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This thesis contains poems that attempt to celebrate, narrate, and otherwise account for the fact of existence, as limitedly experienced and observed by own individual person. If the worldview contained within these pages skews to the brighter shades of the worldview spectrum, the author claims sole blame and responsibility.

BUSY WITH JOY

by

Wesley D. Sexton

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A Blessing

A wilted white lily sits curbed, wanting
a witness to its betrayal. Up-dug, it
suffocates between trashcans filled with
Fancy Feasts and Triscuit sleeves, roots
stiff and stale like dried worms. Bits of
black dirt cling and feed, helping the lily
with its living, but still it longs for
that shut-eyed pilgrimage through Earth.
It wants again to become a color. Soon
I will return, shovel-handed, and head to
the nearest public place, dangling my plant
by its neck like a button-eyed doll
I've spent years telling secrets to. Soon
I will find a brilliantly sun-spangled spot,
impossible to miss, impossible not to mark
with an innocent American perennial.
Soon I will place the lily into a small
hole, and soon, I will think of you, Future
Person, moving irretrievably through your life,
desiring impossibilities, loving people
for the sounds of their living and the way
they let you listen, pausing to walk
near shallow water. I can hear your shoelaces
flapping against your ankles. I can see you
gazing at the blooming flowers. I hope
you feel somewhat accounted for. I hope
your heart beats deafeningly in your chest.

I. Thank Parade

Entr'acte

Death, you old riddle-rouser, how many
awkward moments you've kept from us:
no one has to wonder if Juliet would
have rather had the funny one. No one
has to see the Son of God lose his teeth.
You take your favorites when we need them
most, and we love you for that, though
we'll never admit it. Patronly Death,
how you've kept boredom at bay,
how you've given the philosopher stuff
to fill books with and encouraged us
to make lists – O, how we make lists!
We might have poured our nights
into sleep had we not felt you sitting quietly
in the corners of our rooms! We might
have left our box of days unopened
on the doorstep! Old clog-eared Death,
in your name folks are holding
parades, feasts, concerts! Because of you,
people wear their seat belts and eat avocados!
Bike helmet sales are up, and the fire
extinguisher salesman still has a job!

And Death,
must I mention how patient you've been,
leaving time for us to win gold medals, fall in love,
understand gravity? You stay up late with us,
and look on as we leave, some of us crying,
some of us singing, some of us holding
hands. Then you'll sweep the floors, strike
the set. That final scene, where the senile Tristan
bickers at his wispy Isolde over a sink full of dishes,
will never be staged. You'll lock the door,
and what you'll do next we never care to know.

Rain

Imagine being trampled
by a million tiny elephants.
A shovel won't go into dirt like that.
All you can do is scrape at it
and mix it with compost. This
strawberry leaf, shaped like a heart
cut from construction paper with zigzag
scissors, is helping, though. Watch it
catch each raindrop after a miles-long
descent then set it softly on the ground.
It's a giant egg toss only this time,
it's the ground that might crack.
Each leaf and stem spills a bit
of its hidden color when the water hits it,
and droplets cling to crabapple skins
like silly translucent eyeballs. Look at
the coneflower petal dip and bounce back
as droplets use its purple as a summertime
springboard. Look at the grandmotherly maple
holding hundreds of gallons in her hands.
Every droplet is an aged traveler with
a story. The rain falling into your cupped palm
once whet some prelate's whistle.
The puddles you tread through
once cooked enough rice to feed
the whole neighborhood. The droplet
slipping down your face and into
your mouth was once a tear
on Mary Magdalene's sweet face.

On Electrons and Dying

Two spring flies make whoopee on our blanket & maybe
have been for hours, & I wonder how many other creatures
are loving each other near us right now. Science says that

creatures in love never quite touch, their electrons
constantly repelling each other, but science also says that
electron clouds sometimes overlap, one electron taking space

another would normally inhabit, & I like this making room
for each other better than actual touching, or I tell
myself I do because it wouldn't be scientifically viable

to think otherwise, & I'd already be dead if not for science.
A million months from now your body will die too,
which is something I try hard not to think about,

& I ask you always to sing to me the song about love
lost but if you died I wouldn't be able to hear you
sing it, not even if I drove many miles into the mountains,

& if I wanted to imagine your atoms then, I'd have to think also
about hungry worms & encroaching dark & about their electrons
mixing with but not quite touching your electrons.

Nuages

but soon the sky is blackly aswirl and full of fat raindrops, and you won't want to be in the middle of a field with a golf club in your hand then. If you feel like you'll live forever lie down on your back and look at clouds. They will be moving and changing shape at an observable rate and might convince you of other changes you can't see, like those occurring in trees or hair follicles or pigeon joints, and you must embrace change for without it why strain your face muscles smiling over a single thing. But still you resist: change once took your favorite green shirt, you say. How sad! But consider the kid with an embarrassing pimple on his back, whose sadness he hides under your sad green shirt. Or think of some painter's husband who bought your favorite green shirt from a thrift store, cut little hankies from it, and now some painter is blowing snot and pencil shavings into your changing green sadness – do you want her sneeze to ruin a pretty painting? Do you want pimple boy's crush to see his sadness? Besides, without change you'd have no place to live. The old tenants would never have left. And don't you love your little counter where you dice vegetables, your window where you look at clouds – don't you like how some architect thought to put the light switch exactly where you'd go looking for it?

Parable of the Delicious Beats

A boy found a crate of records while walking
with his three friends and with a squinting look,

the boy picked up the crate and carried it
until eventually he found a tiny room in which

sat a small record player and a woven lawn chair.
The boy waved goodbye, then, to his friends and

sat down to hear what there was to hear and
the whole time he listened he moved his chin

up and down like somewhere deep inside him
was a switch he'd never tried to turn on before

and when one record ended he flipped it and listened
to the other side and even while he flipped the record

his chin kept moving up and down still hearing the music
and when the boy got close to the end of his crate

a small hobbling woman opened a side door to the room
and slid another crate of records in. After a couple days

the boy had built up a large pile of records at his side
and his three friends could not persuade him away

from the room so they went ahead and grew up
without him, getting married eventually and asking

the boy to come to their weddings, which the boy
planned to attend just as soon as his chin quit bouncing

but there never came a good enough time to quit
listening so on and on he went and every time

he got close to done the hobbling woman slid
another crate of delicious jams to his side and

every time the boy's chin liked what it heard.
Then one day the boy heard a noise outside the room

and soon the noise grew so loud that he could not
hear his music over it so he decided to go out and fetch

some headphones and as he walked along the street
he saw a reflected image of himself in one of the windows

he passed by. Although the boy knew he had listened
to many many records he didn't exactly know what

that meant and was very surprised to see such a hairy
and feeble man looking at him through the window.

