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All My Ghosts is a collection of poems that looks to the past as a point of reference for imagination and speculation about death, loneliness, and hope. The collection is divided into three sections that, for the poems, represent a past, present, and future. The poems include meditations on death, geographic displacement, and a lost sense of place to create a sense of wandering, a tactile enjoyment and simultaneous bereavement of the human experience which is intrinsically embedded with the inability to hold on to life and insists we let go everything. The poems inhabit real and imagined spaces, just as the voices in these poems linger in the body or the mind asking what is real, and what is solid enough to cling to.

ALL MY GHOSTS

by

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APPROVAL PAGE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
I. A COLD BRIGHT BODY.....	1
A COLD BRIGHT BODY.....	2
ELEGY FOR AFTERMATH	3
HORSES	4
QUIET TOWN.....	5
WISHBONE.....	6
PANTONE.....	7
GENERATIONS.....	8
GRAVITROPISM.....	9
ON MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE	10
EVENT INCHWORM.....	11
II. ALL MY GHOSTS.....	12
TALKING TO GHOSTS	13
FRANCESCA WOODMAN	14
AND THEN THE SNOW	15
GALLERY ATTENDANT	16
MALBEC	17
PERSISTENCE.....	18
WOMAN IN A SLIP	19
ROOMMATE WANTED	20
ANIMAL BONES.....	21
MOORED	22
MATCH	23
INSTINCT	24
EL CAMINITO (THE LITTLE WALK).....	25
THE MOUNTIAN MAKERS.....	26
III. THE PINCH.....	27
PAR FOR THE COURSE.....	28
ON AIR & RAIN	29
DOMESTIC	30
WE ARE THE SPLIT	31
BLIGHTED OVUM	32
TOUCHED.....	33

TO CRACK AND CRAZE.....	34
SCARS.....	35
LAUNDROMAT.....	36
BOWTIE.....	37
HOUSEHOLD.....	38
UPSTATE.....	39
DRIVING ON 321.....	40
THE INVENTION OF ANXIETY.....	41
WINTER BIRD,.....	42

I

A COLD BRIGHT BODY

A COLD BRIGHT BODY

When I die, I hope abandoning my body will
come with rewards. My fingertips will find

black water, my spine's question mark
will answer itself like a voice in a mine shaft.

After all, I've loved climbing into the darkest
spaces, sliding down the laundry chute.

I've hidden in attics, beneath cellar stairs, laid
still as a corpse behind a rotting log during games

of 'Kick the Can.' In a cedar-lined trunk
I stifled an equal amount of fear and pleasure.

And though my habit is to leave my body
behind in sleep, like a keepsake quilt, folded

and heavy-lidded, it has never been something
I've sought for warmth, no. I'd recognize

its cold, bright breathing anywhere.

ELEGY FOR AFTERMATH

Tonight the ambulance is prepared
for your body, its blue lights
delicate as ripened jewelweed,

as welcome as the first cut
of the day across the sea where
fishermen sharpen their knives,

blade glinting on blade. So many
hours inside the infinite shifts of night
and day that drive you around

the bend where a horse to ride
stands in a meadow, deep
sway of her belly a perfect dappled

convex arc. Taut, sun-warmed,
her musk, and the fluted sleeves
of grass you know are going to seed.

HORSES

There must be a girl who cares for those horses.
Could be, they are like brothers to her.
Swishing their tails to stir the air, how many times
has she brushed their flanks and seen them shiver?

I drove to work, late, again. That same barn rose
in the distance as I crested the hill. In the field,
the horses were passive and mournful. Their stillness
demanded nothing, their necks arched low

toward the earth and its empty blanket of dew. I
imagined myself among them. I was naked, but not cold
and they cared for me the way I needed—left no prints
on my spirit, released no anxiety in my body,

only joy as I passed between. When I was called by name
and led to the barn, I went willingly. And later,
someone came to touch our bodies, saddle our backs,
and feast on the animal spirit that rests in black ink eyes.

