

CURE, LOGEN, M.F.A. *Ask Me to Stay*. (2010)
Directed by David Roderick. 39 pp.

The poems in this thesis are concerned with memory, loss, sense of place, physicality and violence. These poems were composed over a two year course of study in the Creative Writing Program at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

ASK ME TO STAY

by

Logen Cure

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts

Greensboro
2010

Approved by

Committee Chair

© 2010 by Logen Cure

For Nandra Perry

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair _____

Committee Members _____

Date of Acceptance by Committee

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Residence or Refuge.....	1
The Rest.....	2
The Last Time I Saw Her.....	4
Braggadocio.....	5
This is How I Know.....	6
Still.....	7
Merciful.....	8
In the Attic, Above My Head.....	9
Crash-land.....	10
<i>Sliding Doors</i> Exhibit at the Tate Modern.....	11
Allen.....	12
Hold On.....	14
College Station, Texas.....	15
Abstinence.....	17
Condolences.....	18
To Shed.....	19
Thanks for Lunch.....	20
You Said Yes.....	21
Hometown.....	22
Landmine.....	23
Is 206 Enough?.....	24
Letters to Petrarch.....	25

Residence or Refuge.

The air in North Carolina tastes like
nothing, smells like nothing,
like it could be anything.

I am still surprised at how clean it feels,
how not even smoking seems dirty,
how I am aware that the heaviness in my lungs
is something I carry,
not something that surrounds me anymore.

I remember how the air in Texas
came to mean too much,
how fleeting olfactory associations,
once vague and sneaky,
became unbearable.

From here, Texas seems like
pretty postcards of familiar landmarks,
movie sets that replicate stories I tell,
dreamscapes I sometimes visit,
and always leave –
ties that could so easily
snap.

The sky in the Texas desert is too
uninterrupted to be real,
too sublimely colossal.
The distance the eye can see is too far –
you could see storms miles off,
lightning flickering quick as fireflies,
long before you could hear it.

To see the sky in North Carolina
you have to look up.
What comes for you here
just comes.

The Rest.

I.

You washed the sheets today,
because the cat threw up in them.

We are glad about the clean sheets –
the pleasant smell,
the tidiness we'll ruin by thrashing around,
a fresh attempt at sleeping well.

As we smooth them across our bed made for queens,
you comment that you'd like new sheets someday –

but that you love these.

II.

It makes me remember the day
during my heart's great bending
 toward brokenness
(before it came to rest in you)
she-that-did-the-breaking called me,
asked me to meet her –

she had not yet broken
 the habit of my company,
and I had not yet conquered
 my compulsion to oblige.

I stood outside the fitting
 room, held her purse for her,
while she tried on
 new things, the next impulses.

I helped her choose
 new sheets

that I knew I would not help
 her put on the bed,
that I would not wash for her,
as a kind gesture some weekday afternoon.

I skipped class later that day.
I filled my full bed alone.

The Last Time I Saw Her.

She placed each tiny screw in my cupped palm,
and one by one, they rolled to line up neatly in my heart-line.

With my free hand, I held the stereo still
as she slid off its plastic shell,
exposing its small metropolis of mechanical insides.

The recently-bare walls stared in their stunned nakedness
as we crouched, the stereo between us,
(I tried to ignore the thick, sweet, familiar smell of her neck)
and she said, "There it is."

There it was – the CD that slid back and wedged itself
under the rotating deck when she picked up the stereo.
"Goddamn it," she said,
the awful plastic clatter echoing inside.

Her plan was to pawn it.
Soon, her life would consist only
of what she could fit in her car.

"It's not broken," I said.

She slipped her fingers into the narrow space,
but only pushed the disc further out of reach.
"Let me try," I said, extending my fistful of screws.
She opened her hand and I dropped them carefully into her palm.

I tilted the stereo, shoved my fingers inside
and popped the CD out into the room, where it rolled on edge
in a single lazy spiral, before falling face up.

We both stared at my distinctive upper-case letters
written neatly across its shiny surface.
"Thanks," she said. I plucked each screw from her hand,
tightened them one by one.

Outside, she opened the door of her car and shoved a pile of shoes,
binders and stray make-up wands out of the way.
I set the stereo in the empty space.

Braggadocio.

I will know your buttons, your
zippers, the places you open.
I will undo you.

I will be the architect of your
arching, your tremble&whimper,
in you I will raise monuments
& shatter them.

Your body will hold
the pang of my name,
it will echo in your chest as you drive
to work, wait in lines, ride
in elevators.

