

CAMPBELL, MACKENZIE REBECCA, M.F.A. *The Bed The Landscape The Woman*. (2017) Directed by Stuart Dischell. 45pp.

This collection of poems explores the body, desire, heartache, and renewal. These poems run through the seasons of the year and the seasons of relationships. Ranging from tender to cutting, ecstatic to somber, they follow the arc of a relationship—from the nervousness of a first date to the acceptance of an ending. Pop cultural and famous female figures make appearances throughout this collection. Female writers' struggles with mental illness provide insight into the speaker's own experiences. Despite these poems' portraits of loneliness—whether in the speaker's bed or listening to the upstairs neighbor flushing their toilet, they also explore the landscape of solitude and what it means to be a woman coming to terms with her own identity.

THE BED THE LANDSCAPE THE WOMAN

by

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APPROVAL PAGE

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October, Early Evening

October, and I've been waiting
for tonight all my life—orange sky,
your body, the yellow mums in bloom.

Who says memory is all we're made of?

What I mean is the light is leaving us.
What I mean is I'll stay. And then what?

Watch me undress in this evening's light.
For once I'm not shy. For once I won't turn

from you, our tender opening—
the curtain blowing into the room,

your wild kindness burgeoning
between us like the maple
painting your window red.

60% Off At Bergdorf's

and I'm eyeing the Céline bags
behind glass like cakes
on my way to the bathroom
where I hear a mother tell her son
to stop asking so many questions.
Years later, at the little Italian place,
he'll look in a mirror
that hasn't seen Windex in months
and fail to wonder who he is
and if Tanya cut his hair right.
Birds fly everyday into windows
thinking the reflection of sky
is sky proving optimism
can kill you. Is that what Emily
Dickinson meant by
Hope is the thing with feathers?
Untouched in a white dress
she stood at her bedroom window
like an accountant stares into a box
on the spreadsheet. From a distance
the spreadsheet is a white rectangle.
From a distance the window is also
a white rectangle. The mirror
would like to be a white rectangle
but people keep filling it: ladies
reapplying their lipstick,
wanting to do something different
with their hair. The lifespan
of a single hair is two to seven years.
In seven years a bird will look down
on my head and find that it is new.
Can a bird recognize you? Who can say,
though the chances exponentially
increase if you don't do something
different with your hair.
I don't need to look into a mirror
to know what I'll see.
When Emily Dickinson looked out
her window there was a tree.
When Emily Dickinson looked out
her window in winter there was a tree

wearing a white dress. At night,
a white dress.

First Date with You

I want you to carry a kindness
I can hold in my hands.

My hands reach for something familiar:
the saltshaker, the salt itself.

If I could I would tell you
how tired I am of loneliness.

The small lamp on the table
casts your face in shadow.

The bread sits between us
untouched. Across from you

I am someone I want to photograph
and stare at all evening. In this light

so much is erased: the orange glaze
on my fish, the hours that came

before you. I try to keep them
hidden. I try to stop filling

this quiet with talk about the weather.
When I reach for my glass, you place

your hand on my hand, in this room,
in this light that is very still.

Aubade in the Rain

Pale light spins on the clock,
the glass of seltzer, the mirror

hanging next to the bed.
It's early and already

you're heading downstairs
to put the coffee on,

to untwist the loaf of bread.
How many mornings I've spent

looking out your window
at the neighbors fetching

the paper and walking their dogs,
the blue hydrangeas, the rain

flung from the sky like a coat.
Soon I'll go downstairs to tell you

I'm leaving, but for now I stretch out
in the sheets, listening to the rain,

the toaster's pop, the sounds
the house makes between us.

The Mattress Speaks

If you left me
 what would I miss?

Going each day without
 being touched,
 the sound of touch.

When you come up behind me
 I think of all the days
we've wasted kissing:
 Egyptian cotton,
 afghan afternoon.

I'm here in your dark room
waiting, covered up with
 all of the t-shirts
 and stretched-out bras
you've flung,
 waiting to be put on.