QUIET TOWN

The celery root's been grated
the codfish cut into fleshy chunks

it's better if the potatoes have eyes
and the cream is still warm from the udder

eat raisins to find something sweet
in the throat this is how we've been taught

to know existence by how it hangs on
its hooks the aprons in the pantry

the coats in the mudroom where wel komen
and gutten nogen stamp their boots the guests

the children are fed nectar so they won't
remember bitterness we stock up

on fables put the dishes away wipe the kitchen clean
slide the knives back into the block

WISHBONE

Pity the bird those incisions that force it
open so completely. Throat, belly, and vent,

viscera factory-wrapped in waxy paper,
unpacked in homes to flavor dressing,

or gravy. Once the bird is eaten, we dig
out the fused collarbone and let it dry

on a window sill. Its never felt sunlight
through the breast, and light is never found

living near the heart's red globe. Yet, we
beg to grasp the prongs of the wishbone,

yearn for what we want in the luxury
of pulling apart what we cannot eat.

PANTONE

I once walked away with handfuls of forsythia
during early morning fog and into the unapologetic
lighthouse of your chest and its ode to yellow.

I've learned that lux operon will lie
inside the bodies of firefly squid on a beach
in Japan. Tourist arrive as night drapes

its blue-black quilt. A doctor in Mesquite
once told me I needed more of the color green
that, after years in Texas, I'd seen too many fields

the color of birds' chests left open
to the sun. It's true. So much light was like forgetting
your penknife in an asylum with mint-spackled halls.

Two years ago, a fortune-teller in Austin
said wait for the walls to come down. I listened
for what I wanted to hear. Her face

the purple-gray of slate after years
of rain. Her eyes, a rainbow of color
like feathers, hollow as quills.

GENERATIONS

I come from a long line of women who collapse
into self, who know of potato peels and black shoes.
The eldest daughter born into distance, frailty,
and the shape made by a thumb and forefinger before the pinch.
I believe in the vaulted ceiling of nothingness and a bedroom
that circles back on itself, where worn
sheets and battery acid feed carnivorous memories.
One summer I used a ladder to escape. I battled
the jaws of that house, climbed through the skin
of a window and descended into night air painted
by the smells of chlorine and beer.
I come from random acts of isolation and carnival
tunes, from a woman who wrung chickens'
necks and told her granddaughter Zimno, Cold
placing hot bricks in bed before she climbed in.
I come from grocery bags filled with pignuts, broken
locks, and gypsy moths chewing a way through earth
as determined as any to get across, get done, get reborn.
I come from hands held high in ecstasy and a mother
obsessed with the white lengths of cloth that roll
from heaven, from winter, from God. Tell me what she
said about the glacier stuck in her eye. I will not
bury myself there. I will not hammer the edge of infinity
to extend it another inch. It is everywhere and I am a bit of nothing
lodged in matter. I come from nothing and to nothing I want to return.

GRAVITROPISM

“what living and buried speech is always vibrating here”
—Walt Whitman

Windows like dirty stars
peering into the neighbor’s yard.
Her fig tree quickening its purple knuckles—
inverted flowers, embassies of seed.

Like summer’s catwalk finale
in her reckless emerald drape & familiar
bursting at the seams. She’s welcomed
every root that’s hummed
its velvet face into towers
of loam and clay. Shattered shale,
rusted nails, last century’s tantrum
beneath our feet.

Forcing ourselves into the gravity
of each other’s chests, we take root.
Here, now, each calla lily white
spool of lust
thrust by instinct when we meet
those faces that whisper
from the same coffins of speech.
Silent conspiracies twist
like veins along a shin,

each seeding into the other, backward
drafting into dark. Crumpled papers
pocketed & cell phones beep
as people walk the streets obsessing
over messages sent and received—
A false handiwork, a glamorous
stunt. Our shadows, endlessly pollinating,
muling the brunt.

ON MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE

A long brown alpaca coat with mothballs
in the pockets. A green and yellow scarf reflected
in the grimy window of the subway car.

The clatter that falls into my ears, or is it
the marathon of my heart, where my father
always strides before me. His bread machine

making the cadence of retirement. We joke
about where the wine goes and I wonder to myself
if the Caribbean might be the last place he swims

as his wife paints a watercolor on the balcony.
She loves him. If putting old photos in a nightstand
is love. This is Boston. Garbage on Tuesdays

and Fridays. Their landlord is vegan. I hear him
on Christmas day as he brings us a fruitcake.
This year, there is no snow. How is it so warm

the world forgets winter? This alpaca coat overtakes
Me. I slip inside. I seem always to be falling
Like the rain that takes the city from me.

