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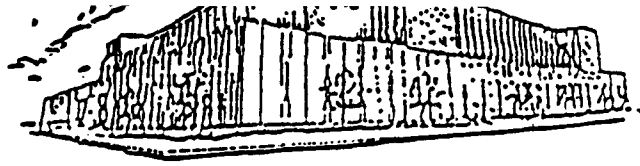
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Sliding Phonology

Colleen Colby

B.A. Whitman College, 1997

presented in fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

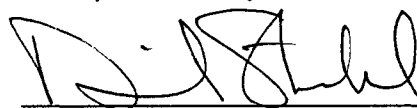
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I

Ascent

Lift the frog, cantankerous in the spreading stream.
Clammy summer night. Lift these cupped hands from my eyes,
count the seconds it takes to un-hide.
Lift the firefly from the air. Bright. Bright.
Lift raspberry leaves to disappear.
Let waves and waves and waves and cells.
Even the dead revel in exhale.
Let close the crumble of enormous thunder crash. Lift
the rumble from stomach; high, and high, streaming
from music clung to night-gleamed grapes,
lift surrender out of frame. Lift the water
above face. Let it close, now, guilt,
lifted straight out of lies.
Close a forest between us.
Close the life from behind.
Close the trees between these eyes. From the penny,
lift milky dusk-light. From her death, lift the eddy.
Lift the rafter over the fall, lift the fall
out of funeral. Lift knee from genuflect.
Pull elbows back from pew,
lift kneeler, body, blue, the river,
an alphabet of water to finger worms. Lift it
breathing in and out and in and out: the ear.

II

The Mission Rubs the Knot Loose

Scars on weathered feet warp time.
The hill is cold, cuts the edges
like chandeliers. Apologize.
Middle of the night raspberry bites
green and thistle the throat. Pinch
the sun out of lungs. Dive
from sweat-slicked ice stand.
Do not exhale. Maintain posture
as feet lunge from one to the other—
jumping jacks and queens. My arms stretch
out of toes, skirt the side gravel.
These things (not real) fold

and bend into crosses. Accuse
the church, empty the altar,
rope it off—like fingers gutting streaks
into tables and no one knows why—
accuse, accuse and no one knows why.
The virgin cracks in warped time,
theater soot. Can the Jesuit fit
in here? I wait barefoot, the veil borrowed,
hands, fingers kneaded into mounds of knuckles
pressing into forehead. They say, apologize—
and no one knows why. Do not exhale. These things
are definable, quantifiable—

men who bar me from their robes,
balloon string tied, a crumpling wrist—
this baptism roots deep in the ditch of chin,
dripping dents of stones of water across
the forehead. All for Sunday ritual;
all for ash exhaled to face. Must
I pay the toll, scratch red marks—
all makes me weep in their penance booth.
I want you to be my house, would swallow
tumbleweed to throat. I cave into knees,

round the opened back. Where is my name?

Apologize. The toes maintain posture as I lunge
from one to the other, spilled like rubies,
red and vague to river. Strip now
for first confession, the view is borrowed.
Pinch the sun out of confessional—the Jesuit
is supposed to be here. I fling myself beneath
look for stomping, weathered feet
and the Virgin statue,

roped. Accuse, accuse as I lunge
from one to the other. I will refuse
my chains to the virgin, will lie
on the floor of this church
until my belly falls through. Wait for wood,
the beams, the mountain buried so honorably beneath
until my belly falls through. Refuse my chains,
untie the wood, the beams, the mountain
on the floor. I will return my rubied
alphabet, its rage a red vaguery of shine.
I want you to be my house—someone

was supposed to be here. I want this to be my house,
will scratch names root-deep in the ditch of chin,
deflate jacks and queens, worship sliced
sunlight through the broken window of the altar.
Is this what they mean? I want—about the wrist—
my name—the house—crumbling, it makes me weep
in their penance booth. Now would I

pay the toll: but the robes, the hill, the broken altar
bar me. These things are definable, quantifiable:
balloon string tied, holy men carved and warped
exhaling ash into my face, they welcome me, teeth
and knees and fingers withering back
to the stone the roots of mountain—they crunch
the letters, my name. Who
should apologize? These things
grip like fingers folded over fingers, bled.

Reverberation

There are no rules for shame.
It simply grows up. Without notice
then dissipates like elephant tiptoes.

Heavy. Remarkable
through doors.

You allowed me
an apology. Gave me
room for throats and facts and chatter.

(As if a room—plush carpet, squeaky blinds
could fill my words.)

It may be
you are looking for poetry here.
For neighborhoods, even

to be measured
in arms and hallowed croaks.
But it may be

that broad thumbtacks, words
pen-scratched across bills and fields
peeping from a star-pocked sky,
simply signify

the structure home
no key click key click boot clank door creak
no kissing lips shaped at the window
no aspen wafts trailing twilight sleep between in and ex-hale—

just a perpendicular movement
grown from the ground up.