If that man corresponded at all with his physical existence,
the boy thought, then he had a lot to be sad about because

a boy whose physical existence appeared so hairy and feeble
was not a boy at all but a very old man and the boy realized

all at once that there were many things he'd never
done so he sat on a bench and made a list and there

he sat still come nightfall, when darkness came down
heavy and slow, pointing at him from every direction.

Negligences

I'm sorry, mailboxes, for how empty you are
of anonymous love letters. My apologies

tuxedo buttonhole, for how unfilled you are
with orange dahlias and for how long

you've waited in your plastic bag. Eastern Redbud,
your bark-dark flash has come and gone.

Sunrise, I was sleeping when you called. Believe me,
I had planned on transcendent astonishment

for much of the day. My regrets, flier tabby, for not
finding you. You must be cold in a storm drain

somewhere. Road-dry earthworm, I have not yet sung
your requiem. O grassy place

between sidewalks, how green you wished to be,
and how I stomped each day on your youngest

prospects. And you, workhorse heart inside me,
what long hours you keep and Sundays too.

How insincerely I've thanked you. Take this,
my apologetic symphony, and may

many French horns will fill with spit
in my attempt to appease you.

Air Mattress

So strange to spend an hour
filling you with my breath,
going dizzy with the effort
so that our friends R & E will have
a comfortable place to sleep.
So strange, to make friends
who sleep on balloons, and
normally my breath just goes
straight out of me and mixes
with everything that exists.
To find a preservation of myself
in you, air mattress, the way
you hold my breath in one place
for days at a time, just like my own body
has never been able to do. And I love
the thought of my friends sleeping
on my breath, and if I whispered a little
prayer into you, air mattress, they'd be
sleeping on that too, and tomorrow
they might be full of energy
and might want to walk all over town
and eat big sandwiches with me, air mattress,
and even then my breath will be sealed up
inside you and also leaking out of me,
like it always does. Oh, great air mattress
of my soul, how badly I want
to hold something of this world!
Tomorrow we will roll you back up,
stuff you into a bag, and place you
onto a shelf next to the tool box
and our big roll of duct tape.

In Pisgah National Forest

A honeybee, sleep-clung to a cluster
of almost-ripe yellow blooms. The plant

is probably mountain angelica or maybe
wild parsnip: it resembles an upturned hand

cupped slightly to hold the sky's coffee,
a yellow cotton ball made of fifty helmet-flowers

sits on the tip of each plant finger. The bee
fell asleep eating and woke up dew-bound.

His unabashed hunger is a type of love, and I think
he quickly forgave the dew its cold cling.

As I watch, he wakes up, stretching
his eyelash legs one at a time,

shaking the water off his wings, walking
around a little bit. A bee's morning routine.

Soon he will remember the other bees
who are worried about him, wondering

if he got clipped by a lawn mower blade
or sprayed with mosquito repellent. Soon

he will fly homewardly away, and I will wonder
about the rest of his day and how it would

compare to mine. I, for instance, have strong arms
that can move rocks and pull young pines

right out from the earth. I have delicate fingers
that can hold single grains of sand. I can

remove the hook from a fish's mouth,
can right the overturned ladybug flailing

on her back. I can walk to some beautiful place
and bring back a bright daffodil for the one

who couldn't walk with me. I can munch on
allium blooms and offer some to strangers.

I can tell them about how wild allium is a weed
and how it made itself delicious anyway, not knowing.

Legislative Proposal

With 7 million people in the world
tell me it's someone's job to sit
every night in a woven lawn chair
and count stars. Tell me someone's government
pays a living wage to such a person –
tell me that when one of our stars goes out
I'll get a call or an automated text message.
I'd gladly support the expenditure of my tax dollars
on this exact endeavor. Why not also
employ springtime flower watchers?
No bud should enter this world ungreeted!
Thousands of prison guards
receive compensation for every hour they spend
looking through bars at other humans,
so why not pay musicians to transcribe
afternoon birdsong? Poets to interview squirrels
at the end of life? Why not
get all the fence builders together
and teach them to identify
beech trees by their bark? Why not
hire someone to clap for the shower singer's aria?
Someone to applaud the parallel parker?
Someone to rub the crying person's shoulder?
Someone to collect snow in a clear jar?
Someone to bury each dead leaf in fall? Why not
make it someone's job to keep track of
the moving pieces around us
and report back with their findings?

A Prayer, Held in Too Long

thank you loved one who will bite into chocolate truffles so I can see the inside

thank you juicy orange that once made my love whisper *wow* and share a piece

thank you mountain cantaloupe so sweet I laughed

thank you every song that gets me reaching for the volume knob

thank you woman dancing tipsy at a stuffy jazz concert

thank you dumbstruck kid's face when I chomped on a purple clover bloom

thank you sun that gave that bloom some sweetness and
flowers' endless work of leaning into that sun thank you

thank you tree breaking pinkly open on January 7th
under which I stood shouting to people
it's January 7th! and pointing up

passing moment thank you for not taking me into your dark cupboard

thank you strong-willed ones who have shouted *stop* at important times

thank you friends waiting in driveways until I open the door
your love is sturdy like a table

thank you Walking Man looking over your shoulder and clapping
the night I parallel parked into a tight space

man shouting German-language Beatles songs through my cracked window thank you
and
thank you for shouting louder when I closed the window

thank you worried pray-ers praying for my wild soul

thank you unknown builder for building me a place to sleep

thank you strangers asking directions
I love the chance to talk to you and sometimes walk with you

thank you Postman carrying my letter across the country

thank you faraway friend for a reason to write letters

thank you random Chance for helping me meet some of my favorite people

thank you Creator for not yet running out of your green paint

dandelion milkweed salvia thank you
grasshopper loose strife bee balm thank you
thank you serviceberry thank you beautyberry
viburnum delphinium allium geranium

thank you soft places inside me and
thank you hard places
thank you places that bend and places that don't bend

thank you billions of people I will never see
 some of you have planted trees I'm sure and maybe
 I have stood under them to get away from the sun

Volunteering at Hospice Care

Someone's grandpa wasn't planning on dying
so efficiently and is shouting that

he thought he'd spend his last moments
in a cypress tree or near one, that

he always wanted, since he was a boy,
to die by the sound of a squirrel

unpeeling its lunch, always wanted to see
something beautiful at the end,

or had counted on the stuff around him
to become beautiful at the end.