Saturday Morning

Again your house,
the oranges we eat in bed.

This house without a dictionary,
apples on the table, stack of blue

mugs teetering in the sink
that drips through the night.

And I wake synced to you,
hand lifting from my body

to rub your eyes, wine glasses
on the nightstand, the clock

reading 11:05. I touch
your shoulder and tell you

I have the most marvelous idea.
You expect it to be a poem.

You expect it to be something
outlandish: my business plan for

half-loaves of bread, *let's go*
to Paris for the weekend.

But we are already here.
I ask if we can stay in bed all day—

watching TV, doing the crossword,
holding each other until night

comes and we do it all over again.

Googling Hart Crane

The Poem-a-Day for April 2nd is “Garden Abstract” by Hart Crane.
I read it while eating yogurt and blackberries, coffee cooling.
The poem’s okay, doesn’t really move me, butt sunk into the bed.

It says he was born in 1899 and died in 1932.
I’m not very good at math, but I know that’s a short life.
I Google him and learn his father invented Lifesavers

which my grandmother always offered me from her tired purse
in the backseat of the Buick, as my grandfather, who could barely walk
with a cane, drove us past the outhouses and horses, up and down

the West Virginia mountains until we came to a town with a Cracker Barrel.
Anyways, back to Hart Crane...In the little box at the top of the Wikipedia page
is his picture. I think he’s sorta handsome. Next to “Died” it says “At sea.”

A sailor and a poet! Or a fisherman and a poet! A poet named Hart
in a yellow slicker holding a pail of trout. How romantic!
But then as I click on the “Death” link, I find he threw himself overboard

into the Gulf of Mexico. Something about a lifetime of depression
and alcoholism, romantic turmoil. There was no note. Witnesses claim
he said “Goodbye, everybody!” before hitting water. How polite!

To bid farewell to everyone, to put an exclamation point at the end!
What I’ll keep in mind when I leave my next party, beer radiating
from skin, stumbling back to my small room, crawling into my big bed.

Listening to Paul Simon

Amber candle glow,
October air drifting into the kitchen:

we move endlessly through it.
Me in my bathrobe

and you in your boxers.
How have I lived without this

evening for so long?
Now I have something to carry.

We've been close, yes,
but never quite like this:

dancing in front of the fridge,
the magnet of the sun

watching us like an eye
in spite of what we've done

to each other, the facts
of ourselves. Now let us bless it.

Waxing crescent moon,
the sound of the train

crossing the river.
Never mind that departure.

Here you ask if I'm okay.
I will be, I say.

I remember my way through it—
my immoderate sadness,

the way you hold me there.

Virginia Woolf's Diary: September 10, 1913

Yes, I tried it.
The pills. The glass.
I couldn't spin
 a sentence,
its mumbling & turning
in my brain.
 King Edward VII
muffling in the garden,
the birds singing
 Greek again outside
my window. My brain
a blank window.
 Leonard can't get me
to eat, not even toast.
Only married a year
 & look what I've done to him.
Brambles tied to my feet.
The leaves of the apple tree.
 The room a vacuum.
Colorless. Thursday.
 Where is the lighthouse?
The waves, the heather?
Now I hear one wave
 breaking after another
all day long. Never
was anyone so tossed
 up & down by the body
as I am, as though I'm
about to slide over
 a precipice. Then I would
have been nothing.
Then I will be.
 Then I am.

Voicemail from an Ex-Boyfriend

after Carolyn Forché's "Reunion"

Your voice I haven't heard
in months. A cup of coffee,
cream on the counter.
You have left no one
I can offer you now.
Not the red house, the one
we slept in, the one I try
not to remember: the river,
the slice of sun, the sheets
still warm from our bodies.
My hand glued to your chest.
Honeysuckle vines.
The purple glasses of wine
we locked ourselves into.
How you touched me all night.
How my body felt, hours
before, your fingers lifting
up my shirt, some yours,
some left by other men.
You couldn't save me
from my wheel of sadness.
Since then, I've learned
to stay in bed all day
without feeling alone
and have sat in the tub
dissolving into the water
between my thighs.
You couldn't see me then
as you saw me. How little
tenderness a box can hold,
the crackle of your voice
talking to a woman who can't
give you what you want
as I was, as I still am.

