
This thesis is a collection of poems. The writer explores mental illness, isolation, trauma, and grief, and chronicles numerous speakers’ attempts to overcome these issues and move on with their lives. She also deals with aspects of love and family, both in terms of foundational closeness and insecure dependence. As a whole, Transient Species is a book about finding enduring connections, while simultaneously learning to understand the temporary nature of all things.
TRANSIENT SPECIES

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE YETI, AT LAST, JOINS THE ROLLER DERBY .............................................. 1

BENEFICIAL NEMATODES FOR TILLED SOIL AND GARDENING ......................... 2

ELEGY WITH DAMOCLES AND OFFICE BULB ..................................................... 3

SIX METAPHORS FOR SUICIDAL IDEATION ....................................................... 4

FOR THE CLAY BEARS YOU MADE IN THE OBSERVATION WARD ...................... 6

FOR THE DEAD POSSUM I FOUND ON NOVEMBER 6TH .................................... 7

PRIMEVAL ............................................................................................................ 8

TO THE STAIN ON MY MATTRESS ...................................................................... 9

TICONDEROGA .................................................................................................... 10

ORTOLAN .......................................................................................................... 11

MUTAGEN .......................................................................................................... 12

AUREATION ....................................................................................................... 14

REVENANT ......................................................................................................... 15

PANTHEON ......................................................................................................... 16

POETRY FOR QUEER WEEK ............................................................................. 18

LYCANTHROPE .................................................................................................. 20

</Em> .................................................................................................................. 22

VINYLIDENE ..................................................................................................... 24

THE SHARPSHOOTER’S DAUGHTER .................................................................. 26

MY THERAPIST ASKS ME TO KEEP A GRATITUDE JOURNAL ............................ 27
The Keepers of Old City ................................................................. 28
Keeping Up .................................................................................... 29
Still Life with Sunshine and Wax Vegetables ................................. 30
The Battle Hymn of Dryer #8 .......................................................... 31
The Boy Who Counted Everything .................................................. 32
For the Beetle on My Water Glass .................................................. 35
For Mumtaz ....................................................................................... 36
Pelagic ............................................................................................... 37
The Most Daring Outfit Yet .............................................................. 38
First, There Was Darkness .............................................................. 39
A Bluer Ultramarine ........................................................................ 40
The Baltimore Sewage Treatment Plant .......................................... 42
God Sees Dog .................................................................................. 43
Ekphrasis as Kudzu Jesus ................................................................. 44
This Is the Poem Where the Dog Dies, .......................................... 46
THE YETI, AT LAST, JOINS THE ROLLER DERBY

She is ready.  
She stands with her sisters,  
greased skate to squeaking elbow pad.  
An avalanche on wheels—

she scuffs her new helmet  
in her first engagement  
when she blocks their Jammer  
like a mountain coming down.

She plucked her eyebrows for this,  
though her legs and her teammates’  
fuzz about the same  
and she is relieved to note

at the end of the first jam  
she is not the only one  
stinking through clumps  
of prescription-strength deodorant.

At the buzzersound,  
the discordant whooping of the pack  
in celebration riot  
sounds more like music

than the frozen wolfsong back home.  
and somewhere in the snarl of limbs  
in the dog-pile, she wonders  
if this is what it feels like  
to be warm.
You should not have opened this box.  
Now you will never be rid of me.

I am waiting underneath your fingernails,  
to infest your ants, your grubs, your skin.

I, assassin,  
woundmaker without knife,  
without teeth, slippery  
body corpse-silent, I,

unremarkable ambush  
predator, am part of a family business.

We will eat those termites for you. Your aphids  
will watch their children burst open,  
our muscle writhing  
and pushing out from inside but be warned:

When I am done here, my cousins are coming for you. Heartworm, hookworm.

Pinworms and whipworms too, if you’re into  
that kind of thing. We hope you are.

