

Compendium

Poems

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Part 1:

Compendium of Cafés And Bars

There Is A Haiku Hiding Inside Of This Poem

A winter haiku hides inside the rain, too, though it's autumn. It is cold, oncoming,
Hinted at, slanted in the light.

There are ways of telling a story,
Or of saying sorry, but I have not discovered them yet.

Forgive me for being empty minded—for looking, dear stranger,
Into your eyes across this café as if I were watching TV.

That's the way we are, you know—the world is not full
To me—it is empty and I am filling it always with hope, one little

Word at a time, thought by rain-filled thought.

The sad city inside the happy city smiles through tears.

I know this teardrop résumé.

The song on the radio

Has a light that makes me cry, sparkles

Going to sparkles inside this world that sighs dark sights.

My friends think I am insane.

It is true, but I'm on my meds. Do you know—

Sometimes sleep is just beautiful, it's so easy

To leave the rain talking to you, like that

Whisper of graffiti getting at the heart of something.

There is beauty in the flutter of a bird's pale wings

Across the pale Tuesday sunlight through rain

And sundown—it is easy to take

A coffee cup to one's lips, and know such sweetness

As a shiver of adrenaline, but oh, there is an undercurrent to holiness.

It stings like a flowers' scent in spring, though it's wintering

In white rain, now, down through the glowing city

Dark with Saturday night puddles and a radio's glinting.

I rely on the balance beam of the sight of graffiti in rain.

It is a theory I have of the music inside things.

I once saw a tenor sax player in the subway on his knees,

Gliding along vision. Scribbles of music in the air.

You can see the light in the dark. Like stars. This light

Is vague, today, early evening in the rain,

Changing to night. The stars are invisible.

Will you be there for me when

I keep falling through the glide

And searching

For whatever love is?

Girls Who Read Wittgenstein In Bars

“Philosophical Investigations” scintillates along with the lime
Ricky, spiked, that I sip sans maraschino cherries, now,
And maybe there’s a cosmic jazz band and a crowd of people drinking
Bloody Mary’s, just as I heard someone say once that eccentric women

Drink Bloody Mary’s, so I do, also, for I am not afraid
To be different, a little strange,
To choose my drinks as if I’m the type to take the road not taken,
As if this would add to the mystique or just the ridiculousness
Of the fact that I’m reading “Theories On Color,” in a bar,

Though now a spiked lime Ricky will do as I wait for you
And tell my journey without luggage not with words
But in episodes of glances to whoever dares to look my way.
And the way the jazz ebbs and flows
So far away from everything, it is distance itself
In the rain coming down, outside—and on the window—
The city is crying teardrops of streetlight—and this makes it seem,
In a way, that the whole city is about distance,

And bound for distance, wound up

In the concept of it as fire escapes cascade

Like black waterfalls down the sides

Of buildings lit with the mirror-like mirage of rainy-day sundown—

And the whole world—wherever you go,

There you are. Jazz full of mist and rain affirms this.

That you're the space between things. The places we never

Actually get to though we say we've arrived.

So in a way it doesn't matter if you up show or not, love—I'm alone and so

The space between the pages of the book I am reading,

“On Certainty,” are those spaces between here and now and a long ago time ago,

And I turn another page, and it's

A point in human history, when you were supposed

To be here, hours ago—though no show— as I think I mentioned before,

And the shadows are turning with the music

Into translucent gold, and somewhere in my mind

I am imagining the clear milk of philosophy—

And if I had a pen I could write contradictions down,

But all I have is a cocktail napkin, and some little whirlwind,

All I have is a ghost of you, now,

Like some whirlwind trapped beneath the skin—

And maybe the beginning or the ending of a translucent or opaque poem

In the rain making labyrinths on the traffic-light's light on the windowpane,

And there goes the jazz, again, like rain dusting the high hat—

And the maraschino cherry getting soggy on the toothpick of my desire,

I had on left and I didn't know because it was hiding behind the lemon wedge

Of love and loneliness,

And what this book might be about is not really on

My mind, because right now my mind is a run-on sentence, and

I am about the space between language

And what language signifies, too, for I am both,

Seen and unseen—

Though all I have is moonlight rain on the windowpane, a pen,

And the music, and the napkin that keeps tearing

In the pen's tip—and some ideas

About haiku hiding inside of backbeat

As I'm kicking around half-formed philosophies about the stained glass lampshades

Above the bar, staining the air cherry, lemon, lime.