Cabinet of Sleep

Blue chest rising in the dark room.
I am beside you. I am not beside you

enough. A glass of water hums
on top of the window unit.

Kenilworth Street is asleep, your room
closed around us like a throat.

I close my eyes & paint my hand
on your back, a house touched,

the house a licked stamp, tongue
on neck—the boy in your eyes,

the boy locked in the cabinet of sleep.
There. How do I get in there?

The cabinet, your skin.

Winter Solstice

I love these days,
when the sun droops

below the horizon
in afternoon splendor,

when the kitchen floor
bites my toes with cold.

Dish soap suds
form a galaxy in the sink

as I wash the bowl
from my tomato soup dinner.

I pour a glass of wine
and head to the couch

to turn on the television,
to fill this voiceless room,

to give it a pulse
with its images. I hear

the latest about our president,
hear tonight is a low of 32,

an action movie opens
on Christmas Day.

I stare at the screen
as it carries me

in to tomorrow,
pushing me toward

another dark afternoon.

Listening to Otis Redding

It's Christmas Eve and we're in a hotel
with a lobby that smells like curry

and eastern-facing rooms with a view
of the Waffle House next door, though

who can see it through all this snow.
We drink wine from paper cups

and feast on peanut butter crackers
from the vending machine down the hall.

We tune in to soft, easy listening
on the clock radio and sway

to Otis Redding in our white towels.
I am ecstatic living like this, as if

tomorrow will only come when we let it.

Breathing

The key turns
and gets hung on its hook.

You in the stairwell,
you in the doorway—

I can hardly bear to look at you.

Trees stand solemn in the rain.
All day the rain. All day the bed.

How the sheet feels against
my skin, the bed another body.

You know why I stay here,

only listening to the rain fall,
your voice asking if I've moved

or eaten today: cereal,
a sandwich, a spoonful of soup.

The white curtain blows
into the room, breathing.

Breathing I reach out to you,
here where I cannot turn

from, here where you love
me and you don't let go.

In My Long Dress

I'm returning to you
and what else is there?

The sky above me
is one cloud of longing.

The sparrows fly to the trees.
Rain burns the road layer by layer.

Every idea I have
is one of abandon. Still

I come to you in my long dress.

The room is cold & dark,
television blue.

Just for tonight
let me be the more loving one.

Just for tonight
let me bring you closer

to my every less than you.

Morning After with Blueberry Pancakes

Absent sun, morning bruised
by storm, as if rain could be inside

the keyhole, suspended above the blue
bowl of oranges. You sit at the table

sipping coffee. Hunger swallows us
like a coat. The eyelet curtains blow

into the room. We drown the botched
pancakes in syrup, drink Tropicana

from wine glasses, stare at each other
across the table, the air between

us, between us only the air.

When the Fingers Leave the Body

The mirror holds the curve of the body,
the curve the man traced with his fingers.
The body stands alone in a white box.
The face a window. Outside the window
it is raining. It is raining: there's a fact.
The hour holds the mirror, the window,
rain, the curve. Something has to.
Even a line. Even a lie. The memory of touch,
of being touched. The pain when the fingers
leave the body. Ten times. All at once.

Coda

In the morning the woman folds down
the man's collar and watches him
walk out the door. The door clicks
shut. The body gets locked into the bed.
The bed is the key. The bed smells like the man
but the man is gone. The upstairs neighbor
takes a shower. Dirty water follows
the line in the wall. The mirror follows
the line of the body. The mirror hangs
next to the bed. The woman hangs
a sheet over the mirror. She wants out
of this body, the body the man touched,
the body the man no longer wants to touch.