The smell of me on your collar
will make you suddenly very
aware of the seam of your jeans,
& as you recall the slick slip of my tongue,
the deft touch&grasp of my fingers
that awareness will turn to friction,
which always turns to heat.

I will marrow your bones.
I will become the definition
of your wanting, the reason
for the dirty pair of panties in your purse.

This is How I Know.

We clean the house together,
because my friend is visiting for the weekend.
You mop the floor and let me
have the easy job: folding the laundry.
After she arrives, I watch you, your easy grace,
the way you carry a plate of fresh cinnamon rolls
like a tray, on your fingertips,
the way you make our house feel
like the blanket you folded
across the back of the couch.

In the warm dark of our room,
we undress under the covers.
You press your body to my body,
your sweet hips move against my bones,
your hands remind me what it is
to no longer feel empty,
that it is good to be possessed.
I press my face into your hair
to stifle the involuntary sound of my voice –
politeness for our guest –
and as my breath comes faster I notice

your hair smells like cinnamon.

Still.

The woman behind the counter asks *Together?*

and I think *Yesyesyes*
as he fumbles with the 12-pack, gives me a drunk-crooked
smile. It has been a long time since that fifteenth
summer, since the bracelet I made him out of a napkin disintegrated
in his wallet, since my thumb ring he stole still fit any of his
fingers – and yet here he is, here we are, on a beer run
for some people I don't know who live in my town, friends of his girlfriend –
they are waiting.

And maybe it's just because I'm stoned but I think

I shouldn't take him back to the warm, dim apartment
on Dartmouth St., to his pretty girlfriend holding
the lid of the whirring blender, margaritas all around – but they are all
waiting.

I think maybe I should just keep
driving, that I could wear this shirt for days if I had to, that maybe we could get far
enough that no one would find us, San Francisco, a city to swallow us, we could
change our names – he would only be Matt to me.

But I take him back, I do, because I have to, and I sit and I watch him

talk and drink and
laugh in his relaxed, graceful way,
and I don't say much because I'm just so
stoned and what would I say, anyway?

He walks me out to the parking lot and he hugs me

and I press my face into his chest to breathe in the cigarettes and alcohol and the trace
scent of his cologne. He starts to walk away from me but

turns back,

kisses me hard, on the mouth, his tongue
opening wide that place in my chest where I keep him,
the sprawling memory of the way he held
me first.

Merciful.

For Parker, my dog.

You took them one by one,
reducing their ranks from a dozen,
perhaps, to two or three.

Your teeth pierced skin, the thick liquid beneath
the surface burst forth, splashed
sweetly across your tongue, down your throat,
sprayed outward with each precise jerk
of your head to tear the hide, exposing
the vulnerable brightness of insides,
swallowing, feasting, spreading remains
across the ground where they once stood
together, whole, and untouched.

When I walked in the door, I saw
the massacre, the shredded clementine peels
littering the living room floor. The sharp
smell of citrus lingered in the air,
sweet and vaguely ominous.
You held your ears at the angle of guilt,
approached me low to the ground, apologetic, humble.

I considered the way you howl at sirens,
because they howl at you, the way you
stalk the cat but would never hurt him,
the way you lay with me in bed, on your back,
head on the pillow, under the covers,
close to me, short breaths tickling my ear,
the fact that you were so terrified
of my old roommate's kittens.

When I cleaned it all up, I found the single,
uninjured clementine you'd stashed away for later,
under the decorative stone stool in the sunroom,
where you like to keep your favorite toys,
and I considered leaving it there for you.

In the Attic, Above My Head.

The box is battered, edges bent and dented,
bearing the weight of what she left.
Torn tape, shredded and peeling:
several attempts to seal the same
wound, like scars can be willed to form.

The box is better at keeping promises –
it's the only way I have left to hold her.
A picture frame, a necklace, a wooden frog,
pieces of paper, her perfect handwriting,
a dozen tiny toy cars,
black and white photographs,
a leather journal, trinkets from Spain –
all fragments of the loveliest lie,
my favorite one, about forever.

I'm certain it all smells just
like her still, the familiar scent
of something fleeting, of seeing the lie,
and finding it beautiful, keeping it close.

Crash-land.

I press my back against the door
so she can't force me to leave, to go home
to my fragile, beautiful, distant
girlfriend.

I'm counting on the proximity –
the way our bodies beg *closer*.
She reaches for the knob,
her forearm brushes
my hip, I can feel my breath
against her collar bone,
and I know – she can't open that door.

