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This collection of poems confronts domesticity and motherhood as it intertwines  
and conflicts with womanhood and desire.

WHEN THE HEAT KICKS ON

by

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## APPROVAL PAGE

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## Latent

More and more I feel the deep  
grooves of man's thumbprint  
on my life. The way I look  
in the mirror asking if  
he will think I am beautiful  
today. The way I never thought  
I'd work because that's  
a man's job. How guilty I felt  
when I loved to work, loved being out  
of my house. How my mother  
stared at my mouth when I uttered  
the word *daycare*.  
How I bend at the waist to fit  
my body with his. How it feels  
like climbing over a cliff's ledge  
when I put my hand on the back  
of his head and push  
his face between my legs –  
Why does that feel like power?  
How I want to cry out something  
other than *Oh, god, yes*  
because it's He who placed  
all men above me. The mountain  
I will peel back in layers  
until I reveal the molten core  
of myself. How after an eruption  
the peak is never so high  
as it was before but the soil  
a luscious dark that breeds and blooms.

Housework

Why do you come up behind me hard

pressed against my baggy sweats

while I scrub plates? Does the smell of dishwater –

last night's garlic sauce mingled

with three-day-old milk

left in our sons' room

slopping in and out

of that yellow sponge – turn you on?

Do you want me

to pull my crinkled fingers out of the water

unzip your wrinkled pants

my knees on our hard

wood floor? While I'm down here

I'll pull up the boards that groan into the night,

push into the dirt of the foundation,

and dig until I'm under the house.

Like a naked mole rat my milky white pupils

are blind. I hear you call my name

over our kids asking

where mommy went.

She is the wall, the attic, the chipped paint

in the porcelain tub, the musty smell that creeps

out of the vent when the heat kicks on.



## Ode to the Costco \$4.99 Rotisserie Chicken

Through crisp brown skin  
that's cooled for an hour,  
I cut away your  
rosemary infused breasts  
dripping with olive oil –  
they want to come  
off the bone.  
With kitchen shears,  
I clip the slick string  
to free the legs  
hinged tight  
to your body –  
the crack of ball  
and socket joints echoes  
across the tile as I lick  
the grease between  
my fingers, and my stomach  
aches. A sheet of skin  
pulled away from the meat  
is laid on my tongue  
like gold. The earthy spices  
between your ribs intoxicate  
the air as I flip you over,  
find the wishbone,  
plunge my fingers  
into bare underbelly.  
My teeth tear at your soft flesh  
as you lie on your back –  
scrape my bones  
against your bones, revel  
in the crunch of you  
by my hands. Covered  
in the carnage of your wings  
picked clean, I am filled  
by your crisp rotation,  
a flight over the fire  
that only knows how to consume.

Wurlitzer at the Waffle House, 1964

One of the regulars  
ambles over, leaving  
a man in the booth.  
She used to come in alone,  
her giggles popped like grease,  
every cigarette kissed  
with her red lipstick.  
She'd rest an arm  
on my amber arch,  
trace a finger along  
my backlit list, and I'd pull  
her song from deep inside.  
As Etta James sang,  
the woman's hips stirred the air  
and her fingers swept  
through her hair,  
pushed down her body,  
and it didn't matter  
if the joint was packed  
or she was the only one –  
once Etta crooned *baby*,  
*I would rather be blind*,  
and that woman moved  
you had to believe in God.  
I had to believe that  
whatever needle carved  
the grooves of her hips  
also cut the records I played.  
But now a man blows the smoke  
of his Newport around her;  
she doesn't blink.  
Her body forms a thin  
L in the booth.  
The disc turns inside me.  
They sit on the names of lovers  
carved on the wooden bench,  
she picks at the wallpaper, smothered  
hash browns in front of her.  
She doesn't even tap her foot.  
How can she remain

still when her song is playing?  
How can a woman  
built of coils and crescents,  
whose pulse was an octave  
above everyone around her  
one day become a flat line?

## Record of the Body

The needle drags along the grooves  
of the vinyl but the chorus carves

into my skin. I spin like a record  
warped, wobbling arms beg to

burst. I fling my hair and heat rises  
from the hollow inside me

as echoing chords revive my pink lungs.  
I am a world where white blood cells

are full notes, and my heart  
is a drum nailed to my rib-wall.