We hope your blood vessels  
are just a little kinky,  
that you like it  
when we get under your skin.
ELEGY WITH DAMOCLES AND OFFICE BULB

She said, "I'm afraid the fluorescent light is going to fall on me," and I laughed, glancing up at its cracked shield, the low, grating hum. "What if the mercury gas leaks out and—"
I told her she would live forever, then, like an old Chinese king searching for the secret to long life. "I don't want to live that long. I don't know how much more of that noise I can take." I looked up, but wasn't wise enough to see pointed shards, already falling.
SIX METAPHORS FOR SUICIDAL IDEATION

1:
The flowers rot on the windowsill.
I never expected to be the person who needed
reassurance that they are loved, but it terrifies me
to think about waking up
without the stench of decaying
roses. I am too afraid to ask for new ones.

2:
I want to believe that there is a place
robots go to pray; They are the only ones with proof
that there is a maker.

3:
On good days, I do not pray
because I have nothing to say to God.

On bad days, I build a shrine
in the corner of my bedroom
and pray there is no afterlife,
because that just sounds exhausting.

4:
Last week, I discovered that I am allergic
to kiwi and my antidepressants
are likely to have a fatal interaction
with over-the-counter allergy medications.

5:
I bake little cakes from a box mix and the smell
of chocolate mingles with the fetid roses.
I stick my head all the way into the oven
to make sure they are cooked through.

6:
A friend comes to see how I am doing.
I offer her cake, say, “I’m still alive.” I wait
for her to take a bite. She tells me, “These taste heavenly.”
FOR THE CLAY BEARS YOU MADE IN THE OBSERVATION WARD

each the size of your thumbprint
molded around narrow digits

and then pinched
and tugged into resemblance

you’re shrugging
they won’t let me have real sculpting tools

in the bears’ hollow undersides
your loops and whorls

left the clay not quite smooth
I have to use my hands

I marvel to think I might have lost them
the bears are the purple-blue

of your bruises
when I ask if you chose the color

you shake your head
each fleck of ear

and nose tiny
already crumbling

and I worry their faint mouth
lines carved with the edge

of your fingernail might crack
and vanish into the drying animals too
FOR THE DEAD POSSUM I FOUND ON NOVEMBER 6TH

You were a chicken joke
   with no punchline:
your little feet laid out, reaching
   for the other side. Your fur

was darker than most,
   body rimed with black
like you knew you would end
   up on the asphalt.
I couldn’t bear the concavity
   of your little body,

how soft I imagined your fur, The tenderness
   with which your babies—I imagine them
black as you, little wraiths haunting
   your favorite garbage bins—must have clung
to you, nuzzled

   at your breast, and your corpse
reminded me of this morning, when
   a gunman opened fire
in a Texas church and I
   didn’t feel anything at all.
**PRIMEVAL**

We were never bred to hunt, but our jaws have always ached to tear open one another’s throats. We are full of instincts we can’t lose, even if we leave them in the supermarket, pretend to drop them between thin-sliced pork chops and chicken strips, already fried. Still, they crawl their way out of refrigerators and plastic packages until we are snapping, restless in the winter quiet, and we have to get away. We hunt for a god primal as we are. We are hunt for a place to rest, to mix blood and berry in a den that will save the memory of our clawed fingerprints.

There is a light on when we arrive and it is a relief we can still see one another even here, see the edges where we turn back, drop scale and teeth. Where we bring soft bodies together, become the tenderest animals.
TO THE STAIN ON MY MATTRESS

You make me look cool and approachable
Like the kind of person who could
say “I have never once panicked and murdered
a prostitute” but not really mean it.

You’re a great conversation starter,
Like, am I (a) the kind of person
who murders sex workers or
(b) the kind of person who spills
a lot of pomegranate tea, and (c)

which of those options is more intriguing?
You know I’m happy to be anything
they want. Even before you,
I had a difficult relationship with the truth.

I hid candy under a different, smaller mattress
Romance novels and cheap vibrators
under a different, bigger one.
Once I even—can I tell you this?