Even now people are dying,
each one with a little window

and a pea-green plastic plant
and a color TV. At the crucial moment

they all expect the drop-ceiling to open
its bag of stars, expect the bedpan woman

to put on her mustache and sing,

or for the sight of their families
in their blue clothes and Sunday faces

to seem in the end like something
worth writing down.

Hearing their pleas

I do what anyone would do:
I rise at dawn and sneak into the

laundry room where they keep
the fancy carts, and someone's grandpa

folds himself in with the towels and curtains,

and I roll him through the hall and down
the yellow ramp and across the tar lot

and through loud traffic and over soft grass
where he lays his head beneath

a sycamore tree and tries to find
the sky through leaves that fall on his face.

To the Heel of My Shoe, on Seeing its Gradual Disappearance

This morning I noticed several inches of you missing, apparently all at once, though I must have left flecks of you everywhere, kicking pieces under blooming shrubs and shuffling bits into storm drains. Other pieces carted off by robins building nests, others sucked and spit out by stupid rabbits. Some child pocketed one of the larger chunks and rubs it during loud storms, as one rubs a smooth stone. Your carcass is strewn. Retracing my steps would only diminish you still. Each day's labyrinth of hours gnaws with unmeasured indifference, caring not for our swaggering dreamward stride, caring not for our nervous pacing in bathroom stalls, feeding all the time. And, yes as many bites have been taken from me, vanishing my life in stolen amounts, never obscene in size, exactly small enough to elicit fantastic surprise when one day I finally leave this place, though of course I've done nothing but leave this entire time.

Confessions of a Gutter Cleaner

For living this incidental life
exactly and accidentally as I have,
this is my reward. For all my
moon-moaning and bloom-greeting
and prayers whispered into jars,
for each day I poured myself into
like it was a 16-count muffin tin
and I was a green bowl
of gluten-free banana nut batter
and for each day I shooed away
like a fundraising girl scout
knocking at my door, for each time
I said I love you and each time
I wanted to, for every hour I sat
at traffic lights and opened junk mail,
and for those precious moments
when the future fit into my back pocket
and I filled my lungs to the hilt
with the world's particular vapor,
this is what I've earned. Because of it all,
I get to be on a stranger's roof in February,
looking, from my advantageous position,
at a line of purple crocuses blooming
all around the house, having dug themselves
into last years gutter-gunk. Some God
planted them all equidistantly and
in perfect rows like He thought
this house was a Tiny Purple Hat farm,
and I will not destroy His work today.
In a few months, after I've gotten and spent
my paycheck and the spring rains have come,
after another repairman is called out
to finish the job I couldn't do,
I'll be the only person in the universe
who remembers what it looked like the day
spring made its secret announcement
and rose out of what wouldn't be washed away.

Disappointed in Sunflowers

I was expecting the bigger kind and looking forward
to the day I would approach the house and cower before

the dying flower peering knowingly over my shoulder,
the way I'd turn my face and squint at the haloed giant,

that yellow eyeball watching so closely, warning
of days to come and days not to come. All this and more

I held in my mind while I dug out grass around the front walk,
fluffed the soil and ripped seed packets. That singular moment

of judgment was with me as I made a little plow with my hand
and covered the seeds, watered them each morning

and chased squirrels away. But I bought the wrong kind
and my green soldiers peaked at knee-height and gathered

into little buds, which were lovely when they opened but no bigger
than my fist and would never have been mistaken for all-seeing eyes,

would never strike with fear.

So I cut them down (5 in all)

and tie them together with a string. I offer them to the first person
I see, which is the Garbage Truck Man who balances the bunch

in his cup holder and bounces on down the road.

An Unlikely Language

Through the park I was followed
by a wingéd congregation, my path
peppered with birds since my footfalls
unhoused grasshoppers and junebugs,
and Japanese beetles at every turn,
each one exiled from its grassy
asylum and sent into the air
toward this or that pried-back beak,
my fellow worshippers close behind,
joyously licking a yellow-green residue
from their creaky maws; and though
I'm saddened to have caused the deaths
of so many insects, it is difficult to lament
the continuation of creatures with such
beautiful names,

for now I sit at the public library,
giggling to myself, field guide cracked open
in my left hand and pointing to the words
that might save me, saying aloud, *grassquit*,
junco, *eastern peewee*, *limpkin*. I'm calling
old friends on the phone – I who have spent
much of recent days looking for reasons
to speak and remaining quiet – I'm reading
aloud from the sacred list of names,
saying steadily, *pipit*, *veery*, *plover*,
godwit, proselytizing into this or that
voice mailbox, speaking such an
unlikely language, meaning it.

Snow Song

The snow builds its case in piles,
stacks crunched receipts on the hackberry branch,

shreds false love letters on roofs
and telephone lines. This falling filing

is truer than any clock: an hour
makes us all an inch heavier;

half a day could bury a body.
A pillow-headed pajama girl pulls

the perforated ruler from her planner
and steps outside in dad's boots

to take her own measurements.
Branches break and the powder

seems sin come back to take
something. Only the ones in pajamas

know what it means when the wind
or a squirrel shoves a puff of snow

in front of the light. Only the pajama wearers
cheer to see handfuls of their day

fall and melt and shine, for they know
what they've always known about the sky:

that even in summer it's nothing
but a blue pile of minutes stacked high.

A Belated Thank You

One of your tables is in my house now,
where I am always glad to see it holding
a yellow pot with a cactus inside. I am glad,
also, for the experience you saved me
of walking into a furniture store and exchanging
some of my money for a place to set my yellow pot
with the cactus inside, and I hope you weren't
too worried about what else you could
spend the money on. I hope you never regretted
not having bought a blue suitcase with wheels
and filling it with bathing suits and driving
straight at the ocean. I hope you never thought
later that you would have rather had a metal bin
to help organize your mail or a pair of knitted socks
or a salad with shaved Brussels sprouts on top.
I hope you never thought to yourself *I should have
walked to the top of a very tall hill and sat down.*
Does it help some to know I have a compost pile,
and that I feed my little cactus well, and that
with its favorable position on top of your table
sunlight is able to reach its green skin and help it grow?