It disintegrates, unable to replenish itself. Is washed
of everything I'll have to let go of,
even the city noise as it leaves me behind.

EVENT INCHWORM

There's an inchworm crawling
on a man's shirt collar
as he sits listening to another man
play guitar. The inchworm
scrunches and flattens
its whole being into sine waves,
temporary and everlasting.
The worm reaches out to grasp
a dark oily curl of hair.
How many have I seen in this lifetime:
thousands? just this one?
They dangle from trees,
live their small grand lives.

I want to reach out,
as the musician sings
of clouds and returning,
loves his voice from within
and outside his own voice,
and pluck the inchworm
up and put it in my mouth.
The way I remember it,
everything wants to jump in
and carpet out forever
in a tunneling portamento.
Everything gets pulled apart
inside a black hole.

II

ALL MY GHOSTS

TALKING TO GHOSTS

Go home, ghost, body of slow crows,
you 3AM over-watered succulent
drunk girl on my porch.

The sleep factory's shut down.
You'll have to build a city of abandoned warehouses
to haunt all night long.

FRANCESCA WOODMAN

Oh those photos, that girl
and her haunted looks.
The staring is all mine,
trying to see with my dumb eyes
what she sees before the camera
can catch the sad cacophony
behaving as a naked orchestra
of windows graced into
a New York brick-walled
loft apartment. And the light!
Thick yellow tomb of sunshine
she will only let have the gray
bands of sensation. White on gray,
gray on flesh. Her tender roundness
flecked with grain. How else to explain
such curves in each photo,
a face of half seconds
she obliterates.

AND THEN THE SNOW

Even holding your hand in a balcony
With our student-rate tickets at a rehearsal performance
I couldn't shake the cold,
the city sniffing outside.
Walking away with the piano concerto in my head,
I kept asking,
How do you pronounce Saint-Saens?
Your apartment over the Cuban restaurant
where the owner, missing an arm from a deformity,
was always so much more courageous than me,
piled rice and plantains on everyone's plates.
His conversation left no one alone.
Upstairs in your apartment
I liked to stand and watch the cars
below on the turnpike,
anonymous with speed.
Your classical guitar forgotten on its stand in the corner,
you told me about the time you got locked
in a broken freezer, or a clothes trunk—
I can't remember the particulars—
just that I'd asked you to tell me
something traumatic you'd been through.
Twenty-six,
my worst year,
so much I needed to forgive.
As I stared out the window the city lights
held their breath in the cold.
The traffic at that hour irregular.
People leaving work late, or a bit drunk after cocktails.
I could have been any one of them
with their someone or no one waiting for them at home.

GALLERY ATTENDANT

In their plumage they murmur their epiphanies,
wearing imported heels and holding flutes of bubbly.

The women saunter by with plates of ripe strawberries
past the attendant proudly posted in his gallery.

One by one they leave to view more masterpieces,
untouchable as extinct birds, or watercolors behind glass.

Their voices aerial above his brain where duende
sleeps though few would guess his past, his flourishing ways.

He offers a discrete nod when, from his corner, he regards
the museum director commending the curator by the open bar.

Like a male bowerbird who has failed to attract
though he stands in a bower filigreed and thatched

with the pinks of petals, greens iridescent as wing covers
from beetles' backs and his moustache, in a fine manner,

spans its lonely bridge. When the long evening fades
he takes his final round then up a staircase polished a thousand

times by soles of shoes applying their hushed litany
to passages of paintings hung frozen like past centuries.

MALBEC

The shop owner brings us another bottle
as we sit across our table, the wine
between us a pool reflecting
an inverse world where we are making love
to salvage something from the spell
of this ruinous vacation. Buenos Aires
has teased us through each barrio, a richness
barren between us, the motion behind you
so constant I must grip inside as if I am filled
with the brown, choppy waters of the Tigre.