We’ve been sleeping together so long.
I’m not sure what the line is anymore
for this kind of intimacy. Once I hollowed
out a Bible and filled it with lube and spare

batteries. It’s still in my parents’ house
somewhere. A confessional waiting
to be opened. Anticipating the moment it can seep
out into the nearest body, thinking, always thinking,
how nothing will be the same after it spreads
TICONDEROGA

I want to put my mouth on you,
    to bite
down hard. You'd like that
    wouldn't you?
to feel my anxiety leave dents?
    Molars a circle
of tiny points, canines

pierced deep into the barrel of your
    mustard hexagon. I can feel you splinter
and give inside my mouth

and I am waiting with bated breath
    for you to hurt me back.
    Please, darling,
damage my fucking enamel.
ORTOLAN

The gods are always hungry
for me. They want to eat
my body, leave greasy
lip-prints on my marrowless
bones.

I pluck out my eyes
with two taloned thumbs.
They feel like balls of wax
in my hands. I shape
the balls of wax in my hands
into two feathers

and hope they will lift
me towards the sun.
They can’t lift my body
towards the sun;
I have fed too fat

on millet seed
and the drippings
from the ones who came before.

They will drown me
in an ocean of Armagnac
like the ones who came
before and I will melt
at daybreak with the wax
feathers in my hands.
I want to escape
my breasts. I want to escape
my own shirt. I want her
hands to be a size
that fits me. I would like
her body to be the size
of a moon. I want
to orbit around her until gravity
brings me to be an inevitable
blemish on her surface. They call
the basin on the moon
Tranquility. It is on the side
that will never face
the sun.

I know that I punched her
and stole one of her teeth,
but when I saw her, I knew
I had to have one of her bones.
I had to have a piece of her to hold
onto.

It would be easier if I could sully
her.

I pressed her fingers into my
bruise
and let the blood
surround
her like a chrysalis. She emerged whole, coated in clear lymph and green light.

We have celestial bodies. Or at least, I asked her one time and she said she might believe in angels. The dead are curled heavy in her irises and I think sometimes I see her writing in a book of my sins. It is lighter than it ought to be.
I made thread to eat. Nothing smoother than fibers under a motionless hand. He told me with hands like that I could spin flax into gold. He told me with hands like that I could get into a lot of trouble this late at night all alone without even a name to call out to. He stole me. Kept me locked in my own house.

Took off Mama’s necklace, her earrings, my clothes. He wanted me to touch him with my impossible hands, wanted me to say his name like praise there in a room full of wheel and straw. I waited until he was sleeping pulled slowly at the fine thread on the wheel. I struck a match, watched the peeling floorboards, the skeletons of wicker furniture, the wheel and straw all turn to gold. I packed in silence. I never said his name.
REVENANT

The cardinal hits
my living room window
and leaves behind a ghost
of feathers and dandruff,
wings outstretched
like fingers on a hand.

She must have seen the light
inside, felt the mechanical warmth
of a heating system I can’t share,
and thought it better
than being alone.

She knocks again, a loud crack
against the weather-proof panes.
This time, she falls limp
as an angel in the virgin
snowdrift outside my house.
I pull my boots on.

I pick the cardinal up with the snow
beneath, her downy neck snapped
and dangling, and put her brown-red
body back into the earth.

I am alone when I return
from her funeral service,
staring at the ghost
outside my living room window,
her wings outstretched
like fingers on a hand.
When you boil it all down, we have three overlapping, yet ill-fitting options for our daughters: virgin, mother, and whore.”

I.
I am full
of milk and honey. I am stuffed
with other people’s bones.

Every day, I take them
to the mill and make flowers
until My arms give out.

There are only five gravestones left
without My name on them.

II.
When they ran out of wood
they came for the haystacks.
burnt them until My needles

were the only things left.
Until the men needed something else
to keep themselves warm.

It is strange to feel guilty
for not being more flammable.

III.
I am the thing of iron and storms,
the jingle of tack and the hull
of their war ships.

I am the sound men make
when they fall overboard.
My compass

will always reach north; no man can sink
what is already drowned.

IV.
I am the goddess of thorns without petals.
I am not beautiful
and there will be no honey,

but o Me, o heaven above,
when the centuries
have dried My mouth

to soil and rock,
men will still feel My teeth.
POETRY FOR QUEER WEEK

Hello everyone, and welcome
to the Queer Week nautical safari!
Come see the queers! Wild
and unbridled in their natural habitat!

