

An Ode

I like riding in the backseat of cars
on the right side
so I can glimpse the driver's profile
and watch his eyes in the rearview

Thicket

From a small patch of woodland, mostly sproutling beech and poplars
Juts a thick honeysuckle bush
gently mingling with a manicured suburban lawn
in the summertime.

The honeysuckle bush has existed there for as long as I can remember
never tiny, but once small with only a few prime picking-flowers
white faced, splay-legged and lapping at the daylight
At night I think they turn into sprites and dance with the junebugs and katydids
Or maybe float back to the pond and strut to the chorus of spring peepers

There's a girl with dark hair who I want to kiss
or at least talk to but I'm afraid of her
and most girls, because
girls don't like boys who like boys too

She reminds me of a honeysuckle.

Where we first opened the door and the place hadn't been touched by a mop or broom or even a
hand to shut the windows

Where I hated it from the start, that paper mâché and toothpick tenement

Where bent-backed over a worn out swiffer that I beat the floor with until I was so proud I could
lie there

Stretched out on the hardwood, sunbathing in my own freedom and that open window cleaner
staring up at the lights whose bulbs we struggled to dismember

Where that summer, the closer of eras, began

and we climbed up a flight to the roof and sat and drank white wine among the roaches and the
lights of the Manhattan Bridge

that roof

Where the sun usurped a passing thunderstorm

the sky a dripping peach

and my shirt clings to my back

Where I lay in the twin bed through days and nights and mornings

The gray jersey duvet clinging to every pore writhing through the sweat-soaked night only to be
relieved in the morning at 7 am when the sun said hello again, sizzling my leg hair

Like every morning

and the one where that boy slept in my bed

I hung up that old drug rug to provide some sort of relief

he kissed me without brushing his teeth anyway

Where I cried all summer

over the chairs

the couch

the shattered glasses and fucked up pasta

when you went to Coney Island and I walked the streets of Harlem sweaty and lonely and a little
scared

and when I called you a fat pig and lay there on that same couch and balled
Where I would always end up crawling into your bed anyway
For the air conditioner, but I love you

Where, after going through the bag of my old clothes and that smell overwhelmed my nose I
shrank back into the gray jersey duvet, mouth agape, for hours

Where I dreamt a girl painted the walls dark blue and tried in vain to hold onto what was finally
all right

Seagull

A quite unexpected song on a heavy morning usually reserved for performances of pigeons
drifting in unison across the sky

Or the mourning doves, who sometimes can be heard cooing outside my window

But it was you instead, your own song an ungraceful aria

Your brazen unwillingness to follow the silly rules of songbirds, taking over the day and
becoming the center of attention (at least my own)

Parking Lot Discussions

In the middle of a suburban park, surrounded by a grove of trees, or perhaps a too-far-long walk away from a school building or outside a Boys and Girls Club

You may never think of me, or probably even notice me

But I don't mind (After all I'm just a slab of thick black asphalt!) (Though sometimes I am not, like in the middle of a July day when I become the molten lava of a Hawai'ian volcano or in January when I am a barren, icy shore)

Do you think of me sometimes? Or am I the uninvited party guest? Sometimes I wonder why you sit in your car for so long. Do you want to go home just yet?

Moments Alone

I.

God I just want a Reuben
even though I'll say it's not as good as Mom's
and with loss of filter, talk about killing the president
imagine—a guillotined head on a platter!
Intermingling with the not-so-bad French fries

II.

You all say I'm mean
but have you seen me talk about my dead idols?
Amy, Bowie, Anna Nicole?
or heard me pretending to be them in my room late at night?

III.

I rented a kayak in Florida
And paddled for a few hours among tropical plants
and ancient reptiles
I'm relieved to be reminded the natural world exists
That there are still nice places left in America

IV.

Maybe Crazy Horse and I can finally have a chat
and eat good bread and shitty olives in an Italian bar—
Ah to be in Florence! The olives would be better.

V.

A new friend's psychoanalysis brings out the roleplayer
there's something to be said for pretending you know
Behind a turquoise bathroom door,
I feel lovey-dovey

VI.

Sleeping until 10 on a dusty day
feels much better than I prejudged

VII.