II. Purge Me with Hyssop

The Observer Effect

predicts that the farmer living by the airport
takes a statistically significant amount
of pleasure in plowing his plow lines straight,
knowing new audiences will fly over him
every minute or so and nod their heads
delightedly. The diving cormorant lingers
underwater an extra beat on days when
some worrier watches waiting for her
to resurface. Urban birds outsing their rural
cousins in their battle against widespread
noise and apathy. The garden lily, I'm sure,
stands a tad taller, knowing someone might be
watching from the window, and clouds probably
rehearse their gyrations, practicing new ways
to capture our attentions. Everywhere on
underlit stages, gardeners spread mulch around
soon-to-bloom lilacs; someone has filled our mailboxes
with glittery greeting cards. The world gathers around
us each moment, hoping we might gaze awhile
with our mouths spread wide. Look, even
in the darkest night a primrose is spreading her
little yellow arms widely in extravagant poses.

Incomplete Confessional to Flowers I've Wronged

Beardtongue Penstemon, I let the flower salesman
sell you ten cents a stem since he held

cloud-water in his hoses and kept the sun
in a big jar. I cut you down, Purple Crocus, with

red-handled scissors because I thought if I showed you
to my Andrea she would smile, or that watching you

leak into a cup might make the things around you sing
a little. O Ice-Tray Begonia, some person or robotic arm

fed you light and water til you grew bigger than a
porcelain doll. I would never have seen you,

Little Blue Helmet Bloom, if not for the baseball
I was chasing and for the person who threw it

over my head. Did you know about lonely before
I plucked you and learned to love your shape?

Penstemon, the flower salesman allowed your
green body become a body and never once ran

a spinning blade across your face. Dear DC
Cherry Blossom, some signs asked me to leave you

alone, but I tucked you into my paperback anyway
and hoped someday you'd call me Soft-thumbed Giant.

On Food & Burials

This pepper is one of the old magics,
and I want never to forget the miracle
of it – the way it takes the nothing
from the dirt and the nothing
from the air and holds it now
in its green thumbs, that my mouth
might become full. A miracle is a miracle
every time it happens: each fall
the trees blush as they undress, like
it's always the first time; the only thing
about my heart that keeps me alive
is its monotony and the way it wakes
with the first alarm and puts on its suit.



I was born on a road and on two sides
of me were fields in which men buried
their yellow kernels and had, by fall,
a sea of Green Soldiers. I advise against
those who plan events of beauty and
war, having watched the pebble buriers
return every fall to chop
the golden bones to bite-sized pieces
and ask the ground to swallow.
In one of my mind's rooms I sit
very still with my arm out a window,
referring to myself as Green Soldier,
and the sky is anything but obvious.



A radish has a seed like an eyelash
and its growth keeps us alive. A potato
sprout makes brothers in the dark – the sprouting
part is called the eye and wants to be
dirt darkened and lost. I once saw
a flower set seed in another flower's pupil.
If I lose the bloom inside me, lord,
I hope to be forgiven. The strawberry too
covers itself with eyes and enters

a small heart with its seeing. Each bad spot
means the picking person gets a keeper.

It's his to name Blood Cloud
or bury and hide for winter.



Mine was a family of gravediggers
and churchmen. The men who spoke
the pretty words also dug the hole.
When burying a seed, you have to go
deep enough that birds can't get
their dinner, the same principle holding
true when burying a human, as though
the endpoint of civility is to ensure
that only the dirt eats us.
If a person dies when the ground's cold,
however, crews have to bury
a bit of fire or cover the ground
with blankets to unfreeze its hungry jaws.

Poem for Iva Jean

For you with your name like a native shrub
like a hip swing-era tune by one of the Dorsey brothers

I wonder what you would think of my song
would you record me making it would you

record the leaves outside listening Iva Jean
with your movie star name you pretended really to love

your life tell me how it is where you are Iva Jean
I've become the idiot who looked too long

at the world like a child in front of the microwave
I've become what the maple leaf falls into Iva Jean

someone told me people die three deaths
which made me sad I wasn't there for your first one

Iva Jean but apparently the last death happens
when people quit saying your name and I just said

yours four times five times if you count this poem's title
Iva Jean my job now is to give my attention

like unsold produce to things that need it
sometimes it's a word I don't know or some puddle in my mind

sometimes it's a sure-shouldered driver of city buses
today I give you this time spent thinking of you it's like

a prayer I don't know if you prayed since I never asked you Iva Jean
the first time you died some large napkins unfolded themselves later on

I found some rocks that were remarkably
smooth and I wish you could have seen them too

On Seeing A Bee Drink His Nectar

Here I sit almost 25 years old,
never knowing how a bee drinks
its nectar til today, having followed
one of our winged brothers
from geranium petal to geranium petal,
leaning in close, seeing his tiny hands
grab each tiny flower, watching him
extend a shining, black cone
from the center of his face to lap up
the sweet stuff. It's a dipping tongue,
apparently, which I was calling a retractable nose
until the internet helped, and butterflies
have one too, and I don't know
how I made it this long never properly looking
at a bee! We should be teaching this stuff
to children, should be dedicating entire
grades to following bees around and
other grades just for looking up
at big oak trees from underneath.
My ignorance of the world is oversized,
like a shirt. It has sleeves that drag the ground
when I walk. Once, my neighbor told me
how a robin keeps her nest clean:
how the young never leave the nest, and how
the mother will carry her birds' waste
in her mouth and deposit in the grass somewhere.
It's true. My neighbor has watched this happen,
she tells me, and all at once I love her,
want to marry her impulsively, buy a big house
just for the porch, and spend the rest of our lives
uncovering the daily routines of moths,
listening to the sound spiders make
when they slurp liquefied guts, wondering
what chipmunks dream about, and if they kick
their legs in their sleep like a dog sometimes does.

Love Song

I love you like an alarm clock
loves a sleeping person,
& I'd stay awake for hours
just to nudge you at the perfect moment
& save you from oversleeping
& running around the house
in your cookie-crumb eyeballs,
shoving peanut butter into your mouth
& cursing the day. If someone were
chasing you through snow or sand, I
would walk just behind you & leave
slightly larger footprints on top of
your footprints & you'd escape
undetected & I love you like a linguist
loves a forgotten language & would
make up a million words
so they could all mean your name,
then teach them to people
under false pretenses.

Even the wind,
should a person catch enough of it
in a sail or balloon, has enough life
inside to fling them across state lines,
so imagine how far your smile carries me
when you point it in my direction!
I'm out of the house at 4 AM
and planting gardenias along
the sidewalk path you take
to work, & in the afternoon
I'll plant petunias on the other side
& go searching all over for
the crunchiest leaves to toss under
your feet as you walk home
so that each step will overwhelm you
with the sense of being alive
at the most beautiful possible moment.