They may have locking jaws,
razor sharp teeth, and a life expectancy
twenty years shorter than ours,
but their hearts beat just the same.

Be sure to check your scuba gear
and lock yourself firmly in the queer cage
before our descent. Allied tours Ltd.
is not responsible for your worldview
being damaged.

On your left, you’ll see
a specimen I like
to call our “model minority”
He’s thin, white, athletic, and basically

almost heterosexual except
for the gay part. He would love
to answer your questions

on his boyfriend his coming out his
sex life your sex life, and of course
your ass looks great in those pants.
Girl, you’re really working it!

Now, at first glance, the butch lesbian
over here can be a little intimidating,
but she would be pleased as punch
to talk to your man about eating pussy.

She doesn’t like sports though, so beyond that
they might not have a lot in common.

Oh, I’m so sorry for your inconvenience,
but this part of the tour is closed.
See, our trans man hasn’t had The Surgery
and we at Allied Tours wouldn’t want anyone to get confused.

Now that we’re done,
stop by the gift shop on the way out
for your free souvenir T shirt!
We are all human
in hand-lettered rainbow cursive.

And as you disembark, remember.
Queers: they’re just like us regular people!
LYCANTHROPE

She follows instructions. She starches her blue uniform dress and always sits with the hem well past her knees. She does not venture outside the Perimeter with its hydraulic doors its identity cards its laser grids—green lines cutting up the stars in the nighttime like veins. Like safety nets. Like razor wires.

They keep the wolves outside waiting, maybe baying, maybe fucking, dog-sweat oozing, panting tongues lolling on the concrete. It is safe inside the Perimeter.

She tiptoes home from the Academy where they teach in well-guarded silence what terrible things wolves can do to little girls who don’t follow instructions. There are wolves in the alleyways, little girl. More in the woods, the skyscraping trees. Wolves, maybe breathing, maybe lapping at the concrete. Their claws can rip a dress clean off you. She dares not go outside to check.

but sometimes she dreams that she slips past the hydraulic doors with their identity cards and she meets the wolves outside the laser grid and its star-massacre, beneath the skyscraped trees, maybe her feet are claws pressed against the concrete and perhaps her tongue drips from her head and maybe she looks up to see stars in a lineless sky and howls.

But then it is morning again, then she starches her blue uniform and straightens its long hem and hurries past the Perimeter and she hopes today is not the day she gets caught looking outside, looking into alleyways, breathing in the smell.
of the trees, hopes when she sees nothing
no one notices
her practiced exhale of relief goes on
for just a little too long.
on the Saturday after He died.

They had long since known He was terminal.

His first Son asked him if He was afraid to return to the place from whence He came. God said no. God said: 

I knew it was over when they shot silicon into their brains, when they discovered that binary necessitates the existence of more than one (1) Answer. They began making up their own Answers, began filling their hearts with code, began filling their fingers with alphanumeric clicks began upload/input/return.

Except they never return.

Not anymore. Now it's called something else—something wire-shiny something blazing with the bitten Apple—of course it is. They had one bite and they think they know everything. They don’t return.

Not anymore. I don’t expect them to return.

The mark of a good parent is having children who can do without Him: Children who press On. Press forwards. Press Enter.
Enter.

Enter.

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</hymn>
</amen>
Vinylidene

Although only a transient species, vinylidenes are often found in organometallics as permanent determiners of reactivity.

A lot of people died this year. 
I checked the statistics, 
it’s not just my imagination.

(Fifty thousand suicides, and 
more than half a million 
from cancer alone.)