Thrum-pump, thrum-pump, thrum-pump –  
the melody through the artery

in my neck makes a metronome  
of my head. My muscles are the sheet

music trying to contain this pulse,  
this force that threatens to rupture

when the record skips. If silence is death  
to sound, stillness is a knife across my belly  
crippling this human accelerando.

## School Bus Love

I want a thighs-stuck-to-the-forest-green-plastic-seat

kind of love

Dr. Pepper-flavored-Bonne Bell-lipsmacker-first-kiss

kind of love

a write-a-heart-in-silver-Sharpie-on-my-knee-as-we-pass-the-chicken-farm

kind of love

a tremble-as-I-hold-your-hand-in-the-orange-dark-of-a-tunnel

kind of love

a scrunched-down-low-so-Mr.Good-doesn't-see-us

kind of love

a hope-you-can't-tell-I've-shoved-tissue-in-my-bra

kind of love

a speed-bump-at-40 mph-and-slam-our-heads-on-the-roof-down-Lafitte

kind of love

an afraid-to-get-off-the-bus-and-the-love-ending

kind of love

I want a world contained by stainless steel –

a love that waits

for that you-and-me-baby-until-the-end-of-the-world

song on the radio

that's gonna be our song,

and we're gonna play it on repeat.

## Thunder Road

My mother with her breasts  
resting on her belly under an old  
night shirt cooks eggs on a Saturday  
morning. We wake one-by-one  
to “Born To Run” and Bruce’s  
*Oh, oh, oh, oh*, sizzling in the bacon grease.  
My father shimmies up behind her  
and wraps his arms  
under those loose ladies.  
What my parents taught me  
of love is two seconds of affection  
in front of the stove  
cancels out last night’s fight –  
the almost slap, the slam of the front door,  
the screams. They taught me  
marriage has no back door, no ending,  
no way out. They taught me *heaven’s*  
*waiting* in an over-medium fried egg;  
*show a little faith* on a weekend morning, *you’re*  
*scared*, but *hey*, that’s what love is,  
*it’s alright*.

## Christmas After My Brother's Wife Left Him

*I thought this was weird and creepy, so I had to buy it for your kids!  
T told me he wants to call it Salt –  
Best Elf on the Shelf name ever!  
Your renegade-in-law,  
Lauren*

My son flips open the cover  
revealing the inscription –  
your name curving on the page.  
You who insisted we start this tradition:  
hiding a goddam huge-eyed,  
floppy-felt-armed  
cotton elf around the house  
all thirty-one days of December.  
It was your idea to hang him  
from the ceiling fan, write warnings like:  
*Be nice or else*  
in mini marshmallows,  
and other random-ass  
shenanigans. After you left  
we didn't give Salt up.  
Naughty or Nice, till death do us  
fucking part. I close the book,  
put the kids to bed and pull out  
Mickey Mouse wrapping paper you'd hate.  
My scissors part  
the paper with ease –  
I want to slice through your name,  
write *Bitch* in dog shit  
on your front porch,  
put the North Polean curse on you:  
*Thou shalt only be satisfied  
by a reindeer.*  
Christmas after Christmas it was you  
who made up our drinking  
games: *take a shot every time  
your sister mentions her virginity,  
your mom says nothing's wrong,  
your dad goes in the garage  
and comes back smelling*

*like a blunt.*

It was you who knew  
how to get everyone the perfect gift,  
wrap it like Martha Stewart, sign it  
*Your Main Hoe*, and make us all  
smile. It was you who held my hand  
when I had labor pains, *It'll pass,*  
*just breathe, baby girl's ready to shop*  
*with us, but not yet, it's too early.*

Just like I can't throw away  
that Polaroid of you and me in matching  
tacky-light-up Christmas sweaters,  
the Shakespeare set you tripped  
an old lady for or the postcard  
you sent saying *You're flawless,*  
*I love you. Will you be my bridesmaid?*  
I can't cut the inscription  
because I can't forget  
how we called each other "Outlaws,"  
fighting this gruesome holiday together.