Maybe we can go to church this weekend
because I miss Jesus
even though just last week I promised I'd be taking a break for a while
I'll return to the dancefloor, and get out of my own head
with the help of the colored lights

Catholics Don't Believe in Reincarnation

I never met my grandfather
and with a child's anxiety worry I won't get the chance
and call for my mother and expose my fear that he'll leave heaven before I get there

In my dreams, it's too late; he's already transformed
he stands atop a lofty mountain peak
a stoic white goat with black hooves and horns
that pierce through
pink clouds just out of my reach

I know him only through stories
of his temper
A shock to all he was killed by a fire that wasn't his own, or that of his red-haired daughter,
my aunt

On the day he died he turned around, kissed his wife again
"Just in case I don't come back"

Catholics Don't Believe in Reincarnation II

My grandfather is not my true grandfather
He didn't even marry into the family
For legal reasons, or something I didn't care to understand
I never thought otherwise though,
He taught me how to build birdhouses and pick blackberries

Divorced, unlike my widowed grandmother
Formerly a Roxborough cop,
harmonica player,
gardening expert
Navy sailor
Formerly without Alzheimer's

I play along with his lack of memory
Like when he asks me what I want to be when I grow up
It doesn't matter what I say, he thinks I should go into the navy
And asks if I want to see a photo of his ship
the *Clarence K. Bronson*
I oblige and follow him to his room
up the wooden stairs I fell down as a child
next to the ship, a photo of my grandmother, bathing-suit clad in the 80s
and a framed postcard
one I sent a few years ago
from the Brooklyn Botanic Garden

He turns and asks me who I am

"We Had To Put The Cat Down..."

Late in the midnight kitchen
an unfamiliar darkness
no soft pad-pad-pad against the tiles

I swear you haven't left yet

Beige feelings, same color as the tiles

Writing this on the stools you used to jump on
listening for a meow

Crocodile Girl

We shared our first home
Though it was mine first
You arrived 18 months after I moved out

I'm sure it was you who ruined our mother
Left destroyed, torn like cat-attacked wallpaper
Your sudden exit caused chaos and
a prolapse
it's your fault
our warm little bubble is now gone forever

From birth you were immune to ridicule
To good for anyone, except the boys I hated and for Dad who liked you best
Everyone gawked
forever illuminated perhaps
by your pretty face and hair
or athleticism

I just wanted to be your friend
but you would have none of it
attacking and swallowing me up
Before I could even say hello

Fur Study

Under a microscope, the hairs of a plush mustard-yellow dog
the one with a big brown nose, won on the boardwalk in the summer
are clearly plastic, woven like wicker
much unlike the soft white fur of my poor dead rabbit
who I found on the hottest day
the summer of my father's affair,
two cold water bottles in tow
lying wide-eyed in her green hutch

Maybe The Ants Have Answers

I wonder
If they are ever bothered
by the thrum
maybe it's the crickets, singing their choruses of rub-legged beats and no hushed whispers
But the ants continue to the center of it all
Up and around and through urban grasses
Weeds that will either sprout up through the concrete
Or die in the coming seasons

Chinatown

I can see America in the seams of your jeans
and in the worn-out heels of my sneakers

Dragging feet through life and the neon signs of the American Legion on Canal Street
missing the N and LEG

AMERICA ION

Squirming with the rest of the horde, just like the eels in the restaurant aquarium
We're all wearing the same indigo jacket
Hanging in the same greasy windows
and makeshift wood paneled ballrooms

Washing our clothes at different laundromats
Shopping at the fruit stands or in the back aisles of grocery stores
At night it's quiet in the good way
except when some creep tried to get me in his car
or when the rats swarm in the trash piled on the corners

The Hunt Across The Sky

Because I liked the way the light flooded from the window
into the gray room
counting the cracks in the ceiling, refusing public kissing
I liked the church across Bushwick Avenue
and your roommate's cat

The night we went walking down the dead-end street and climbed over a chainlink fence
into the cemetery with your ghost friends and weird songs
We once met in Manhattan
and you told me it's not the center of the world anymore
I'm grateful for that and
how you called me insecure when we cut it off

In your bed we
watched Uptown Girls
I still have the botanical beauty products you gave me
in my drawer

Currently

Bothered by the dust gathered on the shelf
The bump on my lip
The unwashed dishes

Maybe it's the weather
I still feel empty in 66 degrees and on
Lunar New Year
Without a full night's sleep in a few months
I still wake up sore in the morning

Circling Back Around

I wonder if I'll ever smell the Midwest again
cigarette smoke among art deco and service elevators and *you are so beautiful*, I think to myself

I bought a flight and warned you that
I'm anxious and have a weak stomach

When we finally met I puked instantly
followed by a rejected kiss on your couch
I smiled anyway because I knew you loved me

We touched and ran to the beach off Oak Street
November
colder than expected, especially in alleyways
and later in your bedroom— your teeth chattered
I asked if I did something wrong

Among other things, Monday came too quickly
I wore your sweatshirt to the airport but
we didn't kiss goodbye
I did see your lip quiver as you hesitated to go down the escalator
and back to your life

I looked back through security but you were already gone