Valderrobes, Trapiche, Andeluna,
we've flown to Mendoza but we can't leave
behind our clouds of broken language, our lips
dull with words too rich to loose
from our mouths. Instead we ride yellow
rickety bicycles to see the vineyards.
You learn that the proper way to water malbec
roots is to drown them so the purple fruit
can suck like thirsty children left
in a drainage ditch. For ten days we sip
color down to the dregs and still

we never touch. When I am
naked it is only the heat of foreign air
learning what my body desires.
Volumes of Latin touching my flesh: carnis,
auris, cicatricis. I am spent. Like having
raked out gravel in a pit when what I want
is to lay armfuls of greens on a kitchen
counter, open the doors to a breeze,
pick the last roses of the season,
fill a single glass to the brim.

PERSISTENCE

Evening's ashes have fallen from
the grate into chilled gray heaps
the bare floor lays in straight rows
of oak sleeping grain to knot beneath
the dust of days she wakes as morning
lopes through the marshes its long
arrival sudden with speechless warmth
filling the sparse view through
the kitchen window where a stand
of trees looms motionless and brisk
coffee is downed with toast it doesn't take
long to get ready when you live alone
when fall's cracked its whip through
the air the scent of leaves is nothing
to be kept for the few terse miles
she drives to the crumbling old asylum
converted into a state-run school
for incarcerated boys the half deserted
property razor-wired and waiting
buildings shuttered and ready to be
forgotten as memory's echo fades
the little girl she had been when
brought here to visit a grandmother
in her final days she could no longer
remember names or face the long winding
lengths of decades that daily passed
the building now edged with neglect
and from the classroom where she sits
its roof behind her sagging

WOMAN IN A SLIP

She can't remember
how she found herself here,
no longer interested in greeting
how shabbily each day is put together.
Even her meals feel dusted over,
and her fingertips absent-mindedly brush
her clothes as if to remove some stain.
Her face is half locked in a memory
that keeps replaying across her features.
She is clad in nothing
more than the room's cold air,
like an embrace where some petulant idea
keeps creeping.
And although she looks
out the window as she's getting dressed,
and that rectangle of sky keeps falling
into her, she no longer feels
anyone could be watching her.

ROOMMATE WANTED

It is the year of the answered newspaper ad
the year I've told myself to not need anyone
I've begun to shut myself in my room
when he's home I meditate on a mattress
a window full of street lamplight against my back
out there Chinese lanterns have been strung up
on a neighbor's porch the sound of a dog barking
and a subway car dragging it's breaks
on a steel track in the distance
The roommate keeps asking if I'm a Buddhist
says his ex-wife is Buddhist
at night I can smell his cigarette smoke through the walls
hear his television sometimes
a pot of Hungarian stew is left boiling in the kitchen
I can't stop reaching out expecting the best
and worst to happen in daylight I make my way
through the city watching the dark
and formless shadows I step
into an imports shop to buy incense
after ringing me up the shopkeeper
hands me a stone carving
It's Ganesh for you he says
a tiny elephant fitted inside my fist

ANIMAL BONES

In my twenties I'd go to Newbury Street to stare at the schizophrenic reapplying her lipstick in the doorway of a café, linger in a shop full of relics & gargoyles trying to determine how and why I'd grown so superstitious. Live well, I've been told, fold your socks into pairs fresh from the dryer. Don't paint around appliances. Learn how to sharpen your knives. If you keep the used rags of your past you'll always ponder the right times to dispose of them. When is something dirty enough to throw away? To heal herself my friend's mother-in-law has hung animal bones in New Mexico and built a sweat lodge. Inside everyone there must be a piece of midnight we bask in as freely as any sun-bleached bones dangling in moonlight. We forget how to feel like strangers, we warn someone that the coyotes are too close these days, that mystery inhabits our scars. If you are wise you lose all sense of boundary and walk everywhere without shoes. We are the true origin of the sky.

MOORED

Tim's girlfriend flays my catfish
beneath moonlight while it's still living.

I look away when she slaps that fish
against the dock and swear I can't eat

a bite. Lamplight—liquid as Abita beer
we drink. A storm travels low against

the earth, and makes our hair rise up
off our heads. When the wind starts,

I listen for the crack of brittle pines.
Rotting branches make the best bonfires.