When Tristan and Isolde Meet in the Afterlife

they can't help but cringe at the sight
of each other. Their heavenly reunion fell flat
when his translucent palm went through her
translucent cheek. Without circulatory systems,
the love potion wore off, and together they realized
the solitary torture of becoming pure ideas. With time
to think, Isolde can't understand why her warrior
let himself languish on a beach for 5 days with a spear
in his chest. Could no doctor have stopped the bleeding?
Was she to save him with her tears? What is a man
who would rather love by dying than live by loving?
In her corner of the Afterlife, new arrivals
make a ritual of visiting her legend. Apparently
people keep writing poems, composing operas, making
movies, detailing the purity of her final act. Entire
philosophies conceived according to her consuming desires.
Like a disillusioned tour guide, she tells the lines
of young dead how she would have preferred
a mundane love – falling asleep on a couch
with an unsipped cup of tea nearby, expiring
slowly, waking each morning and wiping crust
from the corners of her eyes. All she ever wanted,
she insists, was a life full of forgettable sentences
that no one would think worth writing down.

Watching *Blue Planet* I Think of the Afterlife

and wonder if David Attenborough will be there to guide me or if anyone will be there or if it will look anything like this dead whale sinking down the screen, torn apart and falling for months through deep water, becoming all the time less whale, more something else. Even when there's no meat left and specialized feeders have drunk from the bones, at least a million tiny particles will still be falling even then, weightless but for their unknown destinations. Drifting alongside these millions of particles will be millions of others from different drifting corpses, and each dot will resemble every other dot, though the dead are of infinite shape and color. On the ocean floor sit angels dressed as strange fish, mouths agape, swallowing the black, sun-shunned sea by the mouthful and holding tight to anything once alive.

Communion Leftovers

He thinks it wasteful
to let the body of Christ go stale
and that possibly the little birds
could learn, without knowing it,
some type of prayer. As he tears off
smaller-than-usual pieces from
the King's Hawaiian loaf
every dandelion's yellow seems to him
a generosity. *We love people by
feeding them*, his mother always
said, like how the crucifixion
would have come off lofty and abstract
had Jesus not shown the disciples
what love tasted like and taught them
that it can get stuck between your teeth.
When the grackles get their fill
he sees how they linger in a nearby elm
tree for what must be an eternity.

Poem for Your Funeral

So few people come to your funeral
that you regret having died. The whole
thing is so silly, like a surprise
party they know you aren't coming to.
A Preacher Man stands in front
of your body and chuckles then walks
away looking like a phonebook salesman.
Many people pretend not to be feeling
the same things at the same time.
Others occupy themselves with logistics,
wondering who clipped your fingernails,
what they did with your blood after
they drained it, if it is stowed away
in a bowl somewhere or a zipped plastic bag
or if they flushed it down the toilet.
Driving to the cemetery, people speak
of traffic lights and weather – the unseasonal
cold will prevent them from watching
the paid laborers lower you into
the ground, which is, you think, a pity.
They might have learned something,
standing still and quiet, letting their bodies
grow cold and stiff, watching you hide
yourself forever like a hand into a pocket.

Antarctic Pearlwort

I'm sorry for acting like you don't exist.
I was learning so much about your continent
that I began telling people, *there's like no vegetation there*,
ignoring your entire unlikely existence
in that single syllable. I'm sorry I was so obsessed
with the barrenness you bravely defy
that I dug a big hole in my brain and buried you in it.
I'm sorry too, because later I went in search
of pictures of you, and you are beautiful with your flowers
the size of a 12-point period, and yellow is my favorite color,
which I decided once after seeing how stunningly it looked
covering my beloved's shoulders,
but this is not a poem about me or shoulders! No,
Antarctic Pearlwort, this love poem is for you,
and I'm sorry because I overlooked you and others like you:
Antarctic hairgrass and two dozen types of liverwort,
which is like moss except
people used to eat it to cure themselves.
Don't think I don't admire the way
you and your friends hold the soil in your tiny hands,
lest the frigid wind take it away. Don't think
I don't admire your reliance,
for after discovering my oversight of you,
I read that you self-pollinate, working only with the wind,
and that recent years have seen a fivefold increase
in your species across the "empty continent."
And your botanical name is elegant:
Deschampsia Antarctica and my tongue makes a shape
like an anteater kissing another anteater whenever I say it.
I'm sorry Antarctic Pearlwort for thinking
beauty only exists if I can see it. If I ever
deliver this apology to you in person
and the continent that loves you should take me
(as it taken many) I'd be honored to die near
your little yellow mouths, that I
might nourish the ground around your feet.

Don't They Know I'm Building a Paradise?

Days after the cable man stomped out
my kale sprouts, strange people arrive
carrying chainsaws. They are here
to chop down a tree older than the family
who owns it, and when the human population
dwindles and fizzes like a pinched wick,
that linden will still be gone, even if
I hadn't yet spent entire days staring
at the thing, hadn't buried a thousand seed pods,
hadn't yet enacted strange rituals of gratitude.
Does anyone else think it miraculous
that roots might crack a foundation?
What knowledge we have and how we wield it.
I watch the men tie a rope to each branch,
make wedge-like cuts, then saw through,
and each bit falls exactly where they want it to fall.
Everything is carefully planned, even as I sit
reading the science of trees – how their leaves
pull in the air around us and lock it forever
in their wood, how they make such use
of our exhalations, be they lamentation or fume,
how they love lamentation specifically:
our CO₂-laden sighs have each green thing
grinning after a human tragedy. They hold in giggles
as centuries of strife and assassination pass by.
Apparently a linden has hidden itself
somewhere in England and has been waiting
humans out for 2000 years, just like one season's
blight or borer, our chainsaw-flinging
is that fleeting. When the men leave,
I go out and stand on the stump they've made.
I spread my arms wide, enacting absence, waiting
for suckers to sprout from under my thumbnails.
As usual, nothing at all beautiful comes from my body.