Maria

I thank you for your stories that we tell each other
over Texas B-B-Q burgers in a New York jazz bar.

The piano trickles like a babbling brook over the rhythm
of the high-hat, and we are laughing, free, Northeastern

at long last. An eel electrocutes the water in a fish tank
as the saxophone begins crooning something fuchsia and shady, like rain

in the city when the sidewalk is lit up by the red traffic light.

We're here. We made it tonight.

We're with the music.

Part 2:

Compendium of Words

Aardvark

I like this word because it begins every dictionary
With two AA powered batteries, as if the Energizer Bunny
Were going to walk along the long road of the language,
And still be banging his little drum at Zygote. For we must
All make this journey, though we make it in parts,
In dreams, in the alphabetical order of an obsessive
Compulsive's shopping list. Dazzle is in the dictionary,
Too, and so is cake, but not dazzle cake all together.
For that, we need imagination. We need the Aardvark
Xylophone, the whatachamadoodle clock. The imaginary
Clockwork of a poem—that Aardvark heart,
The thing that makes the word tick. Shakespeare
Knew his Aardvarks, how to noun and verb them, how to splurge
As if they were cash and he had won the lottery.
For only in iambic pentameter can one Xerox
A nocturne, or find one's way home in the duality
Of beginnings and endings, and the loop they make
When the book slams shut after Zygote, like the gentle clocking
Of the wind, like the tasteful latch locking once
Again on the lid of an antique teakwood jewelry box.
The muses keep the keys to said jewelry boxes on necklaces

Around their swan dive necks, as if diamond studded

Tiffany jewelry were forever, and they're not playing games.

Take the Aardvark seriously. For as he hobbles across

The dangerous path,

His back can be dried like a hollow shell in the sun,

And made into a lute when strung.

In Search Of Meaning

*When the moon is on the horizon it can appear
to look three times its usual size. This is not because
the moon is bigger—it just appears to us to be
when it is in closer relation to objects that are familiar
to us, like treetops, rooftops, and mountain ranges.
If the mind can do that with the moon, then imagine
what it can do to other things.*

—M.R.

The page is all aglow, I know, because paper
burns its ashes deep into the void—it's night, and ashes
slip fast and easily across the dark side of the moon. It's 4 AM

right now, once again, and then I know
that it's just a computer screen—something
is juicy, something, somewhere, is a wine sap apple

or a summer-blunted pear, and the wings

of birds are all asunder, and the lightning frays
like feathers, and there are ways that I love and hate

myself and you, because you left me
figure all this out on my own.

It was never simply a matter of learning how to skip a stone

across a sunlit lake. There are things that are real—
they're not all set in fourteen karat gold. They're not
just stories, either—though narratives can be stilled

on dust jackets and at readings—when the bells peel,
small birds fly with them. And when I peel an orange,
small thoughts peel with the rind. And so as morning dawns

inside a glass fruit bowl, that's set on a tablecloth's floral
patterned folds, I think of everything that will happen
in this room. The world is gone too late,

and gone too soon. Tell me once again, how to move
a mountain with a pen.

The Attitudes That Are My Snares, And The Attitudes That Are My Armor

*—When we get our minds and desires out of the way of ourselves, our lives are
able to happen*

--John Cage [paraphrase]

I desire this. What we have. A puzzle.

I could try to figure it out.

Pure emotion poured from a coffee pot. I guzzle

The stars. It's part of freeform. Whatever, a dozen

Of one, a dozen of the other. Roses,

Flowers, diamonds. I am fake—

I am genuine. And what of a kiss, butterfly or French,

And heartbreak, the furniture and the fact

That everything I own goes with beige?

Of vices, of woebegone,

Of tambarillos, of slithering and slathering

And slime and glow in the dark Silly-Putty

Of the brain, of waves and weathervanes!

Once, we were reptiles, then we evolved.

So I was the snake in the dark tree of the garden, after all?

With the physical world's short circuits of love and matter

Made up of infinitesimal quarks, strange, charm.

