encyclopedia or saw in
picture books at school with bags strapped across shoulders peacefully tugging hands slipping
mechanically in repetition stroking along kelly green blades occasionally pausing to bicker with
one another or stopping to straighten backs to stand and wave at a passing neighbor
but I only just turned to that side of the world
after I spent so many other minutes
hours
in my imagination
starting at my parents' door
just through the kitchen
down a short hall
I'd go around the corner
and imagine them there contented too sleeping breathing deeply under blankets in that large
room with temperature like the coldest early spring morning no matter the number
on the thermostat in winter
the curtains on the windows would blow
in the back in the room with the highest ceiling
unlike the warmest room in the middle of the house where I'd lie under low ceiling in a box with
a piece of foam smashed down

but keeping themselves under electric blanket turned low
each other heating the cocoon
I would think
of them there
while I lie in my bed
purposely blurring my eyes looking up
toward the ceiling
hear in my mind the sounds of soundness breathing
I would pause over them
then turn away
turn to thoughts of my brother
snuggled
or laid spread but sound
on the other end of the house
he not thinking
of Chinese
just sleeping
like people do.
And at times I would return to my room
eyes glazed think of a spaghetti mess of wires fill my ceiling with them in piles tangles hanging
all colors primary and secondary red yellow orange purple and blue and black and white too
shining abnormally
wonder if other people saw colors the same way I do
remind myself not to mention that
to anyone the next day at school
notice the plastic white coated glaring most concentrate on them and trace and try to find which
way they wove through the disarrayed thick bundle and sometimes that would close my eyes and
my mind would drift off
and I'd sleep before I knew
what had happened.
But not usually.
So
I would leave my brother's room
when I remembered how he smelled
leave the front room too
fly through the wall in my mind and think of the yard outside perhaps birds nested sleeping in
trees and snuggling together fluffing their feathers
then think of mites on them
then of the street and remember where patches of asphalt were coming loose and hope in the
morning boys wouldn't throw those at me and look with those smiles that had wicked secrets
behind them that I didn't comprehend but disturbed me then turn thoughts to groundhogs curled
in holes underground in the woods looking fluffy although I was sure their coats were rough
really and of dogs' noses tucked beneath tails under porches trying not to be cold and frogs
sleeping too and bugs all holding still in sleep
I would think of the neighbors up the street then other streets of the neighborhood nearby then
other neighborhoods farther away where the ranch houses stood with chain link fences shining

pools sparkling in back yards and cars in driveways reflecting the scene off them with street lights and sleeping parents with union jobs to go to in the morning and sleeping children in beds with new blankets that matched sheets that might have some cartoon characters on them not leftover and holey after your brother was tucked in because he was older and deserved more because he was a boy and think of all the people sleeping there and that reminded me I was the only one awake again while everyone else could close their eyes and were normal not like the one with all those strange thoughts in her head and all the things she said out loud like no one else did who had the decency to keep quiet and not disturb the others and make them put their hands on their children and nudge them away and put their adult bodies between them and me and knew

like everyone else seemed to

not to always use all those words so much already.

So then I'd blink those thoughts away

think of blinking stars instead

wonder if they were shooting

moving through the sky

think of raccoons waddling around finding things to eat all through the night

how nature intended them to.

Just the way nature intended them.

Then I would fly away

to get away

from that

and go from the county

over the city

and pass the Gateway Arch

always on the north side of it

up where I could see the Eads Bridge so pretty woven steel intricacy crossing the Mississippi and

would speed arms stretched perpendicularly to the rest of my body over the corn fields feel wind

ripple my sleeves that were silk or satin in my mind while flying above all those states to the east

that didn't matter to me in a flash because that was so mundane and wouldn't dip down until I

could see all the shining lights of New York City

and would take a slow dive down pull to a standing position floating through foreign familiar

streets examining brick and stone buildings trace detailed lines of cornices with the pads of my

fingers grab green coppered rounded gutters with both hands then put my palms on the walls

until I could feel cold white stone and peer silently in through the windows at people

my hot bedtime breath fogging glass

strain to listen to those accents

watch them up fighting and laughing and drinking

using the vernacular of the East Coast I relished

with the family loyalty they seemed to cherish

from what I saw on our television

at night from my floor vantage

or from the Italian and Greek families in my city

and from my school

with their big holiday gatherings

but eventually as I flew through and around New York City

I found mostly they were sleeping.
So my mind would leave and fly over the river and I'd feel chill air and smell salt and look down
at fishing boats rocking on dark waves then fly way up into the sky with stars above deep
midnight purple touching my shoulders and go around the world and turn to what I imagined was
on the other side of the globe
 where they were awake like me
they'd be shuffling
down long dirt streets kicking up dust
in ones and twos
and some would be
pulling two-wheeled carts or tapping a dirty brown yak on the ass carrying big wadded roped
bundles passing by people standing at shabby stick fences gossiping with neighbors
and follow above the walking ones
drifting along
all the way into town where some were haggling at markets or scolding children dashing by
laughing threatening to spill whatever colorful things it was the adults of the town were selling
and that's how it went over the years and the family knew
at some level
no one spoke of it
it was just so
weird wakefulness every night
just the way
it was
the girl
who didn't sleep
with too many words
thoughts strange
something's wrong
but better to just leave it
not to draw
attention
it was
ignored as if a characteristic no different than blue eyes or shoe size and when eyelids thickened
when arteries in whites of my father's swelled eyes pinkened my mother slept shallow soft shut
sitting up on the couch and my brother staggered away silently crawled into his bed mine were
wide open still and one of my parents would say
go to bed
go to sleep
go
to my room
in the world
tired
of thinking
of what they might be doing in China or what creatures walked awake near my home or if maybe
neighbors might be up fighting a husband just home drunk from the bar smelling of another