Just like I couldn't help knocking,
interrupting her idle Tuesday,
because I couldn't ignore the weight
of my lungs, the jacket in the backseat
that still smells like incense.

We stand, deadlocked
before she snaps
the stillness –
lifts me bodily, pins me
to the door, her fingers pressing
into the spaces between my ribs.
My sharp inhale of surprise is nothing
but the hot, stale scent of her American Spirits.

She holds me, my feet off the floor,
I am
dizzy, I cannot
swallow.

She drops me, pulls me
stumbling forward
by the wrist.
She opens the door wide, pushes me
backwards down the steps,

into the dusty gravel driveway
that grinds under my feet as I regain balance,
squint at the sudden afternoon sun,
wince at the slamming door.

Sliding Doors Exhibit at the Tate Modern.

She took my hand,
of a memory than

more the imitation
an act of affection,

and we walked forward,
automatic doors,
the image we had created
the image we had

approaching the mirrored
our reflection,
and recreated over years,
projected into our future –

and we watched it split.
no pushing against

It took no force,
or pulling away.

There was no sound
footfalls advancing

aside from our
in unison.

We simply witnessed together
the only way to stop it

this quiet sort of breaking –
would have been to stand still.

The gap between us
allowing us to step through it

stretched and opened
to the place where that image,

beautiful and familiar,

disappeared.

Allen.

He always smelled like the Texas-shaped air freshener
that hung from the rear-view mirror of his truck – “strawberry leather” –
and Kool cigarettes. He’d show up at my doorstep
at 9 a.m. on a Monday, and we’d get fucked up, drive around,
blast metal that rattled the loose change in his cup-holder.

*Listen to how good
this guy screams,* he’d say.

He never stopped at yellow lights.

He taught me how to ash out the window.

He and I had only one thing in common, but
it was the kind of thing that can get two people pretty damn
far: we just couldn’t stand being alone.

He kept a weapon behind his driver's seat.

In its idle position, it was a thick steel cylinder,
roughly the length of his forearm.

With a flick of his wrist, a heavy spring with a solid metal tip
telescoped out from the handle –
the sound reminded me of someone sprinting
with a stick down a chain link fence.
It was flexible, whip-like. He demonstrated,
making a few whistling incisions in the air.

He showed me the blood

on the tip, blood where the coils had bitten through
the boy who attempted to rob him in his truck
at a stoplight at 3 a.m.

Protect yourself, he said.
Never forget that.

He took care of my girlfriend and me the Sunday
we did mushrooms, watched us rage and riot inside.

He pointed out the prettiest colors, textures that
undulated and throbbed, tried to help me

unclench my jaw, her unclench her fists.

Mostly, I remember moving through static, resistant
air, how even the smallest decisions seemed like
riddles or threats.

He crashed at our house that night, and the next morning,

my girlfriend left for work, still tripping.

I found him sprawled on the living room floor, one arm slung
over his eyes, blocking the uneven slats of light
that fell through the blinds.

Allen, I said,

Hey, Allen, until he lifted his arm to squint up at me.

You can come get in bed with me if you want.

He asked if he could hold me, and with my skull still

buzzing, I let him. He closed himself around me. I marveled

at the hard topography of his still, sleeping frame,

his heavy warmth, his stout, certain arms.

He reminded me of the way my hands smell

after I've climbed a tree.

I eavesdropped on his blood, listened for the person

sprinting with a stick down a chain link fence,

the screams of the boy,

the sick, dull noise of body striking

pavement, foot striking

body, the familiar roar of his truck.

I remembered his clear stillness, how he didn't look away

when he said, *I'm afraid I'll kill someone.*

Hold On.

I was used to different warning signs –
that sick pallor, the sharp, stinging
scent of hand sanitizer, the deepening
spaces around her clavicles,
her bloodless smile.

I learned to sit outside the bathroom door,
to not ask, to wait with a cup of water.

But this –
 this was new.
I saw it, exposed just below her shirt –
 a single, narrow
 red flash.

I stepped to her, pushed
 her shirt up,
 held her at the ribs,
and I saw them –
 fresh, shallow cuts that crawled
 up the trails my hands knew –
 over the ridges of her bones,
 slipping under the band of her panties,
 wandering up the firm curves of her breasts –
 the part that reminded me
 of cupping an apple in one palm.

She pulled me close.

“I stood in front of the mirror
 for a long time,” she said,
 lips brushing my neck,
“and thought how pretty I looked.”

College Station, Texas.