My fuse box is also full of sublimated

Electric eels, as well as myth, squirming in the richness

Of the calcium of labyrinthine coral reefs! Let's make a libretto

Out of this, and call it thrash metal in essence.

I don't know why—it all ends up as the sky's blue blur.

I wanted to add something about Diet Pepsi

In here, because I needed a couple of trochees

To complete an anti-particle collider,

And product placement doesn't hurt now and then.

All worlds and words build up into translucence, like oxygen

In the sky, which is just now creeping with powder blue. It's early—

Or really late—and here we go again.

Desire That Gets What It Wants Is A Journey Without Luggage

After Iris Applequist

I want to stop or start. I want a poem to matter
More than what I desire, when I begin it with a phrase
That begins, "I want." I want to know what I do not
Want; the weak line ending, not
The flame, but the way I am quenched by water.
Not the silver salt shakers in the shapes of pears,
But the unique image, the skull wearing a bonnet
On an advertisement for a book of cartoons
By a cartoonist I have never heard of, advertised
In what I first thought of was Land's End's
New catalogue. I want silence at Christmas
So we can all stop getting soap and miniature water
Color sets in our stockings, so that we can all forget
Who Jesus makes us be, sometimes, when we think
Of him. It's weird, this thing called religion that we fight
Over. I want us to be humanists, really, and to eat
Lentils with cumin and onion. I want to fly.
I want to be the hush of falling snow to you,

So that you think of me as peace, sparkling
As happy things do. I want a diamond ring,
Whoever you are. I want to forget. I want to know
Everything in the encyclopedia. I want to have written
Ulysses by James Joyce, and walked along those shores
Where driftwood was eternity in a grain of sand.
I want to be the universe shining through.
I want to be a shooting star giving you a wish.
I want to be needed. I want you to never need anything
From me ever again, so that I can wander this world
Traveling without luggage.

I want the petals that fell around us, once,
To be memories that scarred the air. I want
The delicate atmosphere in which I tiptoe
Around the house on eggshells made of clichés.
I want soup, sometimes, and Saltine crackers.
I want to swear loudly when I feel like it.
I want to sublimate all my repression
Into penmanship that marks the page
With ash of the mind's great burning.
I want the whole world, which is written
On burning paper. And I want none of it,

So that I can keep holding things together
In my arms. I want the pieces of you scattered
Like Osiris across the globe,
So that your horn rimmed ones
End up in London while your right shoe lands
In Tokyo. I want to be your time capsule
To a better future. I want eagle's wings.
I want to nest like the birds. I want
A bungalow with a coffee maker
That will never break. I want more,
And I want less. I want to hunger
With the road beneath my feet.
I want to travel eternally, being this light.

Towards A Metaphysics

Dawn in me can be a rose, no, a winter daisy.

A tangerine could be an apple if we were speaking another language.

I am bone, web, light, bridge.

The hourglass was a dance in a high school gymnasium, and I had made my own dress by hand.

I went to prom with you and I really did make my own dress, but everyone thought I bought it.

My back is a window and through my cathedraling bones you can see the sky's pale blue.

I am blue, inside and out, like the sky, or the earth's topaz essence. We are all celestial, and so is the dirt.

You cannot save me for I am always both saved and doomed, the way one is both salt and pepper, alive and dead at once.

As a daughter I am both an angel who has drifted away, escaping, and the magician's assistant in a coffin being sawed in half.

I am Antarctic and so cold I frost glass with fractals.

I weave the world, all powerful, and am subject to its flux of forces.

I am a pinwheel on a hat.

I am a weathervane in a storm.

I am a mirage on a road.

You are not me though we both sit having oolong-scented conversations over jasmine tea.

I cook and you eat, you speak and I eat.

Great feast of the poem, words are gourmet.

We stew pears in sugary wine sauce, and I boil down the alcohol so all that's left is sweet.

We call this as close to ambrosia as we can get without pure imagination laid out on the table.

History is a fork and knife.

Poetry is a pheasant on a silver platter.

You have told me about John The Baptists' head, Mom, as if I would be interested and perhaps shaken to the roots of my being.