or giving up thinking eventually and sneaking into the living room to see who was on Don
Kirchner's Rock Concert
sitting so close to the television
the volume down low
so as to not disturb the others
and as rock turned to punk
and by the time the Sex Pistols came around I had found
the men who would buy me a gold or brown bottle
and marvel
about how I never passed out.
But these days I just think
on those nights
when the waking comes
not of villages or dirt paths or shabby stick fences and dashing children in markets
but of smog in Beijing choking
and of those in factories making cheap crap on assembly lines
of the people who are working
dirty dusty sweated headed thick black hair
not silky like rolling water
but powdered neglect
dropping hard across faces like frayed dark dyed twine
when not tied properly
and workers who are not currently crammed in assigned dorms
but on shift on the lines
tucking fallen chunks of hair behind ears under white cotton hats to keep it out of merchandise
rubbing itchy noses with fingers sore with tiny cuts from sharp wires and maybe pinprick burns
from splashed solder in false large daylight buildings where the bosses and shareholders don't care
about shifting assignments on lines
so their hands don't cripple
when that would be
so simple
to do
and think of them in rooms where they might sleep when they do
in little boxed spaces no bigger than narrow halls built on walls like shelves assigned to them by
numbers allotted and shared with others taking turns trading hours with tiny gridded windows
they can't see out of even if their eyes were not so blurred with lack of good soundness and want
of enough energy to think because of all the meals of plain noodles or enough feelings left to
care what might be out the windows rectangular and thin opaqued with sticking pollution spewed
onto them through lower air that some may try to remember is blue above that have suicide
netting under to keep workers from jumping to their deaths after another thirty-six hour shift they
work for a month straight before taking a swaying bus climbing home mountain roads over two
days to give money to elders for food so those sleeping peacefully here can have another new
phone
then try not to think
of the factories
and I can't remember the rice paddies

because the war on television is in the desert
and they don't even show it
and I don't want to think of men in opium fields
or think
of what they do to women
and girls
and boys I hear they dress like girls and make dance for them
and I try
not to think
of who might be awake
lurking around my neighborhood hunched and looking this way and that or think too much about
gunfire nearby now and then since it is not on my block
well, it doesn't seem to be
and since I am not by a window
well, not one near the street and
if they come into the alley there is the garage
blocking me
and my yard has a privacy fence
and my dog would bark if anyone came in or
I try not to think
of the raccoons
covered in oil and transmission fluid
with sharp teeth
and claws
fighting for territory on my balcony fiercely and
digging in dumpsters and
leaving a mess in the alley and
scurrying in dirty dark unwashed scummy trash nastiness blowing the block
those wild urban rodents
trying to survive
the only way they know
because it's their nature.
Instead I think of how they will sleep at light.
And I may nap then too.
I'm not tired at all
just all wide
and wondering
who gets up
at five in the morning
in New York City
since there probably aren't milk men anymore.

Pop Up Concert

day warmed the evening
but it was not sticky yet

i have seen her since then
dressed for blowing blizzard

in heat humid walking up to
business of Cherokee Street

but she has not again stopped
here in front to play the guitar

like that day she sat on grey
concrete steps of my white

concrete painted porch that
covers long ago limestone

her dreadlocks dark and light
her face a smooth butcher's

paper wrapped in layers and
her flowing content wearing

everything she owned i bet
with drab tribal pattern worn

guitar strap over her shoulder
keeping it close to her feeling

body she played a melodic
funky street riff of her own and

two boys two doors down
turned over two five gallon

buckets for an orchestrated
drumming accompaniment

When Camping

on the river it is serene
they bond on a gravel bar nearly silent the water
clean the only traffic an occasional canoe
paddle dipping dropping cutting into clear liquid dripping
relaxing the family is all there quiet except
reeling and casting father and mother fishing
girl swimming unsplashing in freezing creek
boy acquiescing the sport at his father's feet
no beautiful made-up women with heels
competing for the attention of men
they
all canvas shoed
and natural skin washed
in sunshine and chilly spring stream

tonight
they will sit
near the small fire
the children wrapped in wadded cloth
will shine a flashlight on the water
lying on their bellies concentrating on
finding red bats diving
for bugs drawn
or whip poor wills in fast flying flashes
with luck a large green luna moth
eyes drawn on back of wings to protect
to project
danger
and they all pause
listen to bull frogs bass voice statements
jum a-rum
jum a-rum
manly deep throated frogs and father calm

they only come when ready to stay for days
and happy
they do not heave an aluminum canoe on top and pack up the car with raw sausage
maple syrup pancake mix eggs
poles tent extra clothes and
colemans when it is another time
they do not hate here
they listen to the sounds of the darkness
and watch
for the bobcat

the barred owl
or whatever remarkable being
they might spot
they hang a light
burning outside the tent
they all sleep together in the back
of the large two room screened from the night
and doze
along sounds of the melodious grey tree frog trilling
deep in the wood with drifting
scent of coals
of dry fallen branches they gathered

Bareback

Do you ever get lonely
I understand, I don't like people either, but
Sometimes, I just need them, he said

My big toes tucked into the start of the crook of the croup
Into the dark dun stripe
Little toes flared back, pressed into hot slick coat
I'd brushed, curry first, then hard straw, then smooth soft, then shine
Three hours, starting at daybreak
When he and I blew mist to the air
When he and I looked into each other
When he turned his head from the hitching rail and I fell into that rich brown there
And he told me he knew how I cared for him
He told me he knew
And he didn't lie
A horse won't lie to you
My toes in the crook of the croup, in the stripe of his dun
My knees in low ribs
My collar bone on his withers
My breasts on each side, holding me centered
We'd been hours in, through the head-shaking snorting dancing gait
We'd settled and found a place
Where grasses brushed mid-barrel
A breeze
Through hair across my face come loose
My cheek lay between his shoulder and neck
He rocked clomping rhythm
My body bent with him
The bareback measure of contented recluse