How clear that rumble and cry of the train
seemed in the hush, when all of campus
slept around us.
The steady, unfailing interval of street lights
illuminated everything –
antiquated buildings lined with looming
bas-relief animal skulls,
the wide face of the clock tower,
austere, masculine statues.
We could never see the stars
when we walked alone at night.
I never minded.

The dorm always smelled like a hotel –
like some place we were supposed to leave.
But it was also rife with the sweet scents of girls
and the incessant thrum of laughter,
music, and arguing.
We could hear each other clearly
from two doors down.

I remember that Sunday we rode the bus
all the way around – you looking
out the window, me looking at you,
the dull copper gleam of the Academic Building's dome,
bees drifting around vibrant flowers,
the manicured grass we weren't allowed
to walk on.

It was different after we moved
off-campus to opposite sides of town.
Approaching the heart of it all from the outside
made it easy to notice when the sober
skeletons of cranes
materialized in its overcast skyline.
The roads grew littered with reflective orange barrels,
were broken to bare jagged concrete
teeth with protruding metal rods.
The hum of campus became a cacophony of
back-up beeping, metal-on-metal sparking,
the hammering of progress.

Abstinence

really seemed like a good idea at the time. Surprising how quickly concepts seem so flimsy, hard to imagine. Best intentions stolen suddenly that one Monday night the winter I was just seventeen, that winter's coldest memory. Sex became a series made of sacrifices, different ways to phrase a plea for mercy, unwilling acts of worship. Every time a December passes (five now) I attempt to remember what I meant to keep before it was taken, what it's like to hold that something so worth defending. But all I can see is a single waving white flag.

Condolences.

From now on, I will
tell people that you died.

I will say it calmly, without tears.
It is not that I want pity.
It is not that I take pleasure in lying.
I have simply grown tired of mapping
the perforations we made, impatient with
offering our history up for appraisal, intolerant
of questions concerning who-broke-what.

I officially excuse myself from this exercise.
I am not interested in people's opinions
of my victim or villainhood.

The only thing people should be allowed
to say to me about you is
I'm sorry for your loss.

And when they ask me what
happened to you, I will tell them
without hesitation that one day,
your heart just stopped.

To Shed.

I should have pulled out
 my tampon
and shoved your fingers inside me –

I should have forced you to feel
me draining.

You were the making
 of my womanhood.
I should have made you
 reckon with its carnage.

It would have been a small consolation
for the last battle I
 lost at your hipbones.

 I wrote countless treaties
 you never signed –

 you were so content
 with waging war.

I should have stained your sheets.

I should have turned
 the water brown
as you washed your hands
 of me.

Thanks for Lunch.

I remember you always paid for me
in cash, every time – untraceable, clean.
You bought my lunch that day, and several beers
you drank like water. It had been a year
since I had seen you – you were just the same –
your crooked smile, your dirty charm, unchanged.
I can't recall which lie I told that day
to see you, but I remember I prayed
we wouldn't run into someone I knew
who'd want to know just why I was with you,
across the table leaning on elbows
and laughing. After a year it still showed –
you looked at me like you thought I'd taste good,
like you'd have liked to find out if you could,
if I'd let you, if I could forget her
just long enough for these things to occur,
these things you said had never left your mind.
You never liked her, said she was unkind,
said you could treat me the way I deserved.
That day, with you, I was looking to swerve –
I let you kiss me in the parking lot
like it didn't matter if we got caught.

You Said Yes.

Maybe I did –

I listened to you talk
and didn't leave when I should have –

I sat too close
and admitted
I still think about you, too.

And maybe I five-foot-ten-inch trusted you –
three inches more than I trusted myself –

but you still had to overpower me.

You still had to lift
me bodily
because I refused to follow you.

And maybe I didn't fight as
hard as I could have –
somehow you dropping me
seemed scarier than you carrying me

to your bed –
to the place where you held me
down and said you knew
you were crazy.

I held your face
in my hands as
you cannibalized me.

Maybe that said "yes" to you.

You told me that night
I'm the only
person you feel
honest with.

I believe you now.

Hometown.

Your third Christmas morning hangover in as many years
(you hide it well), and this Christmas seems like
every family photo of Christmases past
exposed directly on top of each other.

These moments are recycled –
reenactments instead of reality –
and despite your headache you never miss a cue.

You are at the age when celebrities seem to be getting older,
and you are getting older than celebrities.
You drink and you smoke now, and you don't
live here anymore.