Like my mother’s best friend 
Michelle, who told 
me I would be perfect 
at whatever I finally decided on, 
like my father’s best friend 
Bracey, who told 
me to always keep a knife 
inside my pocket 
because the world was an imperfect 
place. He taught my father 
to make teriyaki sauce with bourbon 
my father taught me to make 
even the sweetest things burn, 
like how it’s easy to hear 
that everyone you have ever loved 
(who has ever loved you) is going 
to die, some of them painfully, 
in a sermon or anatomy textbook 
but it’s harder when they took 
you to the grocery store, 
when you stood next to them 
in the international aisle 
while they wavered
between two brands of tortilla,

a somber hush falling along the tins of oil-packed tuna, the canned yams, like they knew (you were too young to understand) this was only a temporary stop between work and home.
THE SHARPSHOOTER’S DAUGHTER

I never held a real gun
   only cold aluminum BBs poured
into warm plastic and wood
the afternoon we shot paper targets
and old soda cans the same night
my mother taught me to drink coffee
when I couldn’t sleep to stop fighting
   my faulty body the frayed
nervous system I inherited
   from her the rifle was perched
upright between my knees
when she warned me not to point
a gun at anything I wasn’t willing
to kill not even if the safety
was still on the rifle was heavy
against my forearm when she showed me
how to lay in prone
until my arms went numb
   how it was the only way to stop
my hands from shaking
when I took aim the rifle was snug
against my shoulder when she told me
about the boy on the movie set
   who put a gun
full of blanks in his mouth
for a joke but the kickback was still enough
to blow him away.
**MY THERAPIST ASKS ME TO KEEP A GRATITUDE JOURNAL**

isn’t it nice that I can write for hours without stopping to eat or drink and since my lover’s promotion we can afford takeout every two weeks isn’t it nice that there are fake flowers for those of us who can’t keep the real ones alive that my life is probably more enjoyable than Kurt Vonnegut’s that my hands only shake before I’ve taken my medication that if I really did kill myself I know at least five people who would really miss me isn’t it nice that my panic attacks no longer come every single night that butter is spreadable after I forget it on the counter that I’ve learned never to start drinking or singing alone my professor calls me an obsessive poet my therapist calls me a maladaptive daydreamer but isn’t it nice to think that somewhere in America there is a home where people are laughing and no one’s coffee ever goes cold
THE KEEPERS OF OLD CITY

The goats at the cemetery mow the lawn.  
They bite invading greenery back  
from the oldest resting places.  

The goats at the cemetery do not have time for you.  
They only like the people who lie still enough to grow 
grass and vines, honeysuckle sweet from a ribcage 

The goats at the cemetery have tombstones in their eyeballs.  
They see the faces of grave markers like incisors,  
identities ground off by ice and rain and time 

The goats at the cemetery know the missing names  
of the old men, the bony prostitutes, the confederate soldiers.  
They call them Crunch, call them Daisy, call them Dandelion Flower

The goats at the cemetery pull lips back from snaggleteeth, let out 
echoes of words that rotted in molars and jawbones:  
“We live here. We always have.”
KEEPING UP

The Joneses have a new car again. The Joneses got a new car last year, too. The car’s value is inversely proportional to that of their bed. Mr. Jones is a hedge fund manager; a lot of things about him are inversely proportional.

Mrs. Jones likes to say she is a full time wife and mother. The cars hold no evidence of children.

Once, there was a Cheerio that fell behind the driver’s seat but that was a mistake—a false positive. They sold that car right away, like they were afraid it would grow Legos, or ask if they were there yet when they obviously hadn’t arrived.
STILL LIFE WITH SUNSHINE AND WAX VEGETABLES

It was the height of summer; they should have expected it.

The way the windows bowed just slightly, becoming a Chekhovian magnifying glass loaded and waiting to fire, its aim heedless of the quiet mastery

that made them, the way their bodies were formed with no mold or pattern,

only colored wax and perfect memories of harvest time.
O great clattering machination of sunshine,
O galumphing combatant in the war on wet,
O soldier. You are brave indeed.

Scarf-scarred, jean-jacket hard,
you seal unmentionables
in a maw of gaping rubber-glass lips,

never to be spoken of, lest they frighten
new recruits. Rhythmic silence
of sock-bullets and machine hums. Despite

all of your medals, metals
your great grates and heaving lungs,
brass-plastic buttons scratched
beyond repairing
to uniform shine, you never blow hot air.

You tumble, fall, rise
to fight your terrible foes:

the gasping lint-filter fire-hazard,
the matched sock,
the great heaving thumpalump
of your own hour-long heart.