I am no princess though ballet intrigues me for its variations on steps, because I need footwork as well as needlepoint and other ways of thinking.

The sun has risen, and the new day is already fallen into the bucket with the milk.

The bails of sky are haying lavender.

I will now take a walk into the apple pie of what is and is not.

Here we go again on the trapeze of the last vanishing stars.

I am a vagabond pebble skipping across the ocean of the road.

The noon will pop out of an acorn and into a sunny oak, even in the dead of winter.

Myth rides its own labyrinth of wings and waves.

I slip into dream and reality and back without even knowing I'm sewing or embroidering.

I am writing a book about journeys and I travel without luggage, mostly.

I stayed in a youth hostel with polka dot sheet and striped blankets, and there was a metaphor there.

I still have the key. I kept it for future reference to dreams.

Here we go again, the pulse of the last star quavering before vanishing like a reflection on the bay.

Part 3:

The Compendium of Memory

**To The Boy Who Liked Me Many Years Ago, When We Were In Terry Byrnes's Fiction
Workshop**

Somewhere, beauty makes a difference.

I re-arrange my throw pillows, now, putting them flower-side

up. The chessboard, stored by the sofa,

is a game of light and dark I dream of playing

when you are most like a stranger to me.

And you are nothing but the sound of your footsteps.

Terry always said that writers didn't have anything to say,

they just had a way of saying it.

So now, I desire to put on the teakettle, today, to see poems

floating on steam from newly boiling water.

I imagine that I am seeing dragons

like imagination itself taking shape in clouds.

I am actually just trying not to let you take

over this poem, the way you always do, no matter

who you are. And you're that guy I was avoiding
in fiction workshop, who I found myself seated close to,

in public places, often, at random, like that time
I wore my sparkly bracelet to that poetry reading.

I never wore it after that—
I thought zircon attracted you magnetically.

I was the starlight, and then I saw you, and I turned
into a shadow. Somehow you saw a part of me I didn't want

to be there at all; the leaf-blowing-in-the-wind
until-the-voice-of-the-breeze-was-crisp-and-golden

side of me, and this was all in earnest. And there you were,
a few paces to my left,

clapping at the poetry reading. The dim light
in the bar couldn't disguise me. You were looking

at me trying not to look at me, and vice versa,

and I could feel you breathing.

Some days I'd just wish for it—

meaningful visions

rather than irrelevant ones

of luminous rose-petal-like

detail—as I sat outside of the Hall building,

thinking of Escher moving his hands over the icy daytime moon.

I knew you knew that I knew it was all a puzzle,

that we were the ones translating Bach fugues into heavy metal haiku,

as we walked on stairways with no gravity.

Yet still, we must live in this world, return

our videos on time if we want to avoid spiritual taxes.

That's why I had my notepad—in case genius struck me at bus stops.

Or as I killed time outside

the Hall building, sitting on the bench.

I'd glance around for stuff to write about, word choices

between poppies and blossoms, between melting ice,
and there you'd be, a shadow in profile—no, just the door

behind me swinging open—you were always cold
and distant and lurking

like some stranger in the underwear department
at Macys in the Calvin Klein section.

I could almost reach out and touch you—
but you were everything I didn't want to be,

lonely, searching, exactly like me, certain
of everything but certainty. You were Zen

about everything but Zen. I saw it in the way
you described slamming car doors in the brute red tone

of your workshop stories. Your paradox
was a smoky mirror in the bar I went to with friends,

and listened to their certainties leap over the moon,
so high and confident, and then there you were,

again, hidden in the garden of bright-boughed punk music,
apples of Eden bending on gusts of branching backbeat;

oranges rolling like planets in orchards of leafy guitar solos.

There in the shadows, you lit your cigarette,

in the Garden of Eden, and then we fell, and we were
in the vertiginous world, and then we were at a Rave,

together, and I was trying
to console you for the fact

that I disliked your
egret face and doe eyes;

your stories of time looping
back on itself until absurdity shattered our narrative.

Your conflict and disjuncture.

It was crazy, but my cigarette wouldn't light

despite the mauve techno laser beams in the black
and blue early hours of morning flickering—the party
was still going, and I was trying to light the wrong end
of my cigarette. That’s when you noticed, and abandoned me.