## Release

Her body is a crystal bowl  
flung to the ground –  
she licks her wounds  
glass-dust  
on her tongue,  
bare-kneed she crawls  
on the shards of herself –  
a bloody mosaic  
resembles a woman  
if you squint hard enough.

Girl: A Perception

When Daddy says *don't cry*  
what he means is *don't be weak*.

His words pluck  
my eye from my skull,  
each letter lifting my brain's  
pulsing pink canyons out of my head  
and onto the dinner table –

his syllables dissect me.  
*She's our emotional one*  
is the sentence that shaves

the curves off my hips,  
*She'll need a strong man*  
is the diction that cuts  
all color from my lips.

*You thirsty after all that crying?*  
I am being hollowed  
one intestine at a time threaded  
through my bellybutton like a shoelace.

Make an autopsy of this life  
and watch how, stripped to sinew,  
I still birth dominion.

Vagina

is a word little girls are taught to whisper,  
like *roach* in a restaurant.

*Muffin*, is what my friend called  
her daughter's vagina.  
She was five-years-old  
and cried when a waiter asked  
*Do you want butter on your muffin?*

I will tell my daughter, *that's your vagina*,  
not a tee-tee, pee-pee, moo-moo, or hoo-ha.

Not naming a thing creates fear –  
her vagina is not venom,  
a virus, vampire, vulture, victim, vendetta,  
vessel for violation or Voldemort.

No, vagina is her word  
spelled in all caps: V-A-G-I-N-A  
a violin with strings  
meant to be played,

a velvet valley furrowed  
with soil, a vexing veil  
to part and be parted.

Her vagina clusters her body's light,  
waits for nucleic fusion –

*when you hold that light in your palm,  
my love, you hold a supernova.*

And when girls search in their anatomy  
book for their privates, my daughter will say *No*,  
*we have vaginas. Muscular coils, galaxies.*

Wurlitzer at the Palace Roller Rink, 1956

Crazy leg, iceberg, snake walk,  
a whirl of wheels rolls streamlined  
on the maple floor before me.  
The board flashes COUPLES skate  
as an auburn-haired girl leans into me,  
pink fingertips tapping  
the glow of my bubble lights.  
Her plaid swing skirt brushes  
against my speaker as she flips  
through all two hundred  
voices inside me –  
her hips warm  
against my amber pulse  
when she chooses B12.  
Her round face is soft  
in my neon glow  
as she sings Elvis’  
“Don’t Be Cruel.”  
Her curls spin away  
into the blur of desire  
on the floor—  
into the twirl of interlocked  
fingers. They want to touch  
my polished chrome, want to  
touch each other,  
want to touch the world  
that gives them the lyrics  
of their lives. So when a girl wants  
to feel her story, my rainbow tempo  
beckons her, she plays her song,  
always her palm print lingering.

To the Oaks at Audubon Park

Bark-covered beauties, your roots  
sprawl across the grass like women  
lying on their sides. I curl up  
between two knees, my earthy  
brown hair branches out in tendrils,  
the soil welcomes my cheek.  
I want to burrow into the ground  
with your roots, fill the trunk  
of my body with water, taste the turn  
of worms, dead animals, feed  
on the pulse of decay. Cut me  
open, count my rings, see how they thin,  
each year more painful than the last.  
My blood will become  
sap, untouched for centuries,  
hardened to amber –  
a fossil of that dying force  
rolled into a bead to be hung  
around a young girl's neck.

Missing the Tree Frogs of the Bywater

My voyeur's neon green absence  
lingers over the verdant night.

The porch groans a dirge  
across the damp lawn for a July  
without their cream bellies  
suction-cupped to the window,  
plotting ways to join their gummy bodies  
to my sweaty skin. A gust lumbers  
along the moss on an oak,  
crawls down to the ground whispering  
at the earthworms:

*Dig deeper. Dig deeper.*

I wish my frogs were here now, filling  
their lungs with pulsing night.  
I'd open my door, offer them every pore  
of my skin. I would shrink down, wrap  
the inflated gullet of one around myself,  
live as the rippling vibration  
in a body built for sound.  
Cradled in this vocal hammock  
I'd become a cry for a mate,  
a chirruping heartbeat, a lullaby  
for the cypress knees who  
keep calling *Please, come back to bed, please.*  
The algae parts as an alligator  
raises his head, his kill floats in time –  
blood-soaked eggs.