That's what I thought of
And I shook my head, no
I don't have casual relationships, I said
I'd rather be alone

The Girls

the girls from my neighborhood had three choices
stay in the house, lose their virginity when some boys decided
usually around twelve
or fight like a man
when grown the girls know to take their keys in their hand
before they hit the lot
position keyring high on a finger
keep their hands free because they know they are girls and have to be ready
not fumbling around distracted
like some kind of dumbasses
the girls don't cross the street when they see a black man coming down the sidewalk
they know from their poor white neighborhood how to spot a crook, a pickpocket
a beater, a rapist
a bad man, a scammer, a liar, a druggie, a cheat and they can tell who's carrying
without seeing the bulge
they know how to keep their heads down
and still be able to see them
they know how to turn invisible
when need be
they watch motion and eyes, not skin tone, to recognize
and they already knew
from the neighborhood
the police are our enemy
didn't learn that
on social media
the girls from my neighborhood try to get ahead
or try to stay afloat
they wish things were fair but know they won't be
from watching their mothers and
from watching other girls from other neighborhoods
get handed things free
the girls from home marry the boys from home and divorce them drunks
then they marry another one from the country and keep him
they have ungrateful children who end up on opium
they don't get into the union and can't do office politics
or really know how to dress
around all those snooty bitches
they end up running the counter at the auto repair shop or quick stop
they make sure the mechanics and customers are scared of their husbands
and keep their hands off
not the ones who stayed in the house though
they usually do better

Us

You.

Woman.

You made the word a curse word.

I could never say it.

As a girl.

Woman.

It sounded dirty out of my mouth.

Woman.

Made my lips feel soft and round.

Woman.

Like womb.

Like pornography.

Spread open.

Never could say it without feeling nauseous.

Without my lips numbing feeling like slow motion.

Compromise.

You.

Woman.

With your side bends.

Your loud sharp dresses stiff.

Your desperation.

Woman.

Smelling like flowers I never took in.

Pink lipstick.

Yellow curlers.

Rouged cheeks.

Red phony rounded.

Coquettishness.

Painted chalkboard scraping fingernails.

Smiling wide dead.

Dulling eyes to seem stupid for them.

Using that voice.

That didn't belong to you.

High faltered quiet.

For men not my father.

The others.

You slut.

slut

i could always say that word

once my father said it

when you dragged me out of bed

in my long cotton nightgown

creamy white flowered
dusting the floor
sat me rubbing my eyes
made me stay 'til midnight
with your face tight knotted
at the kitchen table to hear the drunken rant
to prove to me that
he was not my hero
when he turned and told me
red-eyed and wobbling
i would grow up
to be a slut
just like my mother
before i knew what that word meant

Not like you.
Woman.

Grown.
Done.
It is dirty.
That word.
I make it.
I take it.
Back bending.
Vamping flattery.
Front bending.
Before them.
Assaulting red lips with heat.
Not a bought stick.
Buff shine.
Nails digging.
Low toned groaning.
Bare skinned.
Witted.
Loose haired.
Clothes on the floor.
Leave them.
Dazzled as they lay.
Lay them down.
Climb on them.
That will have me.
Take them in.
Me.

It's a Boy

they slit me
sliced with scissors the meat of me the men decide this
not wanting to think we are built for it
so you slipped through bloodied
cut into
the stark room
out of me
i would never be the same
was owned
by you then
then your father owned me too

he sat with me
on perfect thick green of the hill
outside after i kept you
on my breast
until you slept and i drew air clear and more
deeply than ever and turned
shining brightly
and told him i had never known this feeling
of love
didn't know
it was a thing possible

he smiled back
believing
reflective
easy
a new confidence in him
a father now
told me how
if i ever tried
to leave him
he would kill you
so i stayed of course
for years but first
at six weeks
the o.b.
stuck his finger in me
said *squeeze*
then gasped
wow your husband has nothing to worry about
he should be quite pleased
good girl

Easel

When it is out of my control
Another man making the plans
He is just following the rules this time
It is all written down, it is right there
For you to see, shouldn't be surprised
That we will make you mind
I put up an easel
That I jerry-rigged
From my step ladder

An ad, I don't know for what
I ripped it out of a magazine I found
In the Snoopy bag I once carried
Up into foothills
A photo in black and white
A young woman with dark eyes
Full lips soft skin with pearls
On her neck small strings of them
Wrapped and aligned to
Silver on her earlobes

It may take some time
To get this shading just right
And I practice drawing roses on
My smaller sketchpad over and over
And I take out my pastels
And scrub off the decades
Of dust, but none are red enough
For the background I want
To put behind her

And I put the men making the decisions
Out of my mind this morning
They matter not to me
They are not here in my house
Just my easel is

Part II

In Brueghel's panorama of smoke and slaughter
Two people only are blind to the carrion army:
He, afloat in the sea of her blue satin
Skirts, sings in the direction
Of her bare shoulder, while she bends,
Fingering a leaflet of music, over him,
Both of them deaf to the fiddle in the hands
Of the death's-head shadowing their song.
These Flemish lovers flourish; not for long.
--Sylvia Plath