Chris Johnson Is On The Guest List

for Erro

You crash parties,
Pretending your name is Chris,
And to make everyone think they've met you before,
You just pretend they have.
There is a profound lesson here,
In moving under the radar, seen, we disappear
Into who others think we are, a smile, and then we're free.
Your stories about chatting up total strangers
Become my memories
As you weave among the crowd
That's always willing to welcome you.
I am set free inside your anecdotes
Like oranges you peel as we talk
Of cocaine, small talk, Champagne,
Décor, and other people's weddings.
I marvel at the way you appear to have wings
As if this world could be flitted through
So easily, as if it were all lightweight to the angels.

Prehistory

It was once said that you were the wind or a horse, and the distance was crossed.

We made a rock's façade into your face, or the curve of your arched back,

With paint, and our hands. Red berries and grapes, snakes as twigs.

The waves gave birth to beauty, Venus.

You came to me through the flowers' fuse and said loveliness is an ocean.

The pinking shears were useful to cut out paper hearts that were letters of a Valentine alphabet,\

In an insane asylum.

I wanted to make sense but time kept passing,

Stealing my words away like rivers sweeping sands.

This is how a river is shaped

While it is being formed.

That is the story we are told.

Part 4:

Family Album

A Cold Morning Poem, For My Father

There is a great absence,
You disappearing always on the streets
Full of shadows
And stale crumbs of grief. Where are you when I need
Something, a wedge of pie like
A laugh? There is a beast, with sharp, tiny
Teeth gnawing at my gut, as out the window the sun flies,
And the blue sky escapes me. I am all imagination,
Sometimes, seeking the meaning of the strange

Theories you taught me about sociology
And coffee cups, taco stands, Disneyland,
And people with ugly neckties. And the bombs
We protested kept on being built
For an imaginary war we were having
With ourselves. We saw a UFO in the Nevada
Desert, and it looked like an amusement
Park ride in a police state.

Sometimes we just had coffee and observed
What there was that other people didn't talk

About, letting happen beneath the surface
Of daily life. Your mother controlled the whole
Family with the way she frowned,
While the smoke
Signals of the casserole burning in the halogen
Stove blazed. The house would tick with the meter
Measuring oil, air conditioning, other pressures.

I visited you often in Phoenix. Orange trees,
Cactuses, shopping malls, swimming pools
Of sky, nature looking like a man-made sunset.
The clouds rose from the ashes, flying higher.
A city of roads and vacant downtowns, stadiums,
Cafes where no one else was.

Arizona was always not Italy,
To you, and when we discovered an Italian
Café on Thunderbird Avenue,
A synthesis happened in your heart
And I felt it the way the earth's weather changes
When the sun blazes with sun flares. Something

Like that as we cut into our antipasto,

Having our cappuccino of meaning
At the end of the world. You'd walk
In, the next morning, to the copy shop,
To make photocopies of what needed reproducing
For the great file we were making
Out of the world, as it spun and cried through space.
You'd wear your loafers and tweed,
A copy of The New York times under your arm
Tucked with the same pride some people walk their designer
Dogs down Park Avenue with. Here I am, I said,
I am a photograph in your pocket, still looking
Like a cheerleader. That was years ago.

Now I'm miles and stories away, and I've read
Raymond Carver, like you said, as if I were looking
For the pot of gold at the end of the Rainbow.
I am, as in a story, or a song, perhaps, even,
A photograph in your wallet.

I've faded, now. I've become round, heavy, sad, even.
I've become America then un-become America.
I've dreamed, died, been resurrected, become
My own religion, then simply a person

Forking turkey into their mouths in some Maryland
Of the half-light at Thanksgiving. Wondering things
That have no words and find only soggy cornflakes
Of sentences, I've stopped writing
That poem that could never exist, it's so beautiful.

Yet. There is always a yet when we decide to keep going.
I've weathered my own storms, too, now.
I've packed them all in a knapsack
And took them with me like a laptop
Across America, looking for your shadow,
Looking for a place to hawk my computer, too.

I've typed on Greyhound busses after spending
Nine hours in a station in Cleveland. Selah.
I've seen a girl's eyes tired as the mist
Whispering through the bridges over Pittsburgh's chasms.
She, too, was traveling, lightweight,
Like you taught me to.