But outside my window now, a tremolo  
of cicadas plays. Deserters of lives outgrown,  
all they know is how to leave behind  
shells, silent dry husks.

Saint Roch's Campo Santo

A girl grips white-hard at tufts of grass  
as if gravity  
no longer is law. She wants to levitate  
into the plush  
night pinpricked by infinite creation.

Is there a better way to feel  
than to lie beside the stone  
homes of the dead?

A willow's thin branches dance  
a dirge into the wind:

*To you all flesh will come,  
grant them eternal rest,  
and let perpetual light shine on them.*

She pushes her lips against the tomb's script:

*Per aspera ad astra.*

In the sinking earth  
her heartbeat moves  
to wake the dead. She wants them to reach  
for her throat,  
create a bridge between her pulse  
and their still flesh.

### Woman: A Definition

A creature cloaked  
in houndstooth, hair  
braided or shaved.  
Devourer with fire  
between her knees.  
A being built of no man's  
bones, but rich soil,  
clamoring for the moment  
they're whole,  
when *woman* becomes  
the strongest verb  
a human can say –  
I will woman five miles today.  
No one can tell you how  
woman you are. An expanding  
circle, a bulb that blooms  
in ever-changing colors,  
always dying, never given,  
an empty place that fills and fills.



### On a Lusty Afternoon

Girl asking if I want fries with that  
in the McDonald's drive-thru –  
No, I want you to wrap those long  
glitter-gold nailed fingers  
around my breasts and squeeze,  
never mind the grease. Bald man  
strolling down Tate Street,  
wink at me and lift my skirt  
with nothing but your wingtips on.  
Weatherman Larry Sprinkle,  
is there a 60% chance of scattered  
thunderstorms when you go down on me?  
I want you to turn me on like Channel 9  
morning news. Lady from the Boulangerie,  
fry me a whole fish, slap it across  
my knees as I ride this amputee. Tell him to tickle  
my ribs just so. Where will we go?  
I want the cleft of my back to feel a tongue, the march of toes  
across my shoulder blades, and down my spine.  
Honey, sit your ass on my lap and sneeze. The sun,  
always so hot, until it sets.

## Ode To My Fuck-Me Pumps

I strut down tiled hallways  
just to hear you clip clop  
in prize mare fashion.

You make my legs like pistons,  
fuel my body machine,  
plump my ass like a plum, power

swagger. I want everyone to notice us.  
When I bring a man home he won't  
slide you off, he wants you to join.

But after, when we're in bed and  
you're tossed on the floor, one upright  
waiting for my foot, the other knocked

over, resting its sole for a moment,  
I'll only want to slip you back on –  
what power I have strapped to your toebox.

Your pieces a cry on my lips: shank, breast, heel  
insole, vamp, lining, platform, top piece, counter, counter, counter –  
you, my patent leather pleasure.

## The Blessing

A homeless man stops me in Jackson Square,  
eyes my blue suede shoes –

*I bet you two dollars*

*I can tell you where*

*you got them shoes at.*

I dig in my purse:  
six quarters plus a nickel and it's a deal.

A man in a suit stumbles past us,  
colored beads around his neck  
and a pink daiquiri in his hand.

He tries to sing along  
with the quartet on the corner.

*You hold on to that and listen close –*  
*You listening? Good.*

*They're on your goddamn feet!*  
*Your lesson is my blessin'.*

He pockets the change  
and moves on.

I walk up the hill to the river, the cracked  
pavement turns the square  
into a concrete mosaic,  
people splattered like drops of spit  
blown through a saxophone.

The thumps and slurs  
swirl behind me as I reach  
the bank of the Mississippi  
and watch barges lumber past.

A pelican dips his beak deep into the river,  
spreads his archaic wings.

The tide gulps at the shore  
I slip my shoes off my feet,  
push them into the waves of the river,  
bright blue skiffs struggling  
to stay afloat on the muddy water.