My Friend's View

you are
gone
lost to that lovely view

but let's think of the view
can you even see it anymore
is it there
for you
is there anything left in you
to look

let's look
let's remember the view from decades before

your flat back lawn blue flowers hanging like bells
dark foliage lush in the natural desert it rarely rains
on the side hiding the neighbor's house on the left
from your mind
to the right wild sage on the sandy hill nothing else grows but scrub brush
and behind
the valley below
peppered rounded rows of terra cotta
some days
dust hanging
mid in the air down there
that you called
haze

you cannot see the university from here it is tucked away in a dip
a dip
a cool treed
green
dip in the flat leveled bottom

we know that's where your man goes to find his level
left you behind on the hill on the hill
at the top of the canyon near the top
of the canyon

but let's remember the view
framed in blue hanging bell flowers on the left and wild sage on the undevelopable right
hill with stately complex scalloped wrought iron fencing at the edge of the drop-off
where lesser professors live below you
but we don't lower our eyes

we look out over the valley
remark on the view at this height
we don't look behind or think of the second floor
where he took this year's young research assistant
what might be happening on his desk this instant
we look to the view
we wonder
of the little brown and tanned
people down there
under the dust
if they might be having
car trouble
or are shopping with coupons
at Albertson's
or if they pick up a six-pack
of Corona
some smokes
they are not stretching abstract concepts of philosophy in the study
but are they kissing deeply
in the thrust of adoring daddy-issued and power lustly manipulating mind
youth and old man's for what he missed out on earlier in life respectively
while you quit school to work day and night to pay his way through
but the view
it is lovely
maybe i will come to you
drive to the top of the canyon
when i get back to the west coast i would love to
take your hand and walk you out of the canyon and out of
that valley
let's go
listen to the ocean
squint our eyes in the sunset
and in the salted breeze
breathe

\ve'spoidēə

Vespoidia: the superfamily of wasps and ants.

Superfamily: the taxonomic category that ranks above family and below order.

He reached to me
Through the phone
 And made it seem
 Of such import
 By his tone
 I have ants

I carried on
And later
In the conversation
He breathed
Like seduction
 I have ants
 On my counter

Four days on
I had them

It was two months with the ants
Wiping with a washcloth
Refusing the poison
Until he decided
To be done

Four days later
I had none

Inviting

Shades of tans and bones and browns
and softness all around even
in edges there is
a blur
of rounded creamy ease and beauty that comforts me
in your little cabana by the drained lake
left
to just a creek
inside the ostentation that surrounds.

Nothing
that happens will take that from me
when I was welcome and could finally see
they mean nothing.

They
who know nothing of taste
have nothing on me
even when you know nothing of me and I mean nothing
to you
but to offer a proof
you are not one of them too.

Urge

i made madness i made you mad i made you desperate i made you come i made you take your clothes off i made you with pressing insistent pulling down tugging your sweet sour refusal i made come off in my bed i made your skull mine in hand fingers kneading into you and bore dripping thick unrelenting shameless soft drifting lostly away from inhibition i made you lie with me naked blending the skin we wore melding deep tissue and calming our fractiousness a moment, opened to chance of love consummate and in that i made my ruination

Cast the Faction of Fools

we fight

the others fight ourselves each other inside
my inside your outside life turned on me kill this empathy
will not help you heal to give me a chance to live and love
have contentment mental health again or for once this time impel it take
my day

that I deserve have earned the right to fall into your arms stop
now

not yours

into my own

to do as he and leave

as they left

just let

the fucks fall off like rotted flesh

chuck dregs

into abyss

where they beg

to live

Null

driving thighs bending ankles burning calves feet on pavement thumping throwing arms forward
fists flying lungs swelling neck throbbing pumping blood coursing through my heart making me
alive i know about the running i know about the flight i know about keeping things neat and tidy
in order to control and getting high to disappear and drinking down the fear and i know about
taking in the ones who never cared for you and safeguarding them to seem better than others
when you know you are not because if you were you could be with the one who does

Portrait

I am paper pages
Added to a magazine
A pulp imagination
 Between thumb and finger
 Hold the corner before you
 Before you turn it over
I am little russet autumn boots
 Jeans stretched tight on thin thighs
 A pearl necklace lying
I am a representation of winter woolen plaid
 A snapshot frozen of cold alone
 A subject framed at a distance
On the next page I am a yellow slicker
 An incidental slip in the misting
 A depiction of an interesting spring
I am a photograph of an ankle strap and calf coming out from under
 The table at a restaurant in summer
I am a pair of cut-off blue jeans
 A peasant blouse embroidered
 Ivory ribbon tied on collarbone
 A large teardrop gap below
I am the breast within it
I am an image
 A likeness in white gauze
I am long legs and arms
 A study in glossy
 A four-color spread

Sunday Afternoon Mixing Wooden Spoon

the Quaker pea and apple
potato salad
taste surprised
so tried to recreate
took a ton of Dijon
to make it fit
my recipe
with sour cream which must blunt mustard
so switched to creole with horseradish next
and after three attempts
the spicy creamy mess
was best I ever made
but you never would eat my potato salad
because you might love me then
if you can even do such a thing
ya big chicken.

Made it for myself, dumbass. Not you.
Would have shared, but babies don't get potato salad. They might choke.

Its Misery

Yellow cat eyes implored over torn flesh and angled bone on right front leg swung during the attempt to save its life from the jaws of my dog. I sat with the cat beside the garage and tried to keep it calm, knowing when they came with the net they would take it to its death and that's what you always do. But you tear the flesh yourself and sit calmly with your own victim until the net of your neglect arrives and traps the crippled you left

clinging yet
breathing still
and you walk back home alone.