For eleven days, you marvel
at the desert flatness, the way the road rolls
out ahead like the end is affixed
to the bottom of the sky,
you count the dozens of pumpjacks
and try to find two that are in time with each other.

You know that you will always leave, and thank god
for that, because this town
is the first link in that chain reaction that lead
to who you are now –
the person smoking on the front porch,
alone aside from the plastic glowing nativity scene –
Joseph and baby Jesus with their burnt-out Mary.

You've noticed that the plastic glowing baby Jesus seems
comical where it used to seem
threatening,
pictures of your 90s bangs and your snaggle-teeth
on your mother's mantle seem
endearing instead of
embarrassing.

You've decided you're the type of person who wears cowboy boots
proudly, and yes,
your decisions have been heartbreaking,
and your mother will cry at the airport,
but you'll come back here in the summer because
you always do
and the sky will open all around you and say,
Welcome back.

Landmine.

You learned to cradle
 your body in your own arms,
to keep your distance, stifle
 yawns and sneezes.
You never knew how much your ribs are involved in every
 movement until they hurt,
until she decided the best way to your heart
 would be straight through your chest.

She told you once that she heard it snap.
She said this like your rib breaking was something
 that just happened,
like you could have prevented if you had been less fragile,
 or if you'd answered her knocking on your sternum
 by opening your ribcage like a door
 and inviting her inside.

You don't remember how it happened.
Your mind misplaces things sometimes.
What you remember is reaching for your seatbelt,
 the sudden, absolute pain that emptied you
 of thought and breath,
 driving yourself home.

You stood shirtless in front of your bathroom mirror
and studied the layers of bruises on your collarbones,
 the sick yellow, the deep
 crimson, the throbbing purple.
You counted her teeth in them.

Your shrink told you once that you haven't lost
 your memories, that your mind just can't access them.
She told you that sometimes, these things can be triggered by
 a certain smell, a place,
 an inflection –

it could happen any time.

Is 206 Enough?

These are things we are never taught about anatomy:
my love for you is the thing that will endure –
that will fossilize and be excavated
with other 21st-century Americans
when anthropologists will have the technology to know
that the bones of poets
look different.

Without you, the rest of me
will waste away
(such a waste).
My love for you will become more evident –
where hips and clavicles jut,
angles become harsh,
and ribs lend themselves so easily to counting.

Perhaps then you will no longer question.
Perhaps then you will see that flesh can change,
that my skin and my muscles –
the motion of me –
are subject to time and will and your hands
(oh, your hands).

Can you come to an agreement with
the way my hair grows,
my crooked smile, my scars?

These are things that are willing to negotiate.

But there is no bargaining with my bones.

Letters to Petrarch

Dear Sir,

You couldn't have known.

Three hundred and sixty six of them –
all for her –

all dressed up, ink-black,
a procession, a year-and-a-day.

This is how we mourn.

Three hundred and sixty six poems –
repetitions of that same name –

Laura –

because that was all you had of her.

Her body was nothing more than the angle of the L
and the curves of her vowels,
her voice a replication of the way the r
echoed in your dreams.

Laura.

Her most mundane moments
were the world's best-kept secrets.

You simply couldn't have known
what it was like to have even one
of the nine hundred and sixteen days she afforded me.

So I will do my best to tell you.

Lauds.

That morning,
like every morning previous,
she woke –

and with this act,
she answered my most
frantic and repeated prayer –

that I would wake to find her
living.

(We are not meant to outlive
the presence of our gods.)

And I thanked her –

for choosing to see this day,
and me in it.

I thanked her
as if my faith mattered –
as if her decision was made
in light of my prayer.

(We were warned against
this kind of worship.)

That morning,
she opened her lovely eyes,

and I believed the sun had risen.

Dear Sir,

You should know I believe
she was mad. Not all
the time, and not in an entirely
unlovely way.

I believe it was the source
of the light that seeped
from her skin, the way
her touch caused my body to
hum. That wide-
eyed panic, that almost imperceptible
tremble created a space around her
that felt so
intimate.

She could fold herself entirely
into me; holding her was
holding her together.

For her, I could be strong
and safe and
singular.

For her, I could be so
still.

None.

The small shadows in the room
 shifted, grew longer,
then settled in with the last
 of the afternoon light.

(It was January.)

We talked,
and we touched,
 the sum of our bodies
 pulled close to fit
 in our bed made for one.

(It was enough then.)

And when our limbs grew restless –
we moved –
 overtaken by the delicate
 electricity of kisses,
 by the topography
 our hands never questioned.

(We were only eighteen.)

We tangled together,
 her laughter bright
 and clear.