Aubade

Still, there's a desire in my always.
The kitchen dark. The sink.
The kettle. The blue flame.
Waiting for someone who never left.
Waiting for someone who never arrived.
Lemon wedge, aspirin, cut of steam
bleeding in air: a still-life to remember
you by. Look at the stars. How far they are.
This is the night. This was the night.
So quiet, so clean, this end.

I Lie Awake at Night Wondering Where in the World Is Carmen Sandiego

And is she still wearing that red hat?
Studies show 65% of men
who wear hats are bald
or will be tomorrow. The US
National Library of Medicine
recommends *hairpieces or a change
of hairstyle to disguise the loss*.
True, grief is unsightly
but like most things easy
to cover up. A little black dress
has been known to contain the body.
The body has been known
to ache at night and reach
for two aspirin. I can't tell you
how many times I've gone
to the movies to be swallowed
by the red upholstered seat.
Consider how lipstick was sold
during war to boost morale
but butter required a stamp.
Vodka raises the spirit.
Ego is a synonym but so is *ghost*.
My ego is a ghost and now I can't find it.
To find your inner self
you need excellent light
and a three-day weekend.
The leap year was the epiphany
of the village idiot and here we are
still using it. Some things know
how to endure: the river cutting
through the valley, Band-Aids, the lock
& the key. It's the middle of the week
and soon I'll be hanging off the edge
of it. In the dark a face strikes
the mind like a match. Good.
The night is cold. The night
needed something to fill it.

Prayer for the New Year

Roofless cosmos, church
of jasmine and boxwood,

make me new again.
Turn me from the year

I built around a man
who taught me what it means

to burn in morning light.
I finger the rosary of nights

fissured and full,
a briar patch of stars,

the nights I slept inside
the space he drew between us.

Why can't I become a key
to the door of my own longing?

Zodiac of psalms, ocean
of tides and salt, let me

be enough. Let me say it:
it is enough—this apple soap

by the sink, that glass of water,
those poplars peeking

inside the room. The room
where he can't turn from me,

where nothing can,
nothing but the sound

of my own breathing.

January Evening

The room bruised by early evening,
the body housed, the bruise growing
like another body. In this hour I think
of the blade of your body, its index
of freckles. Your shirttail stirred
by the wind giving the day a pulse, blue.
In this hour I think of your words,
It's over cast into the room like a shadow.
The door behind you. The door in front of me,
the room pounded by the same fragile light.

Gertrude Bishop's Diary: Nova Scotia Hospital, 1916

Gertrude Bishop was institutionalized at the Nova Scotia Hospital for a nervous breakdown in June of 1916. She remained there until her death in 1934.

Elizabeth's scream hung like a coat
from the hook of her mouth. Her teeth

browned by tea. The tea. I stare into it—
the saucer, the table, the women in white.

I drop a cube of sugar into the cup
and wait. I am dissolving. My fingers

cut into skin. I have no knife, no calendar.
Where is Elizabeth, the raspberry vinegar,

William's kisses, his hand? My hands?
The purple skirt, the mirror on the bureau,

the white teacup: this is what I remember.
And the scream. The echo of the scream.

Elizabeth. William's face stuck in the portrait
above the fire. Mother's hair struck

like a piano. The piano watching the room
like an eye. The clock ticking. The hands.

My scream hanging in the hot air,
the elm trees choking the window. I am alone

in a bed topped with a blue pad.
I have no trunk, no box. I am the box.

I am becoming the women robed in white,
clouds waiting to be filled with rain.

Mother sends me packages addressed
in purple cursive, Elizabeth's arm

draped around the package, the post office,
her thin arm going all the way home.

No matter which way I turn in bed
I face a wall. I am dissolving. I am dissolved.

The Bed Is The Landscape The Woman

The bed is the landscape the woman
knows best. The light turns the bed

into a museum of the day, all
of them she's spent like this,

in the fibers like a stain. All day
she's wanted nothing, no water,

no chicken. Outside a man whistles
for his dog. The dog knows when

to be good, knows the man will feed him
and place the bowl of water

on its spot on the floor. The woman
walks in the dark for a glass.