Blue Suit Poem

We were meeting for lunch,
which I considered a special occasion
after an older man once told me
meeting your wife for lunch on a Thursday
is the type of thing that doesn't happen
all the time, or even once, after you pass
a certain age and your life turns a certain color.
So on my own lucky Thursday, I donned
my blue suit and walked in a breeze toward you.
Outside, the mailman was wearing his blue suit,
and our neighbor was cutting the grass
in his blue suit, and someone went around
and painted blue suits on all the garden gnomes,
and every tree along the way stretched its roots
deep into the earth and might have been touching
the blue-suited bodies of the dead.
True, you used to eat lunch with different people,
and so did I, and one girl lives now
in a faraway city and doesn't remember
my middle name, but still some days I wonder
how much paper I would need to calculate
the improbability of your voice spilling
into my ear like splattered paint – or the likelihood
of my being happy enough about lunch
to put an uncomfortable suit and walk multiple miles
that you might smile or even laugh. On my
bumbling way toward you, such thoughts keep me.

Summer Poem

An orange-bellied spider is walking,
with her eyelash-legs, on the line
she just drew between my elbow
and the grass. In making her line
she manifests the sameness
which has always been between
my elbow and the grass, unseen
and referred to only as an article of faith.
The line is real though. I can see sunlight
sometimes flash off it, and the spider
herself sits now, not on thin air,
but on the silk laundry line upon which
I'll hang the most delicate articles
of my faith. Given this line of evidence
and defense is it so unreasonable to believe
in something for which god might be
a word – something to explain the love
stitching my elbow to the grass? Maybe
some such similar webs have bound me
to other pieces of grass or other leaves
of clover or watermelon rinds or things
that aren't even green, and I might choose,
should I so desire to believe
foolhardily in this possibility.

Noah's Afterthought

Everything had been put in its place: each bird ankle-knotted to a post, barrels of meadow-grass and buckets of slugs stowed away for feed. Noah had docked the more peaceable animals, like the cats and mules, weeks previous; and more rebellious types lay caged and waiting. So finally Noah laid down to sleep, and above him the hemlocks and yellow pines whispered into the wind until his heart went white with a thought: *every single thing that breathes on the earth*, said his God, yet Noah had not thought to save a single green life! Soon he was up from bed and snipping every branch within his reach. By moonlight he filled the Arc with rich topsoil and buried every barberry and burning bush his eyes took hold of. He spilled the money from his pouch and filled it with seeds and burs and cones. Then a revelation came to Noah, and he saw cedars and seedlings dead and washed up by 150 days of rising saltwater. He saw eroding mountains smother any unlikely water hyssop or swamp lily that might outlast the rain. He saw before him his promised paradise – a muddy waste where the animals saved all starve or tear into each other's flesh, two by two. Noah worked then straight through the first three days and nights of flood, trying to make up for lost time. Any single green thing might be his savior, he thought. Overboard went many of the unsightly animals to make room for the types of life from which God built the Earth. Two months into the Flood, Noah untied 300 kinds of grey birds, unable to afford the seed they were eating. He desperately sprouted some of his salvaged seeds and nursed them, even as other animals died of neglect. After six months, Noah sent a dove out to see if she'd find any perch place, but before she came back with her mouthful of red mud, he was off the boat and unloading plants. Long before he kissed the ground beneath him, Noah was digging holes, placing saplings, pinching a little dirt around each stem.

The Plagues, a Synopsis

It's the one where God puts on a show.
Starts off slow: a couple swap gags,
underestimating the human capacity
for nonchalance. Who among us hasn't
mistaken a stick for a snake or seen
a river run red with slaves' blood?
Then He tries a numbers game, filling
every bed and oven with a frog,
blackening the sky with clouds
of insects, changing the dirt into squirming
mounds of lice. *For every grain of sand,*
He says, *there is some trivial thing I made.*
Still no one claps. Then comes the temper tantrum,
which kills or maims every man and steer
in the land. Finally, He tugs hard on the sun's
string, making good on every mother's threat
to take ungrateful children back into the dark
from whence they came. Eventually Moses
tires of foretelling each new miracle,
but still the Big Man makes His case,
bringing perennial plagues of daffodils,
swarms of murmuring starlings. With showy
flourishes, he keeps placing our faces in mirrors,
keeps filling our mouths with teeth. Somewhere
a Pharaoh must be trembling, seeing God wrap
pomegranates in bright red paper, one at a time.
The sky above like a blue umbrella. *Look,*
He says. And, as a child does, asks
are you looking just to be sure you are.

III. Sidewalk Dancer

The Day Mankind Tried to Justify Itself

Look, we've built several big things and
destroyed several others. In some instances,

we even used parts of the destroyed things
to build other big things. We made thick walls

and learned to keep people inside them.
Some of our tallest men have grown knotted fists

and can push over whole trees with one try.
We made a language, from which funny things

can be built, plus lovely things too.
Some of our citizens have learned lullabies

and they sing them whenever birds fly away.
We convinced billions of leafy vegetables

to surrender their lives that a body
might gain a few hours' energy – enough time

to dig a hole to find the moon to walk in a big circle.
With three hours some individuals can read

up to one-hundred pages. Chopped and chunked,
the greatest trees descended to lowly positions

holding our phone bills medicine bottles and
stuffed animals – some of which

sing Christmas songs if you poke
their belly or squeeze the corner of their ear.

Little Airplane

Little airplane, how full you must be
of those little liquor bottles. How full
you must be of nervous people
& don't take it personally when they
take off their shoes and fill you with an
earthy smell or when they slam the
overhead compartments too hard. They
all have terribly important business:
Some of them woke up at 5 AM to a chickadee
alarm clock & did 50 sit-ups on the floor
next to their bed, & some of them feel
very guilty about the orange cats they left
pawing the front window this morning.
Sure, little airplane, some of your people hope
to carry several bags of money back with them
on the return flight & are in a big hurry
& don't say hello or thanks when they drink
their little liquor bottles, but some of them,
I'm sure, would like for it to rain back home –
not too much, but just enough for
the potted ficus on the front porch to keep
from sagging til they get back, & some
of your little people might be returning
to their birthplaces. Yes, someone is dying,
little airplane, or a little person has been born
& she needs to meet her uncle
so super speed, little airplane! And I
will walk through the empty neighborhoods,
visiting all the lonely cats & watering all
the porch plants, & when I hear you,
little airplane, I will remember a walk
with my two friends & how we spent
an hour near the airport waving to all
the busy people rushing to this place or that,
breaking the sound barrier & such.
That day we talked about every little thing
our minds took hold of & every time
we opened our mouths a pile of diamonds
spilled out & we let the birds carry it all away.