I don't build one in a clearing of new grass,
but on the beach when nights are cold

and I'm bare enough to remember.

MATCH

Syracuse could be the saddest place under a bruised-pallet sky. Driving through its center, children wear expressions like vacant porches. They reminded me

of that dream where I'm struggling underwater hauling something nameless in a wheelbarrow. In the crosswalk, a woman carries too many bags to be sane, and a girl bares her midriff

where a tattoo frightens up over her hip. So many faces spill through the seams of my amorphous world as we bubble past in an Impala. The museum closed, we drive to get hotdogs

passing Onondoga Lake, one of the most polluted in the country. I wonder how much is down there making its mercurial apologies beneath the weight of some forgotten

sin, desperate as the guy we met last night at a bar. Trying to impress with his match tricks, he stuck three sulfurous heads together with a ripe blue spark, two attached to one

by their tips. When the single match was held straight up, the other two spread apart and came together like a gymnast's legs, a bright flame cruising their sinuous lengths.

At times I think I know why some of us check our hands To see if we're hauling extra weight: we're the upright match, the one just for burning, the one that makes the whole trick work.

INSTINCT

I don't mind that the cilantro I've planted here
has barely taken root, that the Swiss chard is thin-stalked,

burnt to a lattice by slugs.

Better to keep in mind how I'd begged my parents
for piano lessons, then quit because the living

room was too cold,

and the teacher's scolding's were another needless
thing to rehearse for. I hadn't exactly asked, but I still thought

you were what I'd wanted.

At night I'd watch our dog whimper and chase
cars in his sleep. The arugula by the edge of our drive reseeded

itself. Our window

with the broken lock, once a cause for worry,
became a relief the night I was all that was left out. Though

I hated to admit, when you'd moved out, and I'd sold

the house, and taken back

my maiden name, I almost drove the moving
truck over the rosemary bush, a site of so many battles

with a nest of fire ants,

but their castling between the roots and their
souls full of formic acid were already furious enough.

EL CAMINITO (THE LITTLE WALK)

Above the inoperable fireplace
is a painting of El Caminito
I bought one afternoon
when I was content enough
to follow my husband
through Buenos Aires streets
then down into the decaying
subway station where we stood
listening to the sounds
of each arrival and departure

That day we were tourists
Which gave us permission
to stare like children.
Maybe this is why I cannot forget
the painter in La Boca
who grasped a paintbrush
between his toes. The elderly man
who sat nearby, who I thought must be
the painter's father,
owned a face so patiently worn
it resembled the facades
of last century's Buenos Aires.
His great knuckled hands lay in his lap
Like two vises while his crippled son
gathered paint onto a brush
and set it to a piece of gypsum board
with urgency that expressed more
than what he could no longer say.

THE MOUNTAIN MAKERS

My ancestors made washboard
rhythms, bells with sonic peals, cranes
to build. Men walked on girders
while horses pressed their hooves
with urgent blood. Into the city they carried
a constant furnace, fed languages
of metals and coal.

To gravity's throat all things taste
the same, dissolve into the force
of stone. Tectonic murmurs, immigrant
pebbles the size of cities, and man's
rectangular plots scoured clean.

And the sinkholes wait.
And we shovel a hill with no greenery,
a tumultuous path
with no space for roots.
It can only be healed by pressure and heat,
Your teeth grind to dust
long before the stones do.

III

THE PINCH

PAR FOR THE COURSE

You looked like the man I had married
or, the man I was supposed to love.
Is this a mistake?, I thought, as we rode
our bicycles through the golf course
dodging sprinkler fire, keeping my mouth shut
and the mosquitoes out of my teeth.
Even as the trail dipped between trees
and I fell behind, you took
each curve without looking back.
You were far ahead and I had nothing left
to tell you but I kept pedaling,
because it was what you expected.

ON AIR & RAIN

When I was invisible, I flew
with my husband to Argentina,
where the rain asked me if
I was a bullfrog, or, if I'd ever
been a river. Remember,
it said, when we didn't know
we existed inside everything?
I tested each sound to see
if it were a door I could open,
a threshold I could flood
to ask my husband how many
sounds spoke to him, or if
he'd grown accustomed
to eating wind. But instead
I became the sound of the air,
claiming a side of the bed
like I was the one imperfect note.