Dear Dad, not everyone has a Dad who is interesting,
And as the ancient Chinese curse goes,
May you live in Interesting Times.

We live in them, so what use is a Dad who works
9-5, and does not write one-man plays
Called, "Eat, Sleep, Work, Die?" I remember
You falling down in front of the mirror,
Feigning death, in your own version of life
As we live it in our culture. There needs to be
More than this, you said. There is more

And we know it. You found it in Rome,
Buying a Coke in what we call in Quebec
A Depanneur, just a corner store, bodega,
Where you found the meaning of life
Because the shop keeper raised her arms
In joy each day when she saw you,
Dubbing you, "Una Grande Cola."

In the Midwest, you said, they don't get emotional
About anything. So I went there, to see,
And found myself penniless in Minnesota,
Where I wandered over the Mississippi
On bridges made of wind and American flags
Flapping on the parapets of the undercurrents. I felt vertigo,

But I knew something was over, this falling through you
And through myself, too—I had come to the edge of the water,
Something begun. I'd traveled from sea to sea. The knowledge
That this country is one of shadows. There is still the shining sea.

The shiny new mall and the mannequin
Without a crack or seam is just the version
Of death we are waiting for. Ask the glitz
To rescue you, and you become a ghost.
I cannot buy myself back—not with capitalism as an ideal,
Or real coinage--I'm already
Gone into another country, socialist, against Musak,
And broken into being humanly compassionate, and so I left
For Canada, to find myself there,
In acceptance rather than ego. I was wandering

Down the river of St. Laurent Boulevard,
Looking at the holy sweaters made of the dark colors
Of a gold autumn on the winter of a cracked mannequin's limbs,
The rave of the world in the mannequin's hot blue stare
As the figure faced the street, blankly, all-seeing.
She had an all-too human painted plastic gaze.

The earth can be transparent, sometimes,
When we walk on it, so lightly, though really
It's a periwinkle colored sidewalk beneath our boot heels
In the evening. The world is not a solid substance.

I effervesce with its coils of machinery,
Lampposts, cities, and bodegas selling tins
Of chocolate jelly and cherry wine. I remembered every store
From my childhood as I strolled down *Avenue*
Mont-Royal, looking for a place to sell my rings.
Your mother's costume jewelry from the fifties, like a dream come true,
Then faded into the lie of the décor.
In the bungalow where your parents, my grandparents,
Lived, there were always knickknacks and hints
Of art, even, among the easy chairs and sofas
They called, "Davenports." I am glad you married Mom
In Canada, that I am here, where her farm
Stands, lonely among seasons
That spin around the silent axis of the ever-present
Memory of snow. It's always there, underneath the wind,
Even in spring, maybe even in the sweat of summer.
The snow, making tiny shadows out of cold sparkles.

Dad, you know what I am talking about, right?

That you begot me there, in that city of dreams,

When you fled the war, so many years ago,

Not for fear of being killed, you said,

But for fear of killing others. Instead,

You migrated to winter, Montreal,

And danced me into being with your one

French phrase: *Voulez-vous dansez avec moi?*

And angels danced on the head

Of a pin. And here I am, the daughter

Of Montreal and you, Kansas City, Midwestern

To the end, saying, *In Canada they don't know*

Anything. You never did get the meaning of silence,

In a northern country where the cold takes

Everything out of you so that there is nothing

Left to say about any of it, and how beautiful the snow is, really,

How it can shimmer like a bird in flight between

Two people, tying them together. You can read

The mind in such deep freezes of silence. It's as beautiful

As ice on a lake, and life is as profound

And quiet as the hush of a snowfall so luminous

It's blue in January's ebbing light. The world is beautiful,

Dear father. It always was, and will always be.

I am glad I'm here, though it's been a rough
Journey into the dark heart of a continent
That claims everyone else is the fire
Of shadow, axis of evil, and the world is a frightening
Place, they say, and America alone is the living, good, light.
It's been a life of lies, here,
And now I know. So I bring the coffee cup
To my lips, and taste the dark roast,
The sugar, the pulse of the heart that keeps going.