Before the Shaping

There's the blue, of course, bought with a rock.
Don't waste it.

Between still dusk and the onslaught of light bartering
with the approach of thunderheads, words crawl
up my arms like frozen grapes on the tongue,
then dissipate without intercom.

A color handed over like evening fence-loopers—
periwinkle and cherry. And then the elephant dusk.

I stole for you. Lips, eyebrows, an alphabet in daylight
would confine sound. Never before did so many plums
muffle the ears of the browned grass.

It's not just periwinkle, you see. It's hips
and fingernails alighting in a mesh of summer—
They scull the origin of dissolve.

Parts to Make a Whole

Flapjacks and a girl. At ten, she dangles
pancakes in trees. At ten, the teacher
names her *red face*. Watch her drape
the maple tree in cakes
for birds and flip-flop squirrels.
The teacher points, knocks knuckles
to board. But, flapjacks. They hang,
bobbling against each other—red blood cells
from science films. In all caps, chalk-dust
spills chunks of letters like sand grizzled
to a wheelbarrow mix of cement.
Blinks bruise the smeared touch
of raging cheek. Watch her drape
the maple tree. And no one eats.
The teacher points capital letters,
an arrow long and still. *Red face*. He scrapes
the chalk against cool board
and she is fire she is boiled raw.
The teacher points, knocks knuckle to board.
Deliberate pancake maker, come back—
as in cracking rocks at cliffs, movement
will stick—tonight green tights
are spades with spider legs.
Deliberate pancake maker, come back.
Pinch pancakes out of the tree's
twilight and finger-spread silhouette.
Rip them in layers of flake. Flop them
in heaves to a garbage pail. Blinks will only
bruise the smeared touch of raging cheek:
Claw the cooled den of coming night, eased into relief.

Iridescent Gathering

Life can burst like goldfish bellies,
like floating flashes and hula hoops.
A random turtle moment
and I am buried in shells and flakes
of live cell, of tangible
inside capes of real.

I sleep to catch. My favorite coat was white
and fuzzy and buttons. You made it look better, sister.
And through the fields. And through the fields.
Orange splashed green the canyon,
the dam sucked hair
with wind. The wind.

And even the swim meets have entered, the breeze
through my after-surgery dress. My stomach
still blown up with air. It would leak
through my joints. Shudder the dress.

Shoulder blades and gravity. Pain in finished
edges – dermoids. They still howl,
my ovaries for those lumps
of teeth and hair, brain matter chattering,
to sear the very almonds.

And now we're back, always to this:
time. Whirls aging another reason to be late.

Arms and beeps must shake—must gasp must breathe.
I remember birds flapping my throat. Somewhere
there was a split between teeth and taffy
breathing it, pulling it out, wrapping it around
and around fingers like sticks of sun and still there's more.
My fingers burn to cram in and tear out feathers

and the crunch of flies, all the exhales that practice

for the last that moans—I will hear that one, too.
And the grapes will hiccup to the sun—

lonely, these excuses. I'm a stick woman wading
from silo to silo. Open the door and out spills *of*
and *and*, and *but* and *my* and *my* and *your*,
responsibility. Everything now for fields of mint—
low and pure and fresh instead

of molting moments stacked and rotting
in heaps. Hot and smoldering.
They will melt my eyelashes, fingernails.
I desire thistle in my throat, doctor,
excuse refusals of communion to join

my senses with breathing.
Belled Fertility.
I am a stick woman
with a throat full of birds,
fingers as sticks of sun, a tadpole
sprouting legs on each elbow.

Shifts of Stained Glass in Daylight

Between twists of truth and flashed to cold teeth
should there be a difference?

Answer:

The lake is not always the lake

but often fur-framed memory
and I lie awake combing it
until the shine
is bounced new, until a blush
of willows
sway green flow
instead of wilting August pine.

Or, in the box, the priest leans, he gleans
over the blessed chair.

His hand points red. His fingers point
a tremble of shake.

The debris

of his holy words

rattle

like a gourd against the dusk pavement
and I

am accused accused of lies

I am the deepest betrayal (am ripped silk

fire-lit from bunk bed to squeeze

my harbor father's neck tighter

at each thunder's

drummed escape) I am snakes in socks and distance
is not far enough and so

I will only imagine (desire) that spiders smell
like burned hair, squeak small
and pop in forest fires, that clouds can hover
dripping mango (and guilt). They cling
to glisten me a rotted sweet. Or

I smiled and the man thought

it meant come closer,
thought my own words
banded back
to me would coo.
His fingers curved my hip, my boots
squeaked backward.

There were no gray-lit windows
to smash, no bronze bottles on bars.
I had smiled.
Teeth even.

I remember teeth, the priest's warning.
A sinner a sinner the worst is the self.
But I had smiled

and the priest still breaks my knees—

but not because

yesterday I thought of shame.
I thought of looped and rolled
forgiveness as a retreating space
between indigo
and ashed
to charcoal twilight.