My God

You are not the creator of heaven  
and earth but my entire life.  
You are the force between my legs

pushing a heartbeat into my lungs  
because, my god, we worship our bodies –  
navel to nipple, nape to nonsense,

you burst into celestial being  
below me. I've carried our life in my  
womb, felt our palms wield time, coursed madness

through the earth like a river, nourished the soil  
with desire until life bulbed with the heat-force

of fire, a scorched imprint of immortality.  
Look at our altar, the fierce-pulsing veins, the sheets  
of muscle pulled tight, in a world our bodies carved.

## Conception

### I.

When the fireworks smashed  
in the New Year we didn't know  
my PBR belly would swell into a baby belly.  
The quiet scent of explosion  
creeping in the window –  
whistle, shuffle, crunch of gravel on the drive,  
as the curtains whispered:  
*He's coming, he's coming, he's arrived.*

### II.

*Not again,*  
my mother said  
before the bleeding began.  
We called you Delilah anyway,  
not knowing when you fell  
from my body in pieces  
on the tile floor  
if the name had cursed you  
or your grandmother had.

### III.

The realm of brotherhood,  
forged in the galley  
kitchen on cold grey granite,  
brings on an age of war.

### IV.

How does a grain of sand become a pearl?  
How does my body continue  
to be an oyster, that soft aphrodisiac  
that wants to be devoured  
but also to swell  
in perfect round allure?

Tinnitus

This house is a warzone  
and I'm anchored  
to the stainless steel kitchen sink.

*Just scrub the plates, forks, cups  
and knives of last night's dinner*

I tell myself as one of the kids  
screams in the living room  
and my husband booms.

I don't flinch. The hard thud  
as a door slams, and it's another kid's  
turn to wail. This water's so hot

I think my skin will peel away  
in sheets, reveal another woman  
underneath: a woman less

fixed, less quiet. A woman  
who doesn't need skin  
because she has scales, thick

like diamond plate. A woman  
who could swallow thunder,  
spew words like a summer storm's

unyielding need to empty clouds, cleanse  
the grey world. When all the dishes  
are clean, I cut the faucet off, dirty water

lingers in the drain. I hear glass break,  
walk towards it, wringing the broom  
in my wrinkled hands.

### What Shapes Look Like in the Dark

The bed is a raft, her husband's  
back, a wide-mouthed cave  
tempting her to crawl in.

Stalactites in the damp dark  
opening of his lungs call  
for their siren. The dresser is a whale

on the horizon who sings in deep  
cerulean notes, tones  
that could fill her like the bra-eels

that slither on the hardwood sea floor  
of their bedroom. They wrap  
around her and electrocute desire.

Dust falls from the fan like plankton,  
she sees but ignores the miniature  
lives encircling her.

The moment she knows she swam so deep  
she can't push her body  
to the surface, that the world

above her, so beautiful, fierce and heavy,  
will crush her like soft carapace.

## Elegy with Playing Cards and Sunscreen

Cards fanned like a shark fin  
across the horizon of her face  
she asks *Who's turn is it?*  
Always waiting to make her move –  
after the war she left Lebanon for England  
with an army man when she was only fifteen,  
a forged birth record saying eighteen.  
After her husband died  
at forty-five her life did not end  
but began again. A new hand dealt –  
summers at the Agay, red toenails popping  
in the white sands, men's eyes  
always catching –  
she raised her children, kissed  
her grandchildren, crossed the Atlantic to America  
to meet her great-grandchildren. I remember  
her shaky brown hand as she slathered sunscreen  
on my freckled white skin every morning.  
On the deck of our beach rental I rub sunscreen on her  
great-grandkids' skin, watch as they  
glide through the water, descendants  
of a card shark's migration.



At 3 A.M. I Fantasize About Being an Armless Woman

Your arm's slung over me like a dead ape,  
my crushed breasts and ribs yearn

to crack with the rattle of your smoker's lung.  
What release I could feel if I were to

hatchet my arms clean off, wiggle out  
from under you. Imagine all the weight

I'd never have to carry: the kids, groceries,  
broom, vacuum, dishes, books, toys,

a drink, a job, my phone, my children's  
needs, your desires and I'd never

have to drive again.  
Someone would push my grocery cart

down the aisle, pull items off the shelves  
and say *Here you go, honey.*

Sure, I'd get looks and I'd eat  
like a dog but you'd always wipe

my face for me, and tuck me in, lover,  
wouldn't you? Swaddle the comforter around us –

feel my tightly wrapped freedom, my cylindrical lightness.

