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These are poems that were written and revised while I was a student here.

DEAD HEAT

by

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Approved by

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Committee Chair

for Mom and Dad

APPROVAL PAGE

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## **To Assure Myself a Purpose in the World**

Cold is a measure of absence:  
an empty jacket, or  
this mug without tea.

Outer space, therefore,  
is cold. Therefore  
an open hand is cold.

Some January mornings,  
clear with no wind  
and long before the sun

will rise, or any neighbors,  
and when the snow  
is quiet and not soft,

I step naked from my porch  
and press my back  
to the driveway.

## The Students Celebrate a Basketball Championship

These are the nights we burn couches.  
We carry them each like a paisley casket

up from a basement lit year-round  
by strung-up Christmas lights and joints,  
out from a living room floored  
with carpet damp and soft as cheese;

we curl our fingers under the frame,  
dodge florets of mold, lift the armrest  
nose-high, and smell the year-simmered sauce  
of beer, sex, orange juice, and febreze;

we twist them through a narrow hall,  
kick open the pneumatic screen-door,  
and set them on a lawn itself hung over  
from a winter of snow-cover and mud.

Then, lighter fluid to microfiber suede,  
a match to polyester tweed:  
the couch burns fast, flames leap  
high as a backboard, and come down softly

on the cushions. And we all think,  
“I could jump over that if I got  
a running start.” And we try it,  
stop short on our first attempt,

then run, leap, tuck our knees and flail,  
land askew, tumble and roll to our feet  
ecstatic. Only then do we notice  
that we’ve lost the hair on our shins,

just as many men do when they age,  
just as we lose our jump, feel our knees  
harden around office chairs. One April  
we’ll think, “It’s the best time of year

to buy a snowblower.” When the couch  
burns down (And who would have kept it?)  
all that remains are the springs.

## Trout

I wrapped it in my too-big hooded  
sweatshirt. Five pounds. Big fish.

My girlfriend drove the minivan back. I held  
the fish to my stomach like I was sick with it.

“Fine,” she’d said. “I’ll read at the picnic table.”  
I took a long time to bring it in, my line

the single bristle of a paintbrush  
and the river an acre mural.

Back at the house, I set the fish  
in the basinet of an ice-filled cooler

and put my sweatshirt on. Next day  
I took the trout to a taxidermist.

Ice had pocked the skin on one side  
and it looked like cellulite.

“Next time roll it in a towel first,” he said,  
then handed me a stiff receipt made

for a drycleaners and stamped  
with a date three months away.

By time the fish was finished,  
flat pose on driftwood,

the dimpled flank felted over,  
mirror of varnish, feather gills,

Mary and I had untied ourselves.  
I hung it over basement wainscot.

That fall we passed each other walking  
on Palisado Avenue. Her skirt rippled

over my shins and I writhed  
beneath a buttoned placket.

Because I cannot stay in one place  
I stand in rivers.

## **Another Wayne Gretzky Behind the Net**

I stop. The spray of ice  
falls like glitter

through motor oil.  
The sticks of defenders

are heavy doors hinged  
to ungreased hashmarks,

and Jari Kurri sputts a-  
round the circle, fixed

to an hour hand.  
The play is slow,

as if the ice were tar.  
I am patient. I am

patient. I am patient, but  
I know what next

will happen: My love  
will leave me. My parents

will die. The ice  
will melt. Kevin Lowe

seeps into the slot,  
and I saucer a pass

to his blade. Oh, how  
I want to swallow

the puck. The sun  
will swallow us all.

## Dichotomous Key

My boots aren't new, I tell her, I just treated them  
with boot cream.

She got a trim that morning, so looks the same

as when I left in August: My sometime-lover,  
not-quite girlfriend,  
with whom I trace a tideline for a weekend  
after months apart: endangered piping plover

in a flock of common killdeer, red wolf among coyotes.  
But we are not so field guide clear;  
our words have only hashed a border,

dissonant, ignored: Southwick and Congamong,  
Walton War. I thought to be discrete,  
loosen this knot of speciation,  
but any survey will unspool transgression

like razor wire on a fence. Instead I drag a stick  
through wet sand,  
keep definition brackish: Better to sicken

than sharpen, accept buffalo for bison,  
piano for harpsichord. When I left  
I retraced that line  
with parallax against precision:

few phone calls, few questions, a preference for seem.  
I text 'Going to bed' but not 'Going to sleep.'  
My boots are made by Chippewa but branded L. L. Bean.