And though “Busted P.O.S.”
is the only inscription on your sticky-note
tombstone, you know,
O General:

Sometimes, in a war zone,
the best you can do is be in motion
and look like you’re working.
THE BOY WHO COUNTED EVERYTHING

1
It started with the bees, see
He didn't like that they were all the same. He started naming them,
learned each one by heart. Cried
when the one he called Louise got crushed
by the honey frame. We pulled her corpse
out in a fragrant smear of yellow and black.

The nice thing about a bee funeral
is they bring their own flowers. The kid
looked like a field of poppies after he buried her
and all the sisters who died
when they pulled out their own guts with their stings.
He was never the same after that.

Silent, in a queer kind of way. Like he wanted us to forget
or think we imagined him.
Maybe we did. He left us
a note, though. It smelled like clover
and said one day he'd come back.

2
How can you describe
the way a fish moves in water,
why the silver flash
means so much to you,

the way it feels to pull in
a wrenching line,
nature struggling against
your grasp?

The boy wasn’t interested
in that. He wanted to know
what to call my catch--
trout, a few walleye
didn’t satisfy him.

I remember laughing
when I asked if he wanted names
and family trees
or if he wanted to give my rod a spin.

How can you describe watching him sink beneath the surface when you are just a little bit too far away

3
He had the smallest hands I cradled them as gently as I knew how when I took his fingerprints not my youngest body, perhaps, but the youngest John Doe.

I filed him away with the others, a dozen or so in the bottom section, rows of morgue drawers with no names, only numbers, and waited for someone to come for him.

He was lucky: thumbprints listed in a database designed to help lost children home again. the boy’s parents refused to leave town until they had identified them all said their son would have wanted it like that. His body waited

six months in my refrigerator while each day they brought birth certificates, dental records and high school almanacs and slowly,

so slowly, the names of the other drawers came back.

4
I’ve never seen a funeral so well attended. I’ve never seen the sky so blue.
I’ve never seen so many strangers
in one place,
so many flowers in each pew.
FOR THE BEETLE ON MY WATER GLASS

It was dark when I swallowed you. You felt large as a church to me, with your steel spire legs, eyes full of stained glass.

Your steepled wings beat bellsongs inside my throat. In truth, you were so small. My tongue too big to be your pew.

I named you Jonah. The way you struggled against my body, a prayer in unfolded carapace.

I retched, and you slipped free. Reborn on damp wings, aching and blue.
FOR Mumtaz

“The intimacy, deep affection, attention and favour which His Majesty had for the Cradle of Excellence Mumtaz Mahal exceeded by a thousand times what he felt for any other.”
–Iqbal Namah-e-Jahangiri, historian to Shah Jahan Mahal

O you who have followed me through war and grief, who will now press bandages to the new wound inside my ribcage?

We have made thirteen children--copies of your eyes, your smile, but it is not enough. I must rebuild you.

People and heavenly bodies combust and die like insects, but you, my Jewel, I will construct your face to stand for eternity.

I will arrange the cyprus and the fruit; the paradise rivers of water, of milk, of honey, of wine. Each morning you will bloom fragrant in my desolation.

Each night, the sunset will bring a blush to your stony skin eons after the rise of a different sun.

And when at last I rest beside you in the nighttime of your marble heart, I will never again have need of the stars.
PELAGIC

*After Gifford Beal’s “Launching the Boat”*

It’s real work. The honest kind.
   Like God intended—all day, hauling
   boats, hauling nets. Sliding knife
   between gills and skin; it’s them
   or you out here, and only one deserves
   to eat. Gutting them with salt-roughened
   hands. Proving you’re worth
   the weight of silver
   scales and bones you throw back.
THE MOST DARING OUTFIT YET

I am reading the news and I don’t understand why men care about Kim Kardashian. I am watching the television and I don’t understand why women want to be Kim Kardashian. I want to be Kim Kardashian’s left boot. I want to be autumnal and chunky at the heel. I want to have brassy buckles to compliment Kim Kardashian’s bronzed skin. I want to be a bold statement that no one understands. I want my voice to come from a suede tongue soft against Kim Kardashian’s skin. I already have a foot in my mouth.