Driving to D.C., Listening to Trump's Inauguration Speech, I Decide to Stop at Taco Bell Drive-Thru

*Oh, beautiful for spacious*  
cheesy gordita *American carnage* crunch  
wrap supreme *crime and gangs and drugs.*  
Stop at the *America first* window to pay. *Buy American, hire*  
American Express, sorry our machine is acting up  
today *will be remembered as the day people became rulers*  
*of this mild, nation again* hot or, *children trapped in fire*  
sauce. *Poverty in our inner cities* all of them *rusted out factories*, please.  
*Scattered just waiting like tombstones*  
on your baja blast *infused with the breath*  
*of the same almighty creator*, Thank you.  
Have a nice day. Drive down *new roads and highways and bridges and airports*  
*and tunnels and railways* with an open heart to *patriotism,*  
*there is no room for prejudice.* The wind blows *against radical Islamic terrorism,*  
and my mouth opens wide to *eradicate completely*  
*from the face of the earth* feast and *never be ignored again.*

## Aftermath

A scream gouges the night.  
It could be me in the street  
with my mouth hung open  
tearing the cold air like a sudden snag  
in pantyhose.

How warm I felt hours before, the bottle  
of wine uncorked, settled into my side of the sofa.  
But I watched the votes come in  
like plague victims. I felt them  
surge in waves I couldn't control.

What had I done, bringing life into this world?

If only I could cover my daughter in salt, hang her  
in cold storage, and preserve her uncut skin –  
a medal she doesn't even know she wears.

St. Louis Cemetery

The hungry earth devours the mausoleum wall  
as stone angels throw back their wings and cackle –  
like a horn too out of tune for heaven  
those that were laid to rest above the dirt  
find they're being swallowed by it anyway.  
If you envied the New Orleans dead,  
their escape from earthworm plot,  
you should know the earth craves  
the fertility of flesh, calls  
for the consumption of our sins.  
So hide your body inside of stone,  
burn your flesh to ash –  
she'll find you, and make angels watch  
as she guzzles up your tomb.

The Mojave on Operating Table #8

You're dying a little bit,  
Fred, you're dying.

Can you remember the desert?

How we drove twelve hours  
through dry, sage-lined roads  
trying to guess if shadows  
were burros or barbary figs –

homesick for L.A.  
and my mother's olive-colored  
kitchen, we'd leave the base

in the middle of the night,  
our girls asleep on the back seat  
in pink polka-dot pajamas,

the black sky stretched  
on top of all the miles  
we put on that wood-paneled wagon.  
Remember how it clunked

on that ever-straight road,  
with the windows down, my scarf  
a whip, your fingers tip-  
tapped the wheel, the dawn broke

like a yawn under our daughters' eyes  
when they saw California  
for the first time. We saw the mountains

flatline as if God sheared  
the trees from the desert's scalp,  
just like he carved grooves  
in the sand of our memories

that won't blow away. You drove  
so far just to cure my blues.

Can you do it again, Fred?  
Fight the dog-tired night, push  
your boot to the floor until  
blackness bursts into a clay sun-

rise. Remember the dry air, its force  
in your lungs. Remember my  
rosewater perfume, how it lingered

in sweat-beads on my neck.  
Remember how your heart  
beat in the quiet.

Remember the drive, the thrust,  
the urge, your hand on the shift  
as we parted the desert heat.

## Parking Deck Zen

“Your Life Matters”

The sign on the top level reads.  
I hadn't considered jumping  
until now. Does it? Does this life  
of unequal signs, snotty noses, and dirty  
dishes matter? A butterfly teases the air –  
Her marigold wings have an effect.  
My life stomped out  
would not ripple long. Husband,  
children, parents, siblings, friends  
are the usual. Whatever  
future lain in front of us  
pushes on. This life  
of fraudulent words blinks  
too quickly and it's over.  
When the butterfly glides past  
the high rise apartments  
the sign beckons me to the edge –  
the edge of a building  
made of layers, lives piled  
on top of one another for a few minutes.  
Sign, tell me how far my ripples  
would go, and if floating like a butterfly  
for a few stories  
could shudder the course of this timeline.