## **I am Still an Aspiring Astronaut**

Even now if in uniform they knocked and said “Sir,  
we’d like you to be the first  
person on Mars,” I’d follow them into a white Cavalier

and twiddle my thumbs until Florida—  
flight suit and centrifuge,  
crew cut and launch script, slingshot orbit—

and float months alone by canister the size of a kitchen,  
bored with no Legos allowed,  
the way they scuttle between and behind

(there is no under in space) small appliance and panel,  
under the toaster,  
and once, years ago, in the garbage disposal.

It knocked about until my sister picked it out—I’d refused,  
saw my finger clipped as blood  
spat from the drain; of course she turned it off—

picked it out planning to throw it away but asked diplomatically,  
“Is this an important piece? Space Police?”  
No less important than any other one of thousands splayed

across the basement carpet so I might model  
myself as pirate, cowboy,  
(Black Seas Barracuda, Fort Legorado)

and astronaut, too. The shuttle, with its fiber optics,  
nine volt motors, little gears,  
might blast off though simply five pounds of plastic,

lighter than a trinitrotoluene vest worn by a man who tried  
to kill my sister, now a consul, in Ankara last winter  
by blasting himself and an embassy guard to little pieces.

Flecks of person sprayed against bricks for a block.  
My sister  
was okay. I was unable to talk

much about it: one face on my shoulders, thin smile,  
eyes small, alone in my kitchen  
and counting down ways I could snap three Legos together.

I keep none in my little apartment but they travel,  
scatter like dust or stars,  
so I pray one flew half an orbit to Istanbul

in the fold a sweater and rolled under the seat a government car  
for my sister to find,  
far as she is, and I still unable to jar

myself from the gravity of family, of arcing aspiration  
and a fear of not returning,  
while she is off and making things happen.

What technology I might invent:  
flying car, teleport, laser gun;  
the planets to which I'd say I've went

only now if they knocked. My imagination ticks.  
Detach my legs. Pull off my arms.  
I will never launch a rocket. I will never throw a brick.

## Like Quills Upon the Fretful

The dog won't learn,  
and the porcupine  
has found the acre where  
he'd like to remain.

Next day it wiggles  
into the narrow plastic  
drainage pipe beneath  
the gravel driveway.

What else to do but point  
a shotgun in the dark  
and spray the poor thing  
full of stars while

beech and cedar prick  
the mountainside and raindrops  
dart the soil and oh  
the needles and spines of god—

Even the gravel shivers.

## Another Eugene Cernan Prepares to Leave the Moon

Who could abandon the view?  
Not so much marble as scoop  
or scoops: Snow-packed prairie  
swirls rocky road, the Amazon  
curves lime sorbet, and the Pacific  
settles a blue-raspberry slush

in a Styrofoam cup, sipped  
on the way home from hockey  
at eight am and seven degrees  
per the dashboard of Dad's  
station wagon. The snowbanks  
are jagged with sand.

Had I a long enough straw  
I'd drink that ocean fast,  
swell the vessels in my face  
to a high e-flat and my pulse  
a felted hammer. As if I took  
my helmet off to inhale

the nothing of moon weather.  
Any ice on this face of the moon  
boils off, yet I might drive away  
on my rover's piano-wire wheels:  
The rung on this ladder to the LEM  
is colder than my first aluminum stick.

## I am an Infinite Perimeter

I cut too long an edge against a coworker,  
framed a narrow door,  
so when I ask, *How was your weekend?*  
Rob tells me *Oh fine*,  
not that he drove to Hyannisport

and rented sea kayaks with his brother,  
not that he is really getting into risotto  
and raw mozzarella,  
not that it was dull, let's get a beer on Friday,

because I deflected that offer too often,  
did not want to hear  
*It's such a good movie* more than I had to  
or feign conversation  
that drilled ever-tinier holes in a colander.