DOMESTIC

The smell of pot roast lingers in the clatter
of the Southern kitchen's embrace.

She has stacked the white plates, fitting
their concavities together. Mid-afternoon,

cicadas' hum rises with the hot breeze,
Sunlight presses through the window

and she swears beneath summer heat
that could melt the glaze from the bone

china she has held beneath the surface
and washed. No trace of the meal

once offered, each plate then stacked
on its sisters in the dumb dark.

Through the swinging kitchen door
she walks, wringing the damp

dishcloth in her hands, to the laundry
line stretched taut between two live

oaks, the fields just beyond. For a moment
she's the brightest object in the yard,

her body split along a hairline fracture.

WE ARE THE SPLIT

These days I'm not sure how to survive.
Always slightly out of step, doing it all wrong.
I once heard someone say, I haven't suffered enough
to write blues music, and in that moment
I longed for innocence to teach me again
what I've always resisted—that even birds'
eggs are fragile for a reason.

Thinking of you, in my kitchen,
I put on an apron to cut the onions in half.
When my throat constricts
it's better to think of a night sky full of bats
(and dinner for bats.)
Sometimes absence is therapy.

In her window my new neighbor
struggles to lower her dingy blinds.
She says she likes the alley behind our houses
because it's quiet, that after the party
everyone will go home to their own noise,
an emptiness that is never still.

As much as I want, there is no returning
how much of life is spent despairing
over what's disposable, the slow
mushroom of regret that I can never own
enough yellow thread to make me believe
I can swallow a mouthful of light.

BLIGHTED OVUM

When I hear the doctor use the term,
I think I've nourished graffitied

rows of shop windows, grates
drawn closed, rows of trees

felled by Dutch elm disease,
side streets barren with stumps.

A blotch my body had spent years
drawing out of the hard stone

of existence, which responded
in equal measure to my embrace.

TOUCHED

I'm talking to Jesus again. It's worked in the past. A bad tooth. A house to sell. I've woken with scraped knees. I've cut off all my hair and can't reattach the locks. I am an infected mess. I can't get back the keys I've been handing over to the new tenants my entire life. I want to know why existence feels like I'm feeding my diabetes biscuits with honey hoping to ignore the mustard-seed faith a witness swore she saw in me one afternoon. I was eleven, Pentecostal in a white dress. Inside me I hid a nest of wasps, a sponge soaked in salt water, and the corpse of a girl. There were so many doors to open but the woman standing on the platform looked at me and knocked on my chest with all her raptures. Later I swore I could speak in tongues—a gift where words lose their brain-spoken meaning instead troubling only Jesus' heavenly senses. Years later I spoke in that language high on the foreignness of salvation. My soul was a banquet of treasure and junk that just needed a little straightening up. Listen, I told myself, you're not from around here and if you let your mind unravel like light you will find you are made of everything you've ever loved. We can't sustain anything else.

TO CRACK AND CRAZE

“But swinging doesn’t bend them
down to stay.”

--Robert Frost (Birches)

Some have said that truth may come
looking for you, have said something

beautiful about girls on hands and knees.
But there is nothing beautiful

about a woman who has been subdued
because she has lost her way,

staring at the ground, making nothing
of herself. Strength will greet

strength and what was once tender
will be there to remind you the grip

and chafe are what make the woman.

SCARS

Scars heal more slowly these days,
maybe they are not meant to fade.
I pretend I am wise, recognize
the silhouettes of youth
and the unhealthy practice
of running away. I've worn
the laurel wreath of amnesia
and from what I've seen
it comes back to haunt.
What is it that we've swallowed,
mother's quiet despair,
father's blackouts?
companions chewed like gristle
until we can no longer speak
of inheritance, the silences that ordain.