Statistically Speaking

Human isn't even the most likely option.
We're outnumbered by every porch bug
and thistle-weed around. More grass
in Kentucky than people on Earth.
Far more roly-polies in our gardens.
Far more anchovies, I'm sure,
in our fridges. Why not a life
in water and death via seal gullet?
I could have spent my days
floating through the ocean, drifting
miles in my sleep and never seeing dirt –
nary a mountain, nary a cloud – could have
wandered around forever without thumbs.
What a life – never holding a thing! Had I
wanted to share a seaweed morsel
with the fish I love most I'd have carried it
to her in my mouth and spit it at her,
then gone back for my own bite. Had I
gotten hooked, I'd have left it in or rubbed
it away against some rock. Thank you, thumbs!
How the human burdens – traffic jams,
cavities, junk mail – are lightened somewhat
by this luxury of reaching out
and pinching a sprig of rosemary
between my thumb and middle finger,
raising my hand to my nose, sniffing.

After Eating Pizza Found in a Public Place

I'm using the internet to discern the likelihood
of my being poisoned or drugged, searching things

like *how long til I die, History of lacing,*
and *how bright is the sun supposed to be?!*

at which point I realize I'm acting strangely,
but I can't tell if the problem is the drugs

or my fear of the drugs. I measure the distance
between the world in front of me and a world

wanting to trick me, but in the measuring
the distance dances away like water droplets

on a skillet. The sky above me fills like a bucket
with birds. An airplane announces itself then hides

behind a cloud. I stare at a stand
of black-eyed susans until I can't

remember what name to call them. I think
about myself until my existence seems entirely

unlikely, and though I still don't know
about extra-curricular activity in the pepperoni,

I worry that I'll be dissecting mosquito cadavers and singing
to windowsills by bedtime. I look at a chair and

wonder if it could bite me. A couple hours later
I'm still trying to make sense of trees – the way

each year they go gold and shatter and come together
again right under our noses. When I fall asleep

I watch bandanna-ed men hang tiny wind chimes
from hooks in my heart. They won't let me pay them

and they won't take off their boots. In the morning
I go to the kitchen and call things

by the names I've memorized for them.

Throwing away a Visor Clip

because Mother Mary is plastic and mass-produced
like a water bottle or one of those rings on the top of milk jugs
and that makes me want to revere her a little bit

because Mother Mary never claimed her place on my visor
where she might have rested
her eye on the road ahead
and its moving yellow lines

because I do not wish to die ironically
in a fiery crash hours after tossing the Mother
of God into a black garbage bag in a fit
of anxious decluttering

because I do not wish to die

because most things are a matter of proxy

because I kept Mother Mary in the door pocket
where she watched over
Burger King coupons and tollbooth cash

because I feel bad about that

because my mother's Bible is wrapped in plastic
the same way it came in 1958 when her aunt
bought it from a hospital bookstore

because sometimes family talismans come from a Walmart gas station

because Mother Mary was there at the wedding in Cana
when the good wine was all drunk and her
long-haired son made more

because I bet she blushed a little proudly then

because Mary saw her son killed

because my mother's Bible is wrapped in plastic
the same way it came in 1958

because my mother is private and embarrasses easily
and I like to imagine her buying a religious trinket
or maybe just dropping it into her purse
to avoid that moment at the counter
where a pimpled teen might learn something about her

because later she handed me the piece of plastic,
saying *here, may this keep you safe*

Street-Corner Jubilee

For the man on 38th & Pennsylvania, Indianapolis, IN

You were dancing here when I passed
this morning & are dancing now
after 8 hours work spent in one place,
diverting my gaze from open windows,
& since I'm stopped at a light,
I watch while you defy the world's
lonelinesses (car fumes be damned!
& sweat & death), & I can't help
but ditch the car and join your
sidewalk shuffle! climb the invisible
stair-stepper you call your groove machine,
zero into the invisible beat in your head,
and let my feet take me only here
only here & when some impatient
person honks a horn at our happy
obstruction, we toss our hands up
and wave like their noise-making is a generous
contribution to our street-corner jubilee.
The joy of dancing shut-eyed in public
is impossible to predict. Apparently
I'd longed to sing this song of me,
loudly and badly, in a room
with no walls, & I'll never know
why I pretended, for the sake of others,
that my default state was anything less
than the specific flavor of joyous
that fills my mouth with teeth.
With you, unknown dancer, I'll stop
strangers on the sidewalk – tell them
that even while we sleep pea plants
fill their vines with an impossible sweetness.
Even while we look elsewhere
one moment gives birth to another, and
none of the things that have ever died
have taken us with them.

To a Penny, Dated 1907

You've clanked around in pockets
with many a coin and most of the
others never made it this far – melted
down long ago or buried in peanut
butter jars or lost forever between
leather couch cushions – but you, 1907,
you have cut your impossible path to me,
and, holding you in my hand, I think of
the many others who have held you
this way, and I hope they were all in love
the way I am in love, though of course they
aren't, 1907, because they never met my
Andrea, the golden girl with a voice I want
to bottle and put on a shelf next to rice and
almonds. Believe me, 1907. If she held you
in her sleep-warmed hand the way she does me
you would understand. See the way she has me
writing strange apologies to pennies, O how
I love her! Think of the millions of other pennies,
plus all the people carrying those pennies around,
none of them ever looking across a cup of coffee
at the smile I see, never seeing the face that holds
the smile, how sad they must be. Some of them
don't know yet how sad they are, but they feel it,
I'm sure, some something they can't name.

To My Blood as I Sit at the Plasma Donation Center

The machine spins you dizzy separating red
from gold, the stuff scientists can't replicate

in their labs. You fill the tubes so quickly
I fear a leak in the bottom of my boat, never

mind that my body is the opposite of a boat,
the waves inside and the world floating atop,

sometimes wrecking and sinking into my
unmapped depths. Each week I stay calm

as different White Coats poke me. I hardly
flinch when an older doctor stands over

his new trainee, reminding her,
like you're piercing an orange peel,

because I always suspected my body to be filled
with such sweet, life-giving stuff.

People used to imagine God as two big fingers
squeezing subjects like lemons onto the linguini

of his kingdom, but today I offer you on the altar
of a trillion dollar pharmaceutical enterprise, and

each week my body makes more gold, squeezing it
from the stuff I eat and drink and adding

its own ingredients, the prospect of which
you must be proud for I can feel you stirring.

I think you must also like the feel of Spring's first
warmth and the way unmown fields look covered

in dandelion, like many seeds thrown from some sun.
You like being woken very early by an excited person

wanting to start the day with you, and if I ever
made you thick with my sadness I apologize

and thank you for knowing that it couldn't last.
Even now I feel your raucous stirring at the

mention of love, and while I know exactly how
you feel, I wish you would be a little calm now,

for if I bleed too quickly a bell will ring and a nurse
will walk toward me wearing a worrying frown.