So as the Cape curls to a last spit of sand  
and a ski slope descends  
to a single machine-blown flake,  
the invitation diminished until, in March,

the gesture shrunk invisible and our friendship  
curved to a coke at the vending machine.  
When he'd said, that November,  
*Let's hit Okemo*,  
I said I sold my snowboard.

I hadn't at the time but the following week  
got eighty bucks for it off craigslist,  
took myself out to breakfast at Athan's  
and folded the remainder onto cable and electric

so that I could keep lonely and at home,  
could ignore the orthogonal lines  
that prove Rob's cubicle  
and mine  
are exactly the same size,

could focus on the way light snows through  
the colander  
that hangs beneath my cabinets.  
It's hard to explain. You have to see it.

## **Song of My Avatar**

For what more can I hope from all my shouting than

to be a five gallon bucket of powdered fiberglass  
lifted to the troposphere beneath a weather balloon  
and dumped upon America

so that thousands, more than I'll ever know or care to know,  
will breathe me in but not feel  
the tiny cut in their lungs, that bleeding node.

## **I Love the Smell of Cigars**

and horse shit, the way it hovers me however many dozen years,  
however many thousand furlongs  
back to Saratoga and a slatted seat in the grandstand bleachers,

the night before passed holding a rod on a slatted dock  
thirty miles north in Lake George, worms  
and panfish, the half-pound rod bend, the Poloroid click.

Distinct, now, from cow shit and cigarettes, the parts  
per million that flare my nostrils  
as I round the turn by a dairy farm or bar,

a bar where if it's Saturday and there's no football on  
they'll show the Travers or the Whitney,  
a bar where I might pull up alone and phone

a bet in to my father, wireless now, at the track if he could be  
with brother and friends and maybe cigars,  
since long before I was born and long after with me—

the time he paid forty dollars to park by the entrance,  
upgraded us to clubhouse seats. We affixed  
red badges to our shirts, tucked our shirts into our pants,

and sat for once close to wire, the rail. We left before the final  
race to beat the traffic, I said,  
because I was in middle school and had to check my e-mail.

Which arrives in an instant, nearly, as wires course  
through ceilings and signals jump  
like smallmouths to satellites and spires,

and smallmouths charge a lure like a horse:  
I catch fewer fish now but they're bigger, no worms,  
no dock, the river to myself with spinners and waders,

more fish in the slot, no more yearling cigars wasting bait;  
only thoroughbreds, gamers,  
the way they break from the gate.

There is a gap between the strike and the rod twitch,  
the break and the gallop,  
the whip and the kick, the switch,

so we box exactas, three-six-eight, five-nine-ten,  
and a horse runs the length of itself  
in a fifth of a second and if it wins by a head then second

was one twenty-fifth of a second behind. The times  
I've come home when he'd left  
for the weekend, I'd called when he was on the line.

By the head of a horse: if I catch a fish that big  
I hope that I catch it with him,  
not e-mail a picture I took with my phone, slit of a grin

and some feedsack catfish from a Carolina reservoir,  
pillowy asian carp  
on a private lake in Illinois.

The odds are slim, but Man o' War lost the Sanford, Secretariat  
the Woodward and once Dad won  
three grand on a straight trifecta. It's easy to be upset

when odds prove out, but if a nose wins part of a million after nine furlongs,  
what's a thousand miles? Cigar would cross  
the continent to win every race for nineteen months. In ninety-four

I saw an early defeat through plastic orange binoculars,  
sneakers dangling off  
a plank picnic table, my own *DRF*, Cigar

not yet invincible as I precociously made visual the matrix  
of intervals and splits in the racing form:  
devaluing favorites, laughing at names, my juice box

dripping on my striped t-shirt. I still perceive the order  
of what the slit lens captured: one of a thousand  
frames per second, motionless horses, turf and track fast slats of color,

fast rivers of green and tan and white in which swim the fish  
we never caught, flows the dead heat fallacy  
that two things can ever arrive at the same time. Always

a gap, a slat, a light between: Four Star Dave, Alabama.  
I wish there were more photos of us  
but he always held the camera.