The window's glass. The mirror. The cube
of ice stuck in the white tray.

The neighbors talk by the stove.
A meal is being prepared

with lemon juice and knives. The woman
feels dirty living like this, watching

the sheet hang from the bed,
the fan blowing the sheet, her hand

moving her other hand like this.

Cut

In the mirror I see the alphabet
cut by a scalpel, the letters falling
into the sink, P then Q. The glass
cut, the way the eye cuts its way
across the face and back again:
mascara swipe, lipstick's pink suede.
Now the caesura. Now the going through.
What he didn't do, no, what he did.
Never mind the past, the throat, the jaw,
the breath cutting into the air as hackberry.
Still, I am good. I fold it over again and again
inside my mouth until it's origami
on my tongue. A lung filled by prayer.
Who am I to have deserved that leaving?
Who am I to stand here, looking
into the mirror as if to find myself there?
The eye cuts its way across the face
and back again. The faucet drips.
Even as I turn, I turn to look back.

Sick of Looking Out the Window, I Think of Sophia Tolstoy's Candle

Hail is a summertime phenomenon
is the only fact I recall
from that class I failed on weather
so I know it's sleet pinging
against the window, not hail,
making me absolutely certain
of one thing. The dictionary
defines ping as *to make or cause*
to make a ping which is like saying
a hand is a hand, a mouse
is a mouse, a house is a home.
The woman in B-5 flushes her toilet.
The radiator is a whistling kettle.
The tea steeped too long and now
I'm disgusted. Time's so fragile,
fate so finicky. The only people who eat
fish sticks are picky children
with unclean hands. When does childhood end?
There is no certificate, no gold ribbon,
no stamped signature from God
who has better things to do:
someone in Montana needs a kidney,
the big game's in fifteen minutes.
If the next minute looks exactly
like this one, I'd like that.
I'd like to delete *How to read palms*
from my search history. My shallow life
line suggests a susceptibility to disease.
It's true I've been known to step off a train
into a harsh wind and cough.
Or was that Anna Karenina? Each night
Sophia Tolstoy copied *War and Peace*
by candlelight. Is that what love looks like,
a life? Or is that tingling carpal tunnel?
The dominant hand produces the worst pain.
The wrist easily becomes a knife.
The day gets cut in half. I stare into it.

Sleeping Alone

My window open, the moon
cutting across my throat,

my hair: no matter which way
I shift in bed, I am deeper

& deeper in my body. Parts
of you filled hours—

sometimes June,
a walk through the field.

Your house that I once carried
in my hands: green paint,

the magnolia tree
in your front yard,

air conditioner hum.
I should have known someone

who knew everything about me
could never love me: the pills,

the bottle of wine next
to my bed. Even now

something within me closes, locks.
I strike a match to light the room.

As in what the room was.
As in what it can be.

Knife

The sky holds its wrist
up to the knife of the storm.

I sit on the edge as if waiting
for a voice to fill the room.

Clouds weigh on the trees,
the air burning like the moment

before two people look
at each other. Rain darkens the road,

the light bulb burns out
over the kitchen sink.

I listen to the sky empty,
waiting to believe

I am a woman, unfolding in air.

Single Girl's Prayer

Father of galaxies above,
mute the gunfire in my head,

what he said about my body,
the way he rolled away

from me in the night.
How do I sleep without a glass

of water on the other nightstand?
Who am I to stand here

at the window with my coffee
and let all this dust fall over me.

Juniper and lamb's ear, lavender
and boxwood, be the small desires

that call me to wake. Hallelujah
in my hair, a hymnal in the palm

of my hand. Morning as erasure,
his absence fixed in amber. I want only

to want so little. I want only
to breathe in this irrevocable hour.