Hence Smitten

This squirrel digs my grave and marks it
with an acorn. Years from now,
if he's forgotten all about me by then,

a large tree will grow in my place. There might
be something amiss about thanking a flower
the way I'd thank a person who gave me a song

or a leftover pickle, but I don't know
what to call the thing I want most to thank.
To stand forever in awe of the world

like a tadpole in a sink full of dishes.
To take vocal lessons and grow turnips
on a hill, to learn to praise, though

to imagine some One to Whom
the Praises Go is probably a mistake –
before receiving the tablets, Moses

covers his eyes, lest the Transcendent
smite him down, even though
the second definition of smite is

to fall madly in love (hence smitten),
which offers the delightful possibility
of making eye contact with one's Smiter,

of kissing said Smiter on the lips, or falling
asleep right on the Smiter's breathing chest
and cooking in the morning two yellow eggs.

The Inscription Dedicating a Bench

purports that “what we do for others
and the world remains immortal,”
& while I’m grateful to whatever graduates
of the class of 2002 made donations
that I might have a shady place to sit,
I’d like to ask them a few questions.
I’d like to tell them that the latest
apocalypse theory suggests
some rogue planet might penetrate
our solar system and fling us flying
into some icy corner of the universe.
I’d like them to know that entire teams
of well-paid apocalypse scientists exist –
PhDs and such – & that one way or another
our little Goldilocks planet will disappear.
When we are ripped into our constituent atoms,
each of us will wander away
in our own direction, and by whose definition
will immortality exist or not exist then?
& who will need a bench, made even as it is
of the strongest cedar? Who will remember
ever spending a flower-fouled spring afternoon
under pink, hand-shaped blossoms, leaning
against another dying person, looking up
toward the sky, pointing?

Mother Nature Learns Economics

One afternoon, an observant earthworm
saw an aerator man make \$50/hour,
and soon every gardener in the county
was taking out a personal loan.
Fruit flies caught on and charged homeowners
a hefty waste removal fee. Municipalities
received unpayable bills from autumn maples
listing multiple quality-of-life surcharges.
Squirrels soon demanded back pay
for oaks planted in fall. In Northern California,
a community of garden spiders went on strike,
and 3 people died of malaria. Rainclouds abandoned
neighborhoods that couldn't pay
their monthly subscription on time.
The cost of hiring honeybees to pollinate
fields and orchards soon became enough
to send most farmers into bankruptcy, and acres
of cultivated rows reverted to wilderness.
Local economies collapsed, and people
spent their days foraging. Honeysuckle
soon gained enough capital to launch
a reclamation project across America's
largest cities – once-gleaming skyscrapers
cracked and smeared. Today, many seek
gainful employment running errands for trees.
A would-be hedge-fund manager
spends whole afternoons begging
raspberry canes for a little sweetness.
Former oil tycoons plant wildflowers
for a cow they'd like to milk. Despite
their efforts, millions of industrious humans
succumb to famine and thirst. Those remaining
survive by learning to accommodate Nature's
every righteous whim. From far away,
Earth looks like again a Virgin Planet or
a tangled mass of yarn hanging against a black curtain.

We Could Have Been Dancing

I only wish I knew the name of the song,
the one that made us jump from our seats in such a public place –
coffees un-sipped, friends un-hugged – and wiggle
our dying bodies together, the people around us
offering only the corners of their eyes, embarrassedly
interested, as if we were making love,
or praying, and I understand their shame,
having been dance-shy myself. *I could have been
dancing*, I once protested to my mother
when she opened my door unannounced,
but that day in the coffee shop
I guess our lives had us surrounded, and we had no choice
but to submit, for 3 or 4 minutes, to the bright colors inside our bodies,
me stomping my foot on the blue carpet and you
with your fingers in the air, pointing out angels.
It was a kind of possession, the kind to make
a person bleed or speak to ghosts, the kind to carve
a human-shaped hole in the ground and ask you to jump,
and we didn't resist, didn't even consider the possibility.

A Prayer, Before Eating

Aware of robins' nests ripped apart and burned for fuel,
aware of children escorted to school by military personnel,
aware of children collecting cigarette butts from street gutters,
aware of those plotting violence against people praising God,
aware of those plotting violence against people dancing brightly
aware of those plotting violence against kids practicing cursive,

we delight in the food that sustains our presence in this place.

We, great neglecters of beauty,
who turn away as entire fields of color bloom and die,
who turn away as entire neighborhoods of color bloom and die,
we, who do not clap for the sidewalk dancer

we, who have boiled our rice in the blood of our brothers and sisters,

each time the moon shines above, we believe stupidly
in its shining for us; we repeatedly mishear the cardinal's
pleadings as accompaniment to our afternoons.

We know now how quiet our solitary heavens, and
remembering women bathing underarms in public sinks,
remembering men spreading warm cloth over soon-bloomed strawberries,
and gardeners warming frozen bees in their cupped palms,
remembering lobbied-for forests burned in drought,
remembering tree frogs crushed into colorful lip dye,

we join together as imperfect witnesses and testify,
with eyes half shut, against the world's bright beauty and shame:

above us, the dogwood's many mouths are open and drooling;
in our hands, oranges, which have traveled long distances & spent hours rattling in crates;
blueberries, over which someone's back must be aching;
afternoon light shining at impossible angles.

From above it must look very beautiful – each of us drowning in all that gold.

On Reincarnation

The same scammers go around picking pockets,
and the same bystanders look the other way.
Beneath tangled up sheets lie the same afternoon
work-shirkers. Ancient teenagers also buried
their noses in blooming lilacs. Scientists ad infinitum
admire their shelves of beetle-filled jars.
Again and again, the same soldiers kill and die,
and the same medics and chaplains run in after them.
We're like a bunch of those wind-up toys –
until someone sets us off in a new direction,
we're stuck banging into a wall. But in lucid moments,
we sometimes set ourselves off in new directions:
Imagine the surly sister who cuts her hair and walks
into battle in her brother's stead, the child
who steps into the kitchen and burns two eggs
for a sick parent, the elderly who dance at weddings,
the distant husband arriving home with a handful
of lilies. Every week, people hop into cars
and drive for hours toward the scent of water.
These insignificant rebellions are what
we live for. They are what make us human.