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

ASK ME TO STAY

by

Logen Cure

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Approved by

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For Nandra Perry

APPROVAL PAGE

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

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Residence or Refuge.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Rest.

I.

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

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

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

but that you love these.

II.

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

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

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

I helped her choose  
    new sheets

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

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



The Last Time I Saw Her.

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

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

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

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

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

"It's not broken," I said.

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

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

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

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

Braggadocio.

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

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

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

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

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

This is How I Know.

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

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

your hair smells like cinnamon.

Still.

The woman behind the counter asks *Together?*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

turns back,

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

Merciful.

*For Parker, my dog.*

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

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

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

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

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

In the Attic, Above My Head.

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

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

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

Crash-land.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Sliding Doors* Exhibit at the Tate Modern.

She took my hand,  
of a memory than

more the imitation  
an act of affection,

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

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

and we watched it split.  
no pushing against

It took no force,  
or pulling away.

There was no sound  
footfalls advancing

aside from our  
in unison.

We simply witnessed together  
the only way to stop it

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

The gap between us  
allowing us to step through it

stretched and opened  
to the place where that image,

beautiful and familiar,

disappeared.

Allen.

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

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

He never stopped at yellow lights.

He taught me how to ash out the window.

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

He kept a weapon behind his driver's seat.

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

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

He showed me the blood

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

*Protect yourself, he said.  
Never forget that.*

He took care of my girlfriend and me the Sunday

we did mushrooms, watched us rage and riot inside.

He pointed out the prettiest colors, textures that

undulated and throbbed, tried to help me

unclench my jaw, her unclench her fists.

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

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

my girlfriend left for work, still tripping.

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

Allen, I said,

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

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

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

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

at the hard topography of his still, sleeping frame,

his heavy warmth, his stout, certain arms.

He reminded me of the way my hands smell

after I've climbed a tree.

I eavesdropped on his blood, listened for the person

sprinting with a stick down a chain link fence,

the screams of the boy,

the sick, dull noise of body striking

pavement, foot striking

body, the familiar roar of his truck.

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

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

Hold On.

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

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

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

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

She pulled me close.

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

College Station, Texas.

How clear that rumble and cry of the train  
seemed in the hush, when all of campus  
slept around us.

The steady, unfailing interval of street lights  
illuminated everything –  
antiquated buildings lined with looming  
bas-relief animal skulls,  
the wide face of the clock tower,  
austere, masculine statues.

We could never see the stars  
when we walked alone at night.  
I never minded.

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

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

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



## Abstinence

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

Condolences.

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

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

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

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

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

To Shed.

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

I should have forced you to feel  
me draining.

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

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

                          I wrote countless treaties  
                          you never signed –

  you were so content  
  with waging war.

I should have stained your sheets.

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

Thanks for Lunch.

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

You Said Yes.

Maybe I did –

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

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

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

but you still had to overpower me.

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

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

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

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

Maybe that said "yes" to you.

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

I believe you now.

Hometown.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Landmine.

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

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

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

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

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

it could happen any time.

Is 206 Enough?

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

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

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

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

These are things that are willing to negotiate.

But there is no bargaining with my bones.

Letters to Petrarch

Dear Sir,

You couldn't have known.

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

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

This is how we mourn.

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

Laura –

because that was all you had of her.

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

Laura.

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

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

So I will do my best to tell you.

Lauds.

That morning,  
like every morning previous,  
she woke –

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

that I would wake to find her  
living.

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

And I thanked her –

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

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

(We were warned against  
this kind of worship.)

That morning,  
she opened her lovely eyes,

and I believed the sun had risen.

Dear Sir,

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

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

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

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

For her, I could be so  
still.

None.

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

(It was January.)

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

(It was enough then.)

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

(We were only eighteen.)

We tangled together,  
    her laughter bright  
    and clear.

Dearest Sir,

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

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

Eucharist.

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

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

I attempted to count the bones  
in her fingers.

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

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

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

(This is how  
she learned it all.)

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

a look that said simply –

*please.*

Sir,

You'd never know it,

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

Vespers.

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

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

(We were simply unprepared.)

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

(like January).

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

(We were almost  
    home.)

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

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

Dear Sir,

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

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

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

coaxing lock after  
lock for her.

Rosary.

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

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

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

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

Sir,

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

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

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

I haven't lost them yet.

Compline.

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

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

(This never changed.)

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

I whispered to her,  
urgent,  
grateful –

prayer before sleep.

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

Oh Sir,

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

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

*Would you stay, please?*

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

She only asked me to stay that one time.

Once was enough.

Vigils.

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

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

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

(We were so hastily written.)

Tell me,  
how did you sleep?

How did you sleep without her?

Post Script.

The dreams have not stopped.  
She arrives entirely intact –

ask any of  
my senses –

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

(I could sculpt  
her in my sleep.)

She is always the most  
perfect representation of herself –

always walking  
away from me.