Marigolds

In buttercream light
I put the coffee on as the starlings
outside my window sing their soft song.
I turn on the news to hear the voice
of our president with my eggs.
Almost everything that I've wanted to happen
has happened: wine in the gardens
bursting with marigolds,
each hour I am still breathing.
But I know this can't go on forever.
Maybe I'll meet someone new.
Tell him to put the coffee on
as he embraces the morning
with a full heart that could never be mine.

Anxiety

I see him on the edge
of the room. Here now,

the pills in my hand
devoid of all color,

ocean of salt in my palm,
circles of bone.

Soon I will stand outside
this minute

when all this waiting
brims with rain.

At the Poetry Reading

A cartoon heart hangs above
your heads when you touch her

in the middle of the room
we all breathe in.

In the movie version, this is when
the female protagonist finds

her way out of the room
of her old longing. She joins

aerobics classes and learns
how to cook beef tartare.

She gets her hair cut
and orders a martini at lunch.

I stand on the edge of the room
and stare into the glistening red

of the heart: your body, her body,
the air split by this turning point.

If you were to walk towards me
and place your hand on my arm,

I would feel the electric shock:
lemon juice on my paper cut,

Windex in my coffee, your words
spun like brambles in my ears.

I watch you leave with her,
your hand pressed to the small

of her back. I don't know my way
out of it—back when I stood

in the middle of the room with you,
on a warm night I thought was endless.

Ready at the Touch

You imagine your ex-lover in bed watching TV with the remote in his hand.

Now he nods off next to her, her chest slowly rising and falling.

You've stopped trying to forget the shape of his shoulders in the dark.

You press the glass of wine to your lips. The wheel of nights you've spent like this.

What's there to make of this silence, this lack of touch?

A drop of wine slides down the mouth of the bottle and stains the table red.

How can silence weigh this much? What touch?

Maybe you imagine too eagerly. Or maybe her hands hold all that you know of the body,
your body still but ready at the touch.

Touch Me

in this umbral hour
in which my famished heart

continues to fill the silence
of the room. I've been here

before: watching the gilt
afternoon give way to the stars

rolled across the sky like dice.
Or did you paint them?

A splatter. One by one.
I want to believe, but how can I

when you say the woman
comes from the man,

that the woman was meant
to breathe after. Still,

I can't ignore the red oaks,
the roses bruised by this light.

As I exhale, a man
inhales, and the earth

continues to breathe.

Ars Poetica

Blue lamp, cloud of wax,
picture of my grandmother

in her fur coat, mirror in which
I find myself in my bedroom

in this morning light, slow fade
of lemon chiffon. I wake early

to write poems in mocha
swagger. You sleep

in your bed with another
woman you seem to not want

to hurt. I slide in and out
of longing to remember

your hands on my breasts,
the way you said my name

in the dark. I want to forget
that middle, that glide

into your callousness.
With each couplet I can write myself

farther and farther away from you.
My empty mug fills with sunglow.

The light illuminates my face,
not as you saw me, but as I am now,

ecstatic just to breathe.

Morning Light

Starlings outside my window,
lemon wedge, I wait for the kettle's

soprano solo. I find a bolt of gauze,
a memory to wrap myself in.

His body in the morning light, yes—
no, his threats. The way his voice changed

when he told me I had misunderstood
his touch. The night he told me we

were nothing. I take the tea
to my room to get ready for the day:

polka-dotted dress, lipstick called
Black Honey. I look in the mirror and try

to accept this image of myself, to remember
my mother saying the more you struggle

the faster you sink. I lock the front door
and walk to work, counting the pumpkins

on porches, the maples on fire, wondering how
or when I will stop saying his name. I let it out

into the air, the air I walk through.

November, Evening

Now the burning, now the fall.

The maple tree a heart confessed.

Yes, I think of you often,

at night. But what of that?

Already I'm forgetting

your touch, the architecture of your hands.

The candle snuffed out, the stars

rolled across the sky like dice.