Course

Roiling handsome river rapids unceasing stream sweeps quarry into cool blue bluff bottom hole but turns black cold in deepened pool. Do not stay. Escape. To fight to swim above again to see the gravel bar ahead then quarrel willful current. To crawl alone bruised palms and knees to reach the bank through scum and reeds at edge of shore. To throw upon sharp chert and dull tuff comfort compare to thrill of forceful flow and freezing jilt. To flatten pruned and tender feet. To unbend back and belly. To be upright and walk exposed. To seek the sun.

Vermin

screaming pain high pitched struggle
balcony raccoons
claws tearing bet maybe blood
want some of that
fighting hard rolling biting
fucking it up full out
city vermin fat off dumpster
trash in the alley
competing for space
or some piece
 bring it down to a cackle
 someone
won someone
 lost all
 went off
in different directions

Big Burger Sick

The big burger with that mayo and red onions and tomato and those sweet sandwich pickles so sloppy and the bread so thick it makes me sick so good at the time of the eating but empty really just taste on my tongue and squishy texture that seems like some sort of warm luxury except those crisp pickles and lettuce

but just iceberg

not romaine

I will pay

and the beer wasn't so fine I'd rather have a nice chai latte or a green tea with honey but it wasn't for the taste but the buzz and for the checking out of this life for a while and to let go of the farce smile I put on to keep me from crashing down

delusions are good and they play in your mind and it's quite a way to pretend to go blind to the real world and say it will be okay you can say to yourself that you will have success and live there for a time and get through another day

and another day

and another day

then another

it would be so fun to play with you again but we haven't played in so long the fun is gone it's all been too much talk about future falls no future of love or at all and about love or the lack thereof or how you have none and I want to go back before I became open and ruined it all

it used to

just be

dripping lurid jest

and sparking intellect

if I could go back

and not submit

not choose that

idea of you/me

greasy weeping melted cheese that dissolved in my mouth leaving me hungry

numbed my brain like cheap beer that tasted like shit but I drank fast for the drunk 'til I passed out cold

hangover and fat I want to go back and know you are not nourishment for me

but I can't go back so what do I do with you I do nothing with you and you add me to your list of women who longed and I cannot add to you to my list of men I wanted for friends who only wanted to fuck me.

Fuss

I've heard this fussing from birds
In the past, in the county
In trees screaming or squirrels barking
When a cat came around and now
The kids in the city fuss on the block
I don't know what predator they shout about
Each other a predator and prey themselves
Everywhere they turn likely
Especially the girls
And it is all girls out there now
Sounds to be twenty all fussing at once
A man's voice enters and they settle a moment
But he goes and they are back at it
Chirping and squawking and a tiny baby cries
Wailing like pain and no one hesitates to see
What failure there
For the life it sees ahead
When no one will ever hear it again and again

Beauties

He says
You are beautiful

To each her
And he says

It works
Every time
For them each

When they leave
He is relieved

Maybe they go
To find one
Who will know them
Maybe to be alone
He doesn't know
He doesn't care to

Burn Off

Red Desert. Tan Desert. I don't care. Can't stand it here. All the trees and green and weeds and humidity and people so slow and dulled with Midwestern demands on me and my particular personality. Sticky thickness manner oppression offends my soul. Burn the middling off me with a hundred and twenty degrees. I'll sit and watch nothing all day and listen to some ole twangy Western songs crackle the A.M. dial and look for lizards and watch the tumbleweeds scratch and roll and meet some shady travelers and sleep under flannel blankets in the nights always cold.

In Them Days

when riding
Metro
rail
line
today
smelled raw skunk
carried in that orange bag
right in front of me
breathed deep
remembered way-back days
that man
owned a Mercedes dealership
how he loved
his beautiful things
I was
most prized
living art
up in Alta Loma
snow
on the foothills
me
in the Jacuzzi
with those high-priced prostitutes brought to party
when sales was good
any certain day
the men looked
at me
when they put their hands on those whores
the girls did too
but I'd just scoff
get up dripping
leave them to their business

180 Beats

I answered
The door
The second
The dog barked
Even before
You could knock
 You likely
Standing there
Paused on my porch
 Reading
My mat still

*Ask Not For Whom the Dog Barks
It Barks For Thee*

I flung open

The instant
The threshold
The moment
Our hands touched
Like music
Was there
Unheard in my head
The rhythm physical
Bodies our ballroom
When mouths sought
A lifting
 Viennese Waltz
 Lilted inside me
Swirling and spinning
And turning me backward
Your gentle hard driving
Pushing and sweeping
Our joining
Internal
Within
And circling
My living room

On the Breast

if you
to whom i revealed everything
do not know me
then who?
but others have and do others to whom
i have not revealed
any of these
secret things
to know to be known by
another is not dependent upon
the exposure of the self but of
the attention of the observer
i have
seen these eyes of yours
have looked downward
into
the eyes of an infant
nursing and the loll in them when the enrapture begins
the babe has no more need to see the human
on the other end of the breast
it is only feeding the greed
absorbed in itself
and its pleasure
tongue tingling under the nipple lips gripping wet suckling milk flowing
the eyes deceive beguile the beholder appear like love
and it is love
love
for itself
not the woman
at the other end of its need

Force Fit

I am left
 with little
Calluses
On the tops of three of the toes of one foot
And a bit of roughness
 or a hardness
On two of the other
From wearing those boots
So much
Too big
Had them on way too many hours in a row
During that
Last dalliance
So damned good looking though
A subtle toned brown suede
Cut ankle high
Vintage Western mountain
Style
Square toed
Rubbed dark in spots
With age
So sharp
To look at
Could barely
Keep
My eyes off
In fixated
Adoring
Drifted away
In a way
When I looked
 So in attempt
 to accord
Stuffed
Fluff down
Into the ends
To keep
Feet from
Slipping
But each time
I tried again
The rub
 from the last
Wearing