Wurlitzer at Arnold's Arcade, 1981

*Pewm, pewm, pewm:*

my cobalt tube lights pale  
beside the fluorescent Asteroids.  
The soundtrack on this concrete block  
is a rap, rap, rap pinball slap  
as dozens of teens squeak by me  
in high-top sneakers –  
black scuff marks on the floor.  
Where did the downtempo  
of night go?  
A room filled with girls  
in patent leather pumps  
floating across the floor  
always touching the curve  
of my teak trim.  
A girl in denim overalls  
bumps me on her way to Space  
Invaders, quarters ready to play.  
I remember when my glass door  
ferried girls to a world of song –  
where girls held a different life  
in their throat for a moment.  
If only she would stop now,  
brush the dust off my window,  
and watch how I glow –  
how music can move the body,  
invoke desire, be the unspoken voice  
for a broken life.  
She'd see not only the smooth lines  
of her reflection but the face of her grandmother,  
auburn-haired in her youth, searching  
for song after song, lips parted in awe.



The Birds and the Bees

*Where do babies come from?*

My son asks as easily as

*Can I have a glass of milk?*

and I remember the push –

flesh tearing like a broken zipper.

The push of his body from my body

and the marrow of everything

I was before that moment

with a bag of blood below me.

The push of morphine through my veins,

of desire into the ground, of pain

to the beginning of every thought,

of bricks on my chest, of a river

inside of me that never stops

churning and dragging me under

only to push me onto a silt-filled shore

over and over, my lungs full of air.

## Perfect Attendance

Onstage, my son smiles  
with the award clutched  
to his chest, the title clashing  
with his words:  
*I'm stupid. I don't have any friends.  
I hate school.*

Four months of his teacher  
calling, she can't calm Arthur down,  
he punched a girl in line today.

Afternoons with the same chorus:  
*No one likes me. My teacher says  
God is watching.*

I want to tell him  
his teacher is a fucking idiot, not him.  
God is not the fiery eye  
of Sauron or a robot shooting  
sin lasers at us mortals.  
Goddam this woman.

I want to put a Band-Aid  
On this gaping anger wound,  
Kiss this hurt that Kindergarten  
Shouldn't be.  
How do I show His teacher  
not all five-year-olds are hugs  
and high-fives? Isn't there a little  
dark kernel in all of us?

Listen to him tell a story, build  
a Lego structure with ease, flip  
through a picture book with his baby  
sister, stroke her hair, kiss her cheek.

I want her to open her eyes  
to his tenderness but know she won't.

•

Every night, I rub his back until he's asleep,  
my voice in cadence with his pulse:

*Hop on your horse,  
his name is Bruno, he'll take  
you over a field of red daisies,  
grip his mane tight, he gallops  
fast, listen to his hooves on  
the drawbridge, ride him into  
the tower, shut the door, you're safe.*

## The Dying Game

In a tidal pool my son pretends to be dead.  
My water angel among the minnows,  
he splays his arms outward bisecting

the shore and sea. He calls me over to him,  
his eyelids betraying what a dead boy  
looks like. He asks me to lie beside him –

*You're dead too mommy.* I rest my body  
next to his in the sun-warmed pool,  
my hair a floating crown around my head, and

I wonder how long until our skin  
absorbs the ocean, and we become two  
seraphs bobbing in the ebb and flow of this

undersea-heaven. How long until our ears  
are so full of water the voices that play on the shore  
are like the muffled thrum of a hatchetfish as it brushes

the seagrass? How long until the razorbill flies  
away with our eyes, drops them in its nest  
so we know what it is to be devoured, treasure

in a newborn belly. How wide our smiles could stretch  
when a Dungeness crab pulls at the corners of our lips.  
As coral shreds our back into seaweed, we levitate,

become the invisible pull, the plankton-riddled pulse  
where all life originates, and our salt-bloated  
hearts beat as one again, fluid and strong. When

the tide comes in we can't pretend any longer.  
I want to be dragged with my son out to sea  
like a scream that's only a whisper when it reaches the shore.