## Happy Birthday

What a creek-side log to sit on,  
this warm and easy freedom of adulthood.

Up to my ankles  
in mud like cake batter.

Heron imitates a floor lamp.  
Dime of beetle on my knee.

This water has melted before  
and it will melt again.

Green warblers. Staring contest  
with a turtle.

## Amongst Women

Clutched up by a stomach bug,  
scrunched too tightly even for *NHL '95*, I lay  
on the couch. Second grade.

Mom sets a glass of Canada Dry  
on the coffee table.  
I hold it with both hands.

\*

The first drink I ever bought a girl:  
Whiskey-Ginger in a clear plastic cup  
at a bar lacquered as thick and uneven  
as my introduction. But she stayed,

then slid her boots on before sunrise  
and, before letting herself out,  
set a mug of Schweppes on the tile floor  
as I knelt before the toilet.

## And Down, And Down

From the Darley Arabian, Eclipse. From Eclipse,  
the rest: thoroughbreds ripened  
on one vine across centuries,  
muscle and bone not made replica

but compounded from sire to foal  
like interest on a loan:  
a larger lung, a longer stride; the optimal

approached. The bloodline, then, a function  
of fractional improvement  
and diminishing returns. The leaves  
fold in on themselves like intricate valentines.

Likewise I husbanded love through iteration:  
I Miss You, A Handwritten Letter, I Miss You Still;  
comment and gesture the better to name

a race horse, and as thin.

From Native Dancer

thoroughbreds inherit a splinter of speed  
and ankles fragile as a wine stem.  
On the home stretch, the back stretch, the clubhouse turn,

the horse kneels in apology. White coats and owners  
file down to the dirt:  
a compound fracture. Syringe to neck, carcass to cart.

Not for value, though: laminitis or some other disease  
will otherwise infect and slowly kill the animal.  
So am I infected,  
but such frailty is diffuse, like a franchise,

and too far along to begin a new line. Instead  
I invest toward an asymptotic limit  
with a love so broken, so small,

that I cannot stick a needle in it.

## Another Quint at Ease on the Bow of the Orca

*You're certifiable, Quint, you know that?*

*—Chief Brody*

To hell with the North Atlantic, rippled  
like woodgrain pressed in vinyl.

To hell with the sunset, it's gradient of yellow and grey;  
another pixel trick—the sun sets every day.

To hell with the water's sway and rock, the camber  
of the horizon; to act limber—

to shift my weight on the deck or pivot a palm  
on the gunwale—would suggest that I'm  
not part of the boat.

Break off contact: All I read  
is the book-bent brim of my hat.  
I smash the radio with a baseball bat.

Someday a shark will bite us in half;  
let it swim.  
Cradle a spear-gun. Watch the cabin.

## **It Will Grow Back**

Uprooting ivy and horseweed, I pause  
to watch a salamander scramble over  
the wet teabag detritus  
beneath a rhododendron.

Waddling thumb. Bent pendulum  
that tocks away from where  
the spade came down like a portcullis.

And then its tail: soft purple  
carrot, lost little finger,  
as flush to the shovel's front  
as the vision of Lara Mitchell

that in that moment cuts before my sight:  
Lara Mitchell, who I haven't seen  
or heard from in six years—

The end of a garden party hosted  
by a mutual friend:  
“I think we need a clean break,”  
she said, and then walked out the gate.

Her cheap silver dress—“Got it  
at Ames”—The sharp glint  
of her teeth. Her pitch.

I reach down, pick up the tail  
like an hors d'oeuvre, bring  
it to my lips and kiss the severed end  
I think of wine, taste grit.

The salamander reburies itself  
among the countless others.  
I reach for my shovel. I spit.

## Locket

I find and flush and shoot a partridge.  
The dog fetches it, still half-alive until

I put my thumb beneath its chin  
and pop its neck like so many cans of soda.