Added to new pain and
My poor little digits whined
Then grumbled
And tiny toes
Last gave in
 to injury
So now I can only
Admire
Those boots
At a distance
 Left
On the shelf
 across the room

Should never
Even
Endeavored
This acquisition
But still felt
 such love
For that what didn't fit
That looked rich
Rare and fine to me
Just
 Wore
Too many hours
I put on
I tried
Too many times
I went a day too long

Relations

It would fill
The Universe
The Milky Way at least
It would be
A cosmic movement
The quantum
Entanglement complete
When one particle can
 No longer
 Be defined
Without the other

Confession
after Gary Snyder

I am the one who gnawed the lies
Fed on disease and studied broken
Glass took pieces and pocketed
Sharp fragments cut through into
My thighs while he told me to stop
But could not himself keep from
Walking his habitual well-trod path

I dug like an earthworm desperate
Into the dirt down moist warm rot
Slimming my way away from the
Glaring heat of sunlight that would
Dry being an eyeless blind volunteer
Escaping the day to wiggle in filth
Familiar eating and shitting our grot

I broke into that pretentious act as
If he were some wanted god and me
Another victim and punished myself
For all I had done to those before him
Like it was a dry-rotted ancient shack
Snapping walls in half like bones made
Of past dead and I soulless user of men

I show you what I have in my hands
Now what is left in sweating palms
Pink flesh soft and new healed from
Burning down the ropes full speed
Stand upright exposed on clean floors
Walk from user used having used him
While he climbs back to prepare next

Reflecting

You do not have to make me cry.
You do not have to cut so deep
to prove you don't want and don't need me.
I can see
in the mirror what you see.
Like you, I see in the mirror, you at my back.
There, punishing my reflection; yourself.

Make me lonely. Make me, so you can feel.
Make me want. Make me, so you needn't.

I remember this play.
I, starlight.

Last night I pet my face.
Thought of the sound of you dragging from me.
Looked in the mirror leaning and imagined candles
on a wire table flashing reflection.
On saucers.
And on the floor
before the mirror.
Dozens of them.

In The Work

i don't see the model
except in light and shade
sections and angles
what are his proportions
not his name
his eyes stare away
no indication of personality
i cannot draw him as whole
a human whole
just in sections
think of the perspective
analyze angles
and when they look
with their eyes
try to stare into me
i can sketch in my mind
think of what paints i would mix
to get that certain green
and when they look again
beseech
i can smile
knowing
i will now include
that emotion
they showed
in the work

Part III

Gateway claims have always struck me as thin stuff because they only can mean that you're not there yet, that you're still in transit, that you're not in any well defined place -- Charles Portis

I Think, Therefore I Believe in Love

Do you know what it means
when you think
you are falling in love with someone?

It means
you are falling in love with someone

I think
I know
What love is

Serotonin, dopamine, oxytocin
You men get vasopressin
Originally evolved
For marking territory
That's how you love
And let's not forget
Opposing immunologies
Oh, that's good stuff
That's what makes you
Smell so nice to me
When you're dirty and sweaty
The other? The rest?
Gamma wave function
When we are orchestrating best
A new consciousness
Formed
Then some alpha
Majestic drift
Like when I laid my head
On your naked chest
In my bed
And I believe
The theory
In quantum physics
Of subatomic possibilities
So many
Potentialities
When unwatched
Unobserved

Look at me! right now! while I believe

But don't believe me
I believe in Bigfoot
I imagine them
Wandering
Miles climbing
In the green
Northern California wood
In Oregon
Dragging long arms
Through ferny forests
They bend
Drink deep
From rocky streams
In the quiet
Solitary
Hiding
And stinking
Though probably loving
The smell of
One another
And smelling that way
So they can find
The other

Unproved

Yet I believe

To Each His Own Solitude

i gave you a book

about those of us
who prefer solitude

you just do it in person

one on one
and in groups

Morning

Make my bed
Scold myself for thinking of you again
Make the coffee
Drink sweet tea while it's brewing
Turn on the Trump Show
Lay the yoga mat on the floor
Sit-up and crunch to exhaustion and
Tedium respectively
Will never fix this mess
Then legs
More hope for that
Arms
Just a defense
Against sagging flab
From past fatness
Stretch some, then
Meditate I am a mountain
Wish I could forget my brother
Wish I never had one
Meditate I am a mountain
Wish I no longer had a mother
Wish I could live in the moment
Like a steady rock formation solid
Letting the weather pass overhead
Domed stars move across curved skies and I stand through the night
Clouds of white grey to storms bashing and I stand through the day
Clearing after brings yellow wet wild grasses on my slopes
Hikers come and go and sometimes stop and camp a day or two
Or three or four
Sometimes take a rock home
For souvenir
I stay still and am not bothered
Loosened rock
Let it go
Stretch some, then
Look at a website of a real estate lawyer
Reread rules on Medicaid disqualification regulation
Think of the name of that elder law attorney
Watch more Trump Show distraction
Redirect thoughts from sweet illusions to true falsehoods
From love lies to vicious actions
To rid myself of missing you

For the Benefit of Whom

cellular love motherhood done right
but they don't all do that

i saw it with a horse once
she wouldn't take to her foal

they had to separate

a cat i had ate her kittens
two before I could stop her

starved the rest

many women are driven
to put men above offspring

not me i loved them
cellularly

the kind that comes
from the breast and floods
the body and mind and
overpowers reason and
leaves the only reason to live
to love them and raise them
well and teach them to leave you