It is morning and I am thinking of you,
Bedridden in New York, eating that hospital
Food. I wonder every day how you are,
Though often I say nothing, and let the silence
Fly across the continent, and fill whatever it is
That needs the plenitude, the joy.

Cold Morning Poem, For My Mother's Watercolors of Nature

To be in the morning, in the rain,
Nature like a spirit inside things.
I suppose I need to thank you

For selflessness, but actually I'd like to thank
You for the way you are, and who,
As you stir your tea, groggy in the morning

Like pale rain. You made me
Sometimes think that life was something
Easy, like painting a seascape, or choosing

What your favorite color
Might be, red or blue or pink or green.
But that was then. Now, I am getting
Back to my felicity, headstrong playful
Breeze of imagination that you saw in me.

I take a walk down the driveway
Like a road that leads to the heart
Of the forest, the clearing in the light,

But really it just leads to the main road.

I am not usually like this, so tired,

Needing a tree like a crutch

For the windy part of me.

You cradle me in my depressed phase.

I think of life, its vast arc

And shmorgasboard of lunch meat

And trips I take, going from here to there,

Ending up again at home.

And me in the world, just a spec,

Someone a mother loves.

You love nature, too, Mom,

And fan its light into thin watercolors

That you are now about to paint

More of, with wide fan brushes. Each pine needle,

A ray of delicate gold, not the surface

Of the world, but the life in them

That catches the angle of the day

Light. This calmness you have
Called the eye
Seeing in the center
Of a storm, is something you may have given
To me, too—in the full catastrophe
Of living. There we are, dreaming
The way the world is governed
By its beauty, leaf by leaf.

**Sailing The Seas Of Intellectual Uncertainty Principles,
Or, Discussion With My Stepfather At 4: AM On A Dark And Snowy Night**

In the inkblot of night the heater rattles like a Rorschach

Test—no, I meant to say my dreams vanish

And the light, epileptic as the rose full of worms,

Cracks a brain-shaped web of light across my vision.

I see my two hemispheres connected by a bridge,

Looking like a bone of light, across the dark stage

They call consciousness. I wake to make coffee

At 4 AM, and you're up, too, to fix the heater,

You say, which keeps the house awake. Though

I would wake up anyway (trauma clotting my Delta

Waves). I am always startled out of beta state.

Anyway, we make hot drinks, and discuss your project.

You have begun to embody your metaphors, I say.

I am a daisy, not a rose, and I know that weeds

Have their glorious way of blossoming. I am shapeless

In your hands, a blossom cracked by a rainbow.
I want to kiss girls. Anyway, we speak of tangerines
And how mathematics is just another language

For approximations. It seems weird to say
That two plus two can sometimes be the description
Of improbabilities. We might say nothing

Corresponds. Your gruff manner usually terrifies
Me, or makes me laugh. Either/Or. But lately
I have been alphabetizing your books into separate

Libraries, and I make whole rooms out of philosophy,
Whole universes or tombs out of what you want to be
Made into "The section on the consciousness of mind."

Here's pure science, you say as you finger the spines
Of dictionaries (they're so shiny and blue like the ocean,
That vast expanse in which I drown). Let's get back

To me being a flower, wind-blown daisy, wind
Opening me as the summer bows a fuse in my petals.
I am rain-glazed, especially in this weather. It's so cold

It puts frost on the window, and then it melts on the glass.

This is what we see. You open the fridge and I want
To be someone who can make a sonnet out of leftover

Turkey hash. Thanksgiving just passed—we survived.
We celebrate this, and go on penning strange theories
About darkness and light, transforming one thing
Into another. We study things. That is what we do.

You say that there is a clue in how things we call things
Are never the things themselves, all are approximations
Subject to changes that we ourselves can never describe

Or pin down, since all we have to describe the approximations
With are other changeable, volatile approximations. All is a volcano
Erupting in a void as the whole world slips on infinite

And infinitesimal tectonic shapes in a world governed
By a gravitational flux subject to invisible, unknown forces.
That's not to say we can't know the mechanics

Of a car. But Mom says the car is green, and you say it's blue,

So what color is the car? There's an essay there, you say,
But you stop making sense on the page. You embody the disjuncture

You're talking about, and you have developed your own code
For words. So that to you now everything's an approximation,
And an orange is not really an orange, so why not call it an apple?