I stuff it in the game pouch of my orange vest.  
For an hour it ticks out life's nervous coda:

heat spreads across my skin;  
spurs twitch, tremble, trill.

So has for years my heart's vulgar plumage,  
the lies and guilt I kill then pocket.

## Notes on a Persistent Diameter

Like maple syrup poured on a ceramic plate  
we spread out and stuck together,  
my friends and I pulled by college and work  
to every major city in New England.

That is to say, we still grinned beneath  
the same round parachute that  
in fourth grade gym we shook above our heads,  
pulled down our backs, and sat upon

to capture a private atmosphere:  
florescent light swayed through red silk  
and how perfect a shade we claimed  
until one of us shuffled and the canopy fell.

I moved to the South, outside the range  
of dodging wind behind a Boston maple,  
past sharing a tartan scarf in Providence  
or unlayering for waffles in a Hartford diner.s

I lick what syrup I can find, pure corn  
and synthetic color, and pile together leaves  
of black oak and yellow hickory. But the air  
is damp as a dishrag, and a morning of sleet

sloshes down storm drains by noon,  
and compliments spill from mouths like mud.  
So I've stiffened, grown rough, quiet,  
and withheld sweetness in myself:

no tin bucket nailed to my chest,  
no thin hose stapled to my hip, no  
red light collapsing around me  
stiff and pointed and something like silk.

If I consider whether someone I love  
is under the same light elsewhere in the great  
contiguous forest of the unfarmed east coast,  
whether it's cold enough there to hug the roots

of teeth, to tighten the veins in hands  
thin as those in leaves, cold enough to cinch  
the blood away from limbs and fragile  
twigs and keep it near the heart, I forget

that windows here are left open all November,  
that none of my neighbors know a sugar bush  
is a stand of trees, that deciduous  
means growing so wide you fall apart.

## **I am an Oily Pelagic Thing**

Five years old I jigged through ice for perch:  
smooth red petal  
spun around  
a flat white spoon:  
Bay de Noc's *Swedish Pimple*.

\*

I have not cleaned the chin guard  
of my hockey helmet  
since tenth grade.  
Each winter, acne blooms  
red, red beneath my beard.

\*

Youth is the flash  
of skate blades  
seen from under the ice.  
Would that they rake my pane-pressed face.

## The Common Provenience

Shard of pottery on a plinth of soil,  
ceramic flag of the past's surrender:

I find set in the end-table sediment  
of loose receipts and magazines  
Emily's goodbye scratched on an index card.

I grid that memory with string,  
lay ruler to its strata,

and conclude that my life  
is a constant adjustment to height:  
Counter, desk, bed. The dusty rug

we slept on our one night together  
though a mattress hunkered in my bedroom.

Call it a layer of tephra.  
That is to say, blizzard of ash.  
We blocked out the sun.

To pedestal an artifact,  
scrape down the surrounding soil

until a fragment rises into focus  
like the sculpture on a column:  
bent fork, sharp triangle of glass.

I will not amend for that illusion:  
How the love we feigned, if briefly,

could lift us from the floor. How  
two shadows over-layered are  
darker, yes, but no thicker than before.

## **Minimum Viable Product**

Open bar at a Boston software convention:  
I wake up with my lanyard on, repent

for rows of glossy tri-panel poster displays  
and free-canvas-tote-with-demonstration,  
of conference rooms lit dim with laptop screens  
and tepid expectation, of jeans-and-sport-coat  
CTOs with temple-mounted microphones  
who claim like door-hung cross-stitched notes  
today arrives next big thing, and the next.

At five a.m. I brace myself so tensely  
to the doorjambs of my hotel bathroom that  
something—a string of muscle? A bit of fat?—  
pops out from my scapula. All this vomiting:  
A bug, a feature, glitch? The next big thing.

## Tipped Cow

*A 145-pound person can typically generate about 660 Newtons of force, meaning at least two people would be needed to tip an unmoving, nonresistant cow. However, once the cow's ability to brace itself is taken into effect that number increases to five or six strong people, or six people of average strength.*

*—Modern Farmer*

Thin as a fence post,  
the borrowed car buzzing.