They Took the Ladder

Figured they would when
I left
The garage door
Open
Since
The battery in the clicker
Finally gave out
Fully and when
I pulled back
In
I
Closed my eyes
Thought
Of the thieves
Wished
Peace on them
Since
It would be
One less thing
To sell

But not the two
Dog crates
From the two dogs
I had to kill
In the last
Two seasons
Nor the carpeted
Cat scratching
Tower
From the cat that had
The same fate
And they didn't
Take
My dad's bowling ball
Either
I'll just leave
That
When I flee

Impermanent Ink

i don't know
if i ever drew
a mouth and eyes
on your hand and mine
with ballpoint blue lashes
and washable red marker lips
so we could talk thumb-jawed
i think i did
but if i did
you were too young then to remember

Flock

the women have come
to me one by one
unasked for tendered
each compelled
to tell me they know you
so well
 i stand
mostly
mute but they defend any slight
rise of eyebrow
perceived as challenge
grasp at possession
offer proof
of knowledge
of how they read you
of time spent
that i haven't
of years giving them
their experienced interpretations
they assure me that you
are not what you seem
to be to me wrongly
assuming my kept thoughts
they know not
still they explain
that i am and always will be
no one to you that you are above me
and think nothing of me
i argue not i would never share
with them what is mine
my love
sheltered
of what i knew have known know and i know
what you do to them
heeding strategic adjustment
to each
their need i see it
they all want to feel
they know you best
to own a piece
to hold it
but do they know you

and i never saw you

more hostile
than when i may have
and you always deny i do
as if i am
just another
one of them
unknowing
but i know that
a man in spain
learned a way
to raise geese
to eat continuously
without force
feeding
turning
their own livers
into foie gras for him
he says
if you take
a gosling
to hold
in your hands
the act of concern
will transfer
from the oils
of the skin
of your palms
and it will know
in that moment
it is loved
then will never be free
is ruined for him
because once they know
they are cared for
they will sense
human possession
and eventually
will fly away
from his
fixed flock
to the wild
to live naturally
because only faithful knowledge
of utter liberty from love allows
the geese to stay with him in comfort
and eat to their slaughter in gluttony

On Floors

In the dining room
Where I stumbled to a stop
On rough hardwood
At the thought
Of you and me

A spot on the floor
Bare and empty
Needing refinishing
The hope that stood there
In those days

All looks different today
Than that year
Some friends alive then
Now dead
A thick woven rug covering

Work done past and desires
Of what might become
Behind me
Things I thought
Now seem from another mind

Who was she, listened to you plead
In that spot on vacant wood
Who will she be
A year from now
On a floor of carpeting

Dinner for One

Club Aluminum blue

Crawfish gumbo

I'll have that

For myself

And the Quaker pea and apple potato salad

I learned to make my way

Part IV

Dillinger escaped by threatening his jailor with a pistol made of soap and shoe polish. His jailor was a woman -- Kurt Vonnegut

My Demented Mother

Never seen these eyes
So round before
Full of wonder
I have never seen
Them so unfocused
Not on a particular enemy

Now this
Wandering
Curiosity
Ponders why
The mind cannot
Remember
What happened
Two minutes ago
Or just this second
In mid-sentence
The topic
Of conversation
Or where it went

Never seen the skin
Look so soft
The muscles
Of the face
So slack
The mouth
So relaxed
Unable to maintain
That pinching grimace
The mind unable to hold
The reason for resentment

Wishing

after Jane Hirshfield

i know you wish
to believe
 i have forgotten

i wake in the bed
 every morning
 knowing

my head is
my body is lying

where yours had lain

Oblivescence

Some stay, the most ingrained
regrets, the time I was fourteen
and screaming for the attention
of John, the bassist of Queen
from the fourth row
as he played piano
when he was new to it
after Freddy Mercury
asked us to be quiet
and give him a break

That boy from home
I had spent so many
hours with on the phone
all through high school
we could complete each
other's thoughts and how
we laughed and knew the
other inside out and how
I treated him so badly when
he traveled so far to see me
from across the country and
sadness washed him bleached

I can't seem to forget those
they won't go away and
they still can sting

I can forget you
I will
the love I had
it fades
it will
the pain subsides
it will
but still for now
I remember your face
that first day
pink and
wrinkled
blind eyes
searching for me
fingers too small
nails too fragile
suckling
grasping turned instantly
to completed relaxation

early too-young smiles
later so stunning and
in years to come the toddler
crying
that would make my chest
compress until
I could not
breathe
then how
you would fall over
bursting in laughter
at me
for believing
and your singing voice
my god
I remember
how the crowd gasped
at the first note
of your solo
in the auditorium and
remember projecting into
the future
your life that
would be and
how
I would
watch you grow and succeed
but mostly now
I remember
the work
I try to
the obligation
the duty
I recall that
the tedious thankless
never-ending day and night
and I remind myself
of that boy
you chose
to turn
from me
for
that abuser
isolator
then I try
to remember

the horror
of what you did
that last time
I saw you
that look
you showed
when those words
were
spoken
I remember
the torture
to help
get along
through each day
as the process of
forgetting
you
comes
in
time
The process of forgetting
the very effort of it
the energy expended
the concentration on it
the antagonist of it
but there is no other way
or I forget
all that
and fall back into
pure
love
I remember
I will it
the last thing you said
I recall it
I relive it
the smile on your face
I feel
the shame again
of you
enjoying my pain
every day
I remember and
I endure oblivescence

The Last Fourth

Whiz bang
Pop
Shimmering sky
Rains down
White and gold
Yellow and blue
And red
And fear
Of fire
Because there is
No insurance
On this three
Storied brick
Which causes
Pulsations in me