If you think of me, you don't

tell me about it. Yet here I am,

thinking of you

and not telling you about it.

The artery pumps blood away

from the heart, smoke rises

into the air, eventually

the maple is devoid of all color.

The heart can confess

but with time it must confess again:

yes, I think of you,

often, when I'm in the dark.

Matchstick

All day the bed, the memory of the splinters
of his fingers, the way he filled my hunger

and carved it out again. What will I become?
The curtains a stillness I watch intently.

I want you to make me new again, to paint
a portrait of a woman for whom you can hold

your breath. I wait for the sky to singe me
with the colors of the season. The matchsticks

on the table wait to be struck, the candle waits
to be burned all the way through slowly.

If I told you what I was, if I showed you the pills
I place on my tongue, if I looked in the mirror

and saw only the glass, my blue towel hanging
from its hook, would you keep me, the edge I stand at?

As if a promise could remain a promise.
As if a window could continue to cut out the air.

The Color Green

Stars held up by magnets,
astronaut wave, Tuesday galaxy—

we give in to the same desire:

what the body can do,
what we can ask of the body.

How the light falls. How
your arm becomes fragmented

by the mirror hanging next
to your bed. For a long time

I forget to hurt, the face behind it,

how to describe the color green.
Green the color of the house

I used to wake in, the color
of the sheets on his bed.

In your bed I am someone

I want to wake up to, your arm
reaching to turn off the light—

The Color Red

Have the maples turned red in Virginia,
has the river flooded from all the rain?

Your sister tells me your aren't eating
or sleeping. I'd like to think it's because

of me, my familiar absence.
Each night I am slow to sleep, slow

to forget the rise and fall of your body.
It's not enough to say this. I wear

the red dress you like more than I should,
read the letters you send me

in your horrible, cramped handwriting.
North Carolina is a silhouette I want

to fill with color. I don't know how
to explain the days when I do nothing

but remember the bones of the trees
outside your window. I circle

the weekends I will see you
in red on my calendar, the days

we will spend talking on the rocks
by the river. The night is warm here.

A small wind blows my curtains
into the room. The maples

are green and the river flows
as it does without you.

White Boxes

The woman fills a glass from the tap.
The kitchen smells like eucalyptus.
The woman doesn't need much. That's a lie.
The man hasn't touched the woman in months.

At night she thinks of his fingers reaching
to turn off the light. The man rises
from his mattress in another city. Another state.
The calendar on the fridge is full

of little white boxes with nothing in them.
The woman needs something to fill them with.
Something: the man, a train, the county fair,
a cucumber, the world's largest light bulb.

The woman looks for the pills under the sink
but she can't find them. The medicine cabinet.
The little drawer by the bed. The bed is white,
clean, an aisle, soap on skin, gin.

Gravity continues to press down the hours.
Someone in the upstairs apartment is singing
& playing guitar. The woman follows a red string
to the other city, its river & mattress.

The woman holds the pillow to her chest, turning
in her gray t-shirt to stare at the naked wall.

Thunderstorm on a Sunday

The sky indigo & raw, I drive
back to the state I live in now

away from you. Haybales border
the line of the road, curving into the clouds.

Watching the wind whip up from inside
your house during the tornado warning,

you could see I was scared.
This afternoon, past peeling barns

& weather vane spin,
past locked cars & lemon chess pie.

I drive back to my apartment, my radiators,
my succulents soaking in sun.

Gin Rummy

The blue sheets, the sun crawling
through the window, our heads

resting on one pillow. Call it
wreckage, call it the falling through.

Here now the window is a canvas.
Never have I so wanted to be touched:

his jacket on the chair, cards stacked
on the coffee table. Ace of hearts.

Ice melting in a glass. The way the song
pushes his newness towards me.

I choose this moment to stop
remembering what I don't want

to remember: the train running along
your bedroom, your breath in my lungs.

Now I subtract the hours that came
before this. I draw the two of spades.

I'm about to be touched.
I exhale the second before I know it.