To feel warm beside  
the bellow of my ribs,

to watch water vapor  
curtain from my back

and shimmer the night  
onto hands soft and pale

as the underside  
of maple leaves,

should have been enough.  
How like a young man

to believe he is more  
than himself.

But then

to prove it: each elbow  
a pinion, two legs torqued,

my body a granite statue of Hesat  
and his an Assyrian army or

every unsaid urge  
of the whole damn hockey team.

## Truth as Carcass

For years, sighting after sighting  
reported, refuted, dismissed:  
Bobcat, coyote, dog;  
circumstantial evidence,  
no photographs, no prints.

But it's another belief I'd held for years,  
doubt kept out by corrugating faith:  
That Kara still loved me,  
That I would get Briana back,  
That mountain lions live in Connecticut.

I read game trails for ambiguity,  
paused at the vibration of leaves and  
looked for tooth marks on deer bone  
the way I double-scanned for e-mails,  
felt the ghost-rustle of my cell phone.

Then, a mountain lion leapt  
across the grill of an SUV, crumpled  
like cardboard, and died on Route 15.  
A wild mountain lion in Connecticut.  
Just as I thought.

A few weeks later I threw out  
the envelope of hand-written letters  
and photographs, the shoe box  
of gifts long-nestled in newsprint  
like a family of dead hamsters.

Whatever to whatever hides in my closet,  
the unmarked package,  
the shadow of a boulder.  
I have stopped now,  
stopped looking over my shoulder.

## **Another Maria Mitchell Reads the Forecast**

Do not reduce a frozen sky-born thing  
to ice:

*Snow* is water cooled crystal quick,  
water become mineral.

*Sleet* is snow that melted off its lattice, lace,  
refrozen to a globe.

And *Hail* is rain that fell up, gathered and grew  
until convection could not bear it.

So yarn is not thread, though both are wool.  
So to earn is not luck, though both are will.

Tonight the sky is clear but,  
late October in southern New England,

I will maintain an expectation.  
I take off my hat. I stand upon my roof alone.

From the shared and unpredictable night  
I will create a new precipitation

and drop a comet on the world.

## **Long Hike**

Sunscreen is rancid  
with fear.

Bug spray is better aimed  
at campfires.

Wear no socks  
inside new boots

and cross the highway  
barefoot.

Fill your pack with every rock  
whose angles you admire.

Pinch a your skin in  
the hammer of a gun.

Make it blister,  
pop, and run.

## **Another Saint Brendan Encounters the Leviathan**

Adrift in our skin boats, my students and I  
hop between the islands of the canon:  
*Gatsby. Streetcar. Frome.* At *Huck Finn* Connor asks,

“Not to be offensive, but could you argue  
the descendants of slaves are better off now  
than if they’d never been taken from Africa?”

The classroom moves like a wave.  
My students scramble toward the ocean  
and their oars. They pray and shout

and I lead them back to sea. Yes,  
I knew they disembarked upon a whale.  
Yes, I bid them build a fire on its back.

They watch the smoke rise from that island  
as it swims away, too large to bring its head  
to its tail. Years later we discover America.

## Sometimes Another is Within One

So it goes with banana and plantain: Each  
distinct, but not from a distance.  
Lobster and crayfish; apricot, peach.

When I graduated to adult from junior-  
sized hockey sticks I used the same curve  
but the blade was longer, wider.

How in a set of silverware  
the table spoon contains the tea spoon.  
Or coffee spoon, to be fair,

as I used the curve named for Paul  
Coffey who, legend has it, would bend his feet  
into a pair of skates three sizes too small.

He had to cut the laces after every game  
just to peel the boot off.  
The curve that bears his name

has a legend of it's own: big tusk,  
long tooth, banana bend,  
nearly anomalous meniscus

in the ice-core of legality. With it  
I first could lift the puck from off the ice.  
Now I trigger it

just beneath the crossbar.