It is always
The renters
Isn't it
Never seen
A homeowner
In the street
With these cheap
Badly made
Commercial grade
Sized fireworks
Fluttering singed thin paper
Hard cardboard parts
In the trees
In the yards
In the bushes
Leaving black soot
Slashing radiating stains of
Gunpowder ash
On sidewalks
I wonder if homeowners
Check their cars
For damage in the morning
Before work while renters
Still sleep
Since they are up
At one-thirty
Lighting explosives

The air thick
Hangs grey
Like a dry
Unnatural fog
From the ground
To where above
You can't see
Through metallic smoke

The smell of
Reminds me of
Fontana
In the eighties
When Kaiser Steel
Was still running

And that's a nice
Memory

Vinnie worked
For Kaiser
A pipefitter there
Welding metals
Sparks at the end
Of his big gloved hands
A darkening mask
Protecting rare
Italian blues
And loaded
With big money union
And loved me
And told me
With that old-school
Brooklyn accent
That captivated
While he held me
In his real job
Olive arms
That I was perfect
And that he
Would protect me
From everything
While I
Pretended
I needed

I look out
The window tonight
Of the second floor
At the renters
Setting off sparklers
Spraying across
Ten-foot radiuses
By my neighbor's car
Not theirs
And notice in the distant-near
From on the next block
Beautiful silver
Blinking flashing and falling
Weeping willows
Low over homes
Where the people there
Probably are wondering
If they will get through
This Fourth
Without their home
Ending
Gutted in smoke and cinder

Then I decide
To lose myself
In the shimmering
Confetti glittering
Bombardment
Over there
And try to remember
When I last enjoyed
Such display
Remember how
The pleasure even then
Was just an aside
To providing diversion
To children
And how
Lamentably
Hot
And screaming
Steaming
Humid
It is
In St. Louis
During the VP Fair

The annual onus
Hauling young ones
And lawn chairs
A cooler with sandwiches
And snacks
And juice boxes
And money in my pocket
I cannot afford
For standing in line for hours
For tickets
And misery
 And alligator on a stick
 If I am lucky
 But that vender doesn't come up
 From Alabama
 Anymore

However

I am soothed
To watch the beauty
A block away
Where it can't get me

I am relieved
The latest renters
On my block
Have less this year

I am full of satisfaction
I will be
In Fontana
Next Fourth

And Kaiser
Is shut down
So won't smell
So bad now

Or maybe Riverside by then
Where there are big wooden Victorians
And large easy going mature trees
And UC Riverside enhancing the population
With its extensive MFA program
And a philosophy department
That offers an emphasis in law

And a worldwide top ranking in theory of action
And nearby what seems like a well-attended
And rambunctious
Monday night poetry reading
In a trendy coffee house in the renovated
Spanish-mission-style
Downtown Mission Inn vicinity
And a city college a little farther
Down the street
With what looks like
A deep and broad art department
And tons of lawyers
All around
Since it is
The county seat
And Quaker meetings Sunday mornings
In walking distance of the studio apartment I may have
And with hope
A chill group of all ages doing sunrise yoga
Every weekday in the park
Across from the courthouse
Or maybe up on Mount Rubidoux

In any event

Riverside is only
Fifteen miles from Fontana
A brief scenic drive through Jurupa pass
And across the Santa Ana

Either way

No one
Will set off
Explosives
In the street
In either city
For fear
Of starting fires
In the dry settled desert

And the foothills
Will at times burn pretty at night
If kept the right perspective
And a safe distance away
Just about without anyone's assistance

Proposed Needed Ingredients to Eradicate a Certain Stain

I thought a club soda
Not strong enough
So whiskey straight

But the blemish spread
Bled through and into
Left a blotchy mess of it

A limpid vodka might
With grapefruit juice
For the acid content

Strong tepid greyhound
In an altitude essential
To remove such lofty hex

Humphreys Peak venue
Hike the snowy volcano
To sky at twelve-thousand

Brisk wind chap my face
Sharp desert sunset blazing
Under rising waning moon

erase

Girls Your Size

I haven't forgot
the girl of two
who so effectively argued
in plastic heels
made for a girl
of four or five or six
nor forgot I was so relieved
when it eventually struck me
how to end the argument
they just don't make them for girls your size
because I couldn't seem to beat her logic
how she should be allowed to wear
heels everywhere she went
even to run a hill or play in dirt
though I saw the potential danger
of tripping and scraped knees
and what would follow
tears that squeezed me
so only let her wear them
now and then in the kitchen
because her whole foot would fit
in the ball and toe of the things

Bluebird Sublette

On a balcony near Second and Locust
The broad railing once took my weight
The thick wooden post of the Victorian
Propped my back and I ate strawberries
Or cantaloupe with living taste in them
Drank coffee from beans just grinded and
Tree branches held wide yellowing leaves
So near to my face on the second floor
That between piano concertos during
Rhythmic rolling intervals of scratching
Vinyl drifting through French doors behind
From inside the sublet that summer and fall
The rustling sycamore provided undertones,
And on the street under me just at daybreak
The parade of homeless quieted on my block
To listen while leaving sleeping quarters
Traveling from Fairmount Park on the north
Heading in such orderly a line toward the south
Marching carts single file wearing layers
To White Park where they spent their days
Downtown where begging was allowed them
Though not to sleep in and I held newsprint
And sucked fingers inked and juiced and
They heard Mozart as they passed below

I know the LA Times will crinkle soon in my
Sticky citrused fingers in a winter with leaves
On trees a corner will blow and fold over my
Thumb and an arid breeze will portion my hair
In a home where I daily dustmop sandy hardwood