If no pieces of the puzzle fit because the labyrinth is always shifting,
We still must traverse it, and solve the riddle. That's just
What we do, narratives that we are, writing ourselves
Into chapters and subheadings along the way. Meanwhile,

You've made ginger tea, and gone outside in the snowy rain
Once or twice to check that the oil in the heater has enough
Anti-freeze, and all of a sudden it's dawn. Mom has been sleeping

Through this—she told me not to edit your work,
But I think it would be fun to fix the uncertainty
Down in a journalistic way. I can document your voyage.

I can be your ship's log.

Part 5:

Elegiac

A Poem Simply Is Two Oranges On A Kitchen Countertop In Morning Light, Sometimes

It might be the silvery glow
Of morning dappling the golden
Orange skin of oranges.

The way I could just pick one
Up and peel it when I want to,
The freedom of that, the existential
This or that, now or never or when
And how everything

Is like that,
The vast choices the world gives us—

In everything, even a simple thing,
Like peeling an orange. So imagine
What life can do with other things—

The waves and the journey across them.
We go across and come back in our minds
And at every moment,

Here or there, in all of this spinning
Gold light. Music. That's what a poem
Is—the music echoing

And reverberating, looping
Like time back in on itself,
Fugue, cannon, duet—

All counterpoint, turning
The autumn leaves slowly—
All suspense as the morning

Holds time still in a pause of gold.
The waves were still the morning
After the day I found out of your passing

Away—the crests and troughs
Froze for a moment, as if to make a point—
To say there is a flow of time—

That one can make a point
Of its rhythms in a poem
As well as life—that they are not

As clockwork and immutable

As we usually conceive them—

That they, those rhythms in nature,

Too, are susceptible

To imagination,

The timing of the heart beating. Thank-you

For teaching me through your last

Poems what poetry

Really is—

I will always have those words

Of yours, and the view of the still water.

And you have taught me that it is enough.

It is enough just to be forgiven,

To be loved, for the girl I am,

For this way I stand on the edge

Of the water, looking out.

Elegies And Life

I wanted to offer some kindness, but I was preoccupied with the cutlery in the drawer.
The way you thought reality was stupid was written all across your frown.
You were from elsewhere. I understood that music can sometimes solve everything,
Like looking into the sky and peering into infinity,
But thought better of telling you this bluntly, since I had just met you.
Your cousin, my roommate, looked for things to say and spoke with you about childhood,
As if it were a mythical place that could bandage things with good memories.
The curtains were pleated like the folds of the space-time that so thoroughly preoccupies us,
Unless we are concerned with things other than tea, shoes, or umbrellas, things beyond
The fire and smoke and mirrors of this world. I could tell you were there.
You may have had a toothache, I thought, not knowing you had given up.
It was strange in retrospect to say that the closed door of your wry smile had been
Happening while you were thinking not of going on, but of the elegy
You would pen, translating loneliness into another form of loneliness.
I know how you feel, now, since I have also thought those things, almost,
But decided that coping was best, because then again I get to feel
The first snow brush a whisper across my face. I get to breathe
And turn on lamps to read books, to sip hot chocolate,
To answer the phone to say hello to the friend on the other end.
I get to think of life and keep on keeping on,
Thinking of those who are with us, and those who are not.

I peered into my teacup as if I were looking into a crystal ball,
Hoping to understand what might help. You've got to take it lightly,
Sometimes, say it's all just a trick of the light, egoless, in the beauty
Of the light like a prism through a city pigeon's frazzled wings, I should have said.
I am a writer, too, I would have told you but then I didn't know you wrote.
I never really knew you, and that is sad that a world vanished without affirming
This way that we all trip and get up and stumble on
In some scene in a novel we write as we live the book of our lives.
Coffee mugs, stereo systems, bottle of wine—these set the scene
That matters, that has to matter to us—we have no other choice
But to make the clouds, the arrangement of chairs, the music collection matter.
It's a puzzle we must piece together, or else we are blown apart
In a world without gravity that pulls us in every direction, floating, lost.
The way we make it matter is simply to believe, and tell ourselves we do.