Dearest Sir,

When I embraced her, I could reach
one arm all the way around her
and touch my ribs on the other side.

I can create that space
with my body, feel
my heart in my fingertips, look
down into the exact
shape of her absence.

Eucharist.

Hunger was finally enough
reason to get out of bed and
into clothes we had abandoned
on the floor on previous days.

She took my hand,
and as we walked in step
through our heavy door,
into the orange glow of the evening,

I attempted to count the bones
in her fingers.

(I made the mistake
of trying to take her apart.)

We sat across from each other,
our feet touched under the table,
and as she talked, I watched her
imitate my expressions –

she made faces I had only understood
as what muscle feels like
when it reacts to emotion
and what haunts me
about mirrors.

(This is how
she learned it all.)

When her plate was empty,
her foot grazed my ankle –
she shifted her gaze from the food in front of me
and delivered a look
she must have learned from me –

a look that said simply –

please.

Sir,

You'd never know it,

but: her room was always at least
knee-deep in her clothes; you could see
her pulse in the thin black
ribbon she wore around her neck;
she had pretty handwriting; sometimes she'd fall
a step behind me, and I'd look
just in time to see her turn
the most perfect
pirouette.

Vespers.

We had no idea
 how cold
 it was
until the walk home –

the color was draining from the day,
wind rushed and swirled
 from all directions
sliced through too-thin clothes.

(We were simply unprepared.)

We ran down the long sidewalk,
 alternately surpassing and falling
 behind each other,
our laughter rising
 as electricity gathered in the thin air –
 like before a storm

(like January).

Together we closed the distance
 between ourselves and the bed we'd left,
 her messy desk, my shoes we both
 tripped over, the toothbrushes
that were identical, except in color.

(We were almost
 home.)

The difference between sky
 and ground
became the difference between grey
 and other grey.

And we stood at the door
 breathless –
our noses pressed together numbly
 as she rose on tiptoe
 to kiss me.

Dear Sir,

She was forever
flustered, losing
things, locking herself out.

*You have no idea
how calm you make me feel, she'd say.*

I mangled my I.D. cards, snapped
hair pins, learned an artful
application of force

coaxing lock after
lock for her.

Rosary.

I had been brave enough
to give her my ring, but not
brave enough to explain it
until that night.

I don't remember exactly
what I said, but I remember
how I cradled what felt like
courage with my tongue.
I spoke of faith, and how
bright a thing she seemed
in a world so full
of endings.

The ring was my only
possession I considered wholly
mine – not given to me, not found.

I remember she held
my face in her hands.
She said, *Thank you*
thank you thank you.

Sir,

She could see that I am an excellent
care-taker of small objects.

She gave me things
she did not want to lose:
photobooth strips with sepia
iterations of our faces,
ticket stubs from concerts and movies
we'd seen together, notes I'd hidden
to surprise her, a pressed four o'clock.

She said she couldn't trust
herself to keep them safe.

I haven't lost them yet.

Compline.

Our clothes dropped at our feet –
hers-mine-hers-mine in layers,
a tangle of sleeves and colors.

She stepped close to me,
pressed her palm flat
against my chest, over
my heart, entering
the surprising heat
of my skin and her skin.

(This never changed.)

She covered my cheeks,
my forehead, my eyelids,
my mouth,
with smooth kisses,
reminding each part
of the word “yes.”

I whispered to her,
urgent,
grateful –

prayer before sleep.

I spread my fingers over
her skin, held her,
like our bed sheets
held us both.

Oh Sir,

Before it all,
 before that first dizzying kiss,
we talked for hours one night in her room.

As sleep began to settle over us,
 I got up to leave.

Would you stay, please?

In bed, I tried to keep my distance.
I listened to her breath as it slowed.
The darkness seemed expectant –
 perhaps I could sense that this
 was the eve of something
 colossal,
 like the last event that precedes
 a stunning triumph
 or the beginning
 of a war.

She only asked me to stay that one time.

Once was enough.

Vigils.

For her, I slept flat on my back
and straight –

a lowercase l
with occasional delusions of being an uppercase I.

I accommodated her question mark,
curled and leaned against me,
over me.

(We were so hastily written.)

Tell me,
how did you sleep?

How did you sleep without her?

Post Script.

The dreams have not stopped.
She arrives entirely intact –

ask any of
my senses –

as if my memory
heeded my heart's wish
to keep her.

(I could sculpt
her in my sleep.)

She is always the most
perfect representation of herself –

always walking
away from me.