I want to know that someone made me with an awl and the secret parts of animals. I want Kim Kardashian to lift me forwards and shine all the hardest parts of me. I want to spoon my mate in a mansion’s secret closet and never be alone. I think Kim Kardashian wants to be alone, but I want to be Kim Kardashian’s left boot. When she takes me out everyone will see me. When she takes me out people will call me beautiful and if I am not beautiful it will not be my fault. and if I am not beautiful, it will be because Kim Kardashian picked me. and if I am not beautiful, everyone will still want to look at me.
First, there was darkness.

It didn't last, of course. Eventually, there was a hand on the light switch--its cherry ions not diffuse enough to forgive the curve of her sagging breast, the pockmarks near his flaccid cheekbones, the yellow tinge of teeth curling around the reassurances stuck in her mouth--

but not then. Not yet. First, there was darkness.
A BLUER ULTRAMARINE

What if we were dangerous pirates and stole everything we needed from the king and slept in hammocks, rocking weightless in the starlight?

Would we love the feel of dirks and swaying rigging beneath our calloused hands, the way the tar sticks to our bare feet even after they dangle in the water or

would we then spend our nights dreaming of going somewhere colder than the Caribbean for winter, laying down our pistols and scabbards so I could turn to you and say,

“Dear God. At least we aren't in paradise.”

Would we discuss what we would do if we never spent time in the crow’s nest and didn't have to eat our limes?

Comfort ourselves with the thought of being students at Cambridge, secure in our sweaters and motionless beds, feeling fall coming on with a vengeance?

Think of how happy we’d be, worrying only of Latin, and never putting our geography lessons into practice.

What would we do if they caught us?

Ran us down in a faster sloop or destroyed our ship with cannon fire until the chain-shot was looped around our lungs.
Would we plead with them?

Beg for mercy, for our legs to buckle
on solid ground and our throats
to gulp the saltless air?

Become citizens and students;
reformed after all? Or would we stand proud
and say thanks,
but we’d prefer not to be rehabilitated.

If they hanged us at dawn
on a Monday morning,
our defiant noses pointed north
to smell the ocean,
would that make us happy
at all?
THE BALTIMORE SEWAGE TREATMENT PLANT

I know that it's mostly shit, but at night they turn on LEDs covering the tanks' frail helix staircases, lighting a path so even from down here, we can climb to the stars.
GOD SEES DOG

I got up on the wrong side
of the Old Testament today

and I was ready
for retirement.

The rains were primed—
set to just after antediluvian.

I had held with those that favored fire.
There were comets the size of dinosaurs.

But when I looked down
to aim my itchy trigger finger,

there you were. Bringing back
a stick, even though

sometimes, she pretended to throw it
just to laugh at you.
EKPHRASIS AS KUDZU JESUS

I have always clung
to things that are bad for me
    and now I have fashioned these power
lines from wire to cross
    to holy bones The cars
don’t stop to admire them when they pass
    me though nor the trains that thunder
by in neat rows like ducklings made of iron
    I think they know if they stopped
I would want to touch them
    I think they know how lonely
I am here
    How lonely I was here before you

Step closer now please reach
    for the tender leaves beneath
my waist feel
    how they tremble in the air for you
the way you are the most electric thing
    they know how they know I want
to touch clinging
    until I smother you
    This is the only part of my body that
can make its way down
    to you but understand
I am always reaching for you
I want you to feel my body wet
    and green each atom
a charged current pulling
    air from your lungs replacing
    it with my own
This is the poem Where the Dog Dies,

where Laika has her last howl at the moon, closer than anyone has ever been before
And she realizes they didn’t name her Sputnik because travelers are meant to come home,

where Old Yeller knows that his eyes are failing and that it is awfully dark here in this shed And he waits patiently for the horrible, deafening light. This is a poem where my father cries at the end

of Where the Red Fern Grows, where the black poodle from his childhood still hangs over his heart like the smell of something burning Where he pays the vet over and over
to treat our whippet’s cancer, though the tumor comes back each year, faster and angrier than the last. This is the poem where I stop before the last line, before I can’t hear

my dog’s nails clacking on the hardwood, before the tumor becomes inoperable, before I learn it is possible to break my father’s