LAUNDROMAT

I read a book, feel a stack of quarters
in my pocket, pry a little into people's lives
by looking at how they wear their faces,
their clothes piled high in their carts, inching
past. I could reach out and touch her,
the woman with three loads of wash
and hair like patent leather.
I could slip a few more quarters
in her dryer, watch her life fall in a circle.
But I'm dead center, never making contact

except when my life spills in the way.
When I die surely someone will have to stop
and walk the last few miles for me, the bills,
the food in the fridge, the shutting down. Doesn't
everyone keep a box of treasures: a pressed rose,
foreign coins, or an infant's sock, a collection
significant only to them? To make heads or tails
would be like looking in a laundry basket to determine
what someone believes they deserve, or, by watching
them fold their clothes, how deeply they love.

BOWTIE

for my brother

Do you remember when you lived in Mint Plaza
And I made lemon cupcakes for you and your girlfriend?
Matthew insisted on taking me dancing
that night even though I was too tired. The way you said
Dude sounded like you wanted to punch him.
The next afternoon we all went to the Blue Bottle Coffee Shop
and marveled at the five-light siphon bar
from Japan with its glass globes, bamboo paddles
and brass trim. I stood next to you when we ordered,
so close my arm brushed your shirtsleeve.
I stared a long time at the espresso foam in my cup.
In it was a design of a leaf I could have stepped on
in the street. Chris, when I left my husband,
you told me that part of you was jealous. When I waited
for more you said you'd walked San Francisco wearing
a bowtie with your leather jacket, that strangers
had complimented you. A knotted piece of fabric
at your throat like the possibility of a new direction
or, like me, the end of waiting for someone else
to make a difficult decision.

HOUSEHOLD

Home with suitcase
and four sacks of groceries
she's bought to keep her
the money spent always a little
too much the heat has been turned off
for days the cold has curled into pockets
inhabited drawers hung itself
between blouses in the closet
the rugs send a chill through her feet
there is a barrenness to living alone
no one else could have left
the sugar bowl empty time circulates
in rudimentary shapes across the clock's face
whole lives unattended as she flexes
her mind's unnecessary chatter
she unsacks the groceries looks at how
she left at the apartment the tiny
bit of milk in the refrigerator
enough she thinks
to get me through the week

UPSTATE

We've used the past out of this old house,
though the past was its only possession.
A blue tarp services the roof with its foreign tongue
clicking in ripples. There is so much

in need of constant repair. The house shudders
when I open the door, come home to you and the infinite
cast-off and broken items: couches, books,
our windows brighten in evening's dark.

We walk on the tongue and groove
wood floors that reject the varnish. Porches
and lintels sag. The panes need to be washed.
When the first snow falls, the world feels

like a violin slowly being dismantled. Putting
our bodies together seems nostalgic, a way
to release the pressure, the slow gesture of living.
Inside, we are bones waiting to be found.

DRIVING ON 321

We drive to the lake, past a condemned house and its broken barn. In its empty finery, its broken windows and mantle clocks, a girl drifts from room to room singing. And the sound of a ladder rattles in the distance, to build something new or repair something old. The empty hours we drive together to forget. What we talk about is love and the child we've lost. All our fears begin and end as we ride up over the hills. Sometimes I touch the back of your neck. Several times you kiss my hand where the IV left a bruise. It's the last visible reminder of the little curve we made of each other. I want to be at the ends of our lives already. I want to know if we will make it.

THE INVENTION OF ANXIETY

This shack. These loose, rotted
boards I've wandered into.

Someone's hung a flag outside.
It snaps its head again and again.

I bend with the wind, sweep
the floor tirelessly until my arms

disappear, the way a child will
when buried. Don't abandon me

here, my mouth full of snow, in
the only place I can remember.

WINTER BIRD,

we're all partly made of snow,
the way Oma taught us. The

great wind will lift our hair and steal
the sky's directionless black.

You've taken so much snow
into yourself, naked branches disappear

in the white perfection
of your face. When you bruise

the pine needles they scent our trail.
Not even heaven brims

over the edges of our boots and collars.
Listen, the insects are pulling their dreams

down from the attics of dirt
they've burrowed into,

some have found the bags of millet
in the pantry; we'll have to fill the feeders.

At times I can't distinguish flying
from the wind on my face.

We've been domesticated,
grown patient with tight spaces,

believe too strongly in our debt to dark water
which watches us all while lying on its back.

It knows we can no longer fly
without first being thrown.