I can't recall

at what age my wrist shot went  
from lobbing arc to powerful;

I see them all as rifled off the ice, age  
regardless: whippet and greyhound;  
four-ten, twelve gauge.

But truly rifled, the way the puck spun.  
The arm of a Mandelbrot:  
Sometimes another is within one.

I played hockey this winter for the first time  
since high school  
and it felt about the same:

I won many face-offs but scored few goals.  
Our games were late at night.  
The goalie and I carpooled.

I was faster than most other players  
and on my team were a bartender, a line cook,  
two lawyers;

the rest I don't remember.  
I tried to analogize my high school teammates:  
I know two became plumbers.

In the locker room we mock-propositioned the rink girl and swore  
about children and loans.  
We had Whaler's jerseys and I wore

the same-sized skates. We hardly won.  
Sometimes I pretended my parents were watching.  
Sometimes I hold bananas like guns.

## **I am an Unwilling Asteroid**

Mom, you're going to die one day.  
Me too! And the dog  
shriveled in August, and  
the big white pine in the yard  
that sprazzled outward like the wool pom of your hat  
frosted with fungus.

We hemmed the tree to firewood and  
reduced the dog to ash.  
My childhood tree fort, crenellated, turreted,  
was only ever one wide plywood plank  
laid across two limbs  
like a blanket on your lap.

This Christmas you hid in my stocking  
a sponge dinosaur, the kind  
that swells from pill to football  
when left overnight in a bowl of tap water.  
The next day it dries  
and shrinks back to extinction.

It was a joke gift that I  
should have passed to my nephew  
or dropped  
in the donation bin at mass.  
I tied a rock around its thin green neck  
and threw it in the lake.

## Crossing the Mid-Atlantic Ridge

The ocean is still and the clouds  
are still and the cabin is still  
and I am still thinking of you  
though under all of it the Earth

is coming apart. Slab-pull and  
convection, transverse fault;  
Europe and America  
in opposite directions.

Slow, as rocks go. Magma  
cools in pillows, spreads  
two blankets of basalt  
by pushing them apart.

A fissure between two headboards:  
The confluence of currents, dear,  
of counter-oscillations  
in our asthenosphere,

means my return will be farther  
and you will have nudged west.  
We shall not be off by much,  
but the deviation grows:

Slow, as rocks, though. Every year  
a fingernail further; each week  
only the width of a hair  
still in the folds of a sheet.

## **Boston Calls Me to Love**

The eyes open to the cry  
of my neighbor,  
who is loudly having sex.

Her emphatic  
affirmative

sprays my own sheets damp,  
glares against  
my bedroom mirror,

drags it fingertips  
down my shins.

Then I am standing,  
wavering as her breath.

I spread my curtains

to let enter the brush  
of each passing car

the slow chrome  
of handlebars  
and rippling spokes,

the chime of last night's  
bottles and aluminum cans

and the window-box  
of cigarettes and marigolds  
and the tree in its planter,

bursting the sidewalk  
on a which a whisking push broom  
seems to whisper

*yes    yes,    yes.*

## **The New Geography**

Like saran wrap taut around the rim  
of a crater on the moon,  
I am not good for much but keeping in

and keeping out. Though, quiet as a map,  
there isn't much  
that needs keeping:

All of my dust is in its place. All of the rocks  
are settled. I am content  
to be passed through by light, or not,

and I will for a moment keep level, poised and thin,  
when I welcome another  
of what made this crater to begin with.

## **Fish**

There is no bridge on which I will not pause  
and lean over the railing of to look  
among the stones for fish. I have no cause  
or reason; only impulse of the brook,  
I guess. A friend or passerby will wonder  
what I'm looking at. I point. "That trout there,  
by the oak leaves." They look. "Perhaps under  
them," they say. "I see nothing. It must be glare."  
They're tough to spot, believe me: buoyant, dark,  
revealed by subtly moving form and fin.  
But I've not seen what others have: meadowlark,  
black bear, puffin, though I've looked again  
and again, as for assurance, truth. All wish.  
I may know nothing else but this: There are fish.