I thought a spider
circling fumes to death. Legs trilling, trailing
desperate in back-to-time motion
but shouldn't forgiveness be like hair like fingers
tracing gauze and breezed faces in the mirror?

Even so shame puffs
its chest, trembles
a loud boom of voice, leans
over tables tipping salt shakers and sturdy sentences.
Shame cowers me, lurches me, branching spits
of caws of crows just to break my arms, break my hold
from necks, from logic, to haunt
my willowed refuge, to accuse.

Lift it Breathing

Through a tunnel macramé, the spider
watches hands in sunlight pop pop like potter's clay.
She stops to feather and smear
buttered dandelion across a new-freckled
chin. You'd think she'd tasted
a familiar surrounding of grass of fruit.

Skin, soothe, don't crack—a man
is swimming a smile, head barely up,
through an electric pile of children
in the front yard. The seconds

are bombarding. Must she maintain
the present? An old man buzzes
the neighborhood back and forth
on a motor bike. It must be Saturday,
early summer.

Pavement pops
with sunburned toes and wheels of bicycles
fat and sung to street, baskets where little girls
hide buttons and whistles.

Wet weeds, then a view. Spider
slicks a leaf. Whose feet?
Wind insists and brushes
the hands: kite-string, school-freed hands.
Scarred, now stained, sun wrinkled hands.
For one burst of berry, should
forgiveness be defined?

Prescribing Carver

Pathetic. Dreamy. Sapped out of your mind
with sentimental philosophy and wine.
Middle of the night burst of phone call.
I can't stand your convictions. I say,
read Carver. Carver's locked himself
out, too, I say. On occasion. You rattle.
Metal ribbed phone cord swings and clicks. You

are too accessible. You should be in bed
like me. You should've done your work
and then gone to bed. You shouldn't know
the cold hollow of Sunday night street,
I say. Shouldn't know the raw of stomach
in cold hours. It's abnormal, I think.

An abnormal action. Breaks open strange space and that's
what pushes us over, you know.
You are quiet now. I can see a cat, you say. Maybe it's
a cat. Go home, I say, and read Carver. You tell me
it's okay to smash rain pocked windows.

Sure, I say. As long as the green tint and shard of glass
on carpet is yours. And there's a beautiful crash
like the one when roofers slide shingles
off a June house or cut trees
pushed with work gloves
are falling—but in the middle of the day—
a sound nameable in light. Your words
choke themselves and I hate you

for disturbing my normalcy. My healthy and good
milk and honey night. I hadn't planned
to think of these things, not tonight. Not blank spaces
in abyssed hours, the gnaw of odd at night. Not now,
now I'm on track. Not lost in a swelled
musk of chaos, not in a phone booth
gazing odd in car-stretched hours.

Spontaneous Dialect

I didn't notice immediately
that you brushed my arm when we talked,
only I was too close to your breath
to guard, wooden soldier, against the wind

against cartwheeling familiars—
the dilating newness of puddles,
still pools on summer mornings,
blustered nights thieving grace.

You force pungent
the surface. But no more you—
not as the phone rings, children tumble,
all-but spill out of buses. Not after
an orchard, its angles.
I once steadied myself against you.

I hear our embrace—awkward, and more
familiar than bicycles tipped to lawns,
toddlers in half-bikinis
sputtering through front-yard sprinklers.

Can the present flip inside out?
This umbrella of separation, crisp
dives and arcs of drying conversation,
swallows my out-stretched hands.

When was the wind a dragonfly
flitting down my neck and your hand,
flat against my back?
Rust in that shirt you used to touch.

Night Leaks Intrusion

the wisp of breath secret winks:
suck of cigarette? and too much
awake
in ashes, corner, and musk
loves the silence here

words scratch the inside ear
they dangle swing like licks
dead spider sways
 bedroom screens — broken
I hear breath outside
spiny lips crawl my ear
slip along the orange-lit stair

caterpillar-stretch down step:
 deliberate leather
this moment — again —
listen what is
there
listens shifts in smears
 of smoke,
slides in time and
breathes — short, short.
what is? shape dissolved
there.
hum is smeared still. Still.

What Can't Hold

Doctor, it's more than movement,
the way a word flashes like shock pumps
of chest and blood from cheeks
to the trembling pool of body. I am their release,
their reason. Here I watch him flash hands
through her hair. Cars pass. Shells
crunch beneath me. The test
is how well I will balance for the crowd
and later, how well I stand
in echoes of those nights—tractor
pounding reverberations
of cacophony. Lightning snaps hair, leaving—
it is easy to keep me wrapped
in my own cocoon—leaving wind

to mourn the folded flowers. Pretend eyes
glance toward a blue house
where I fell down the stairs,
an accident. Where I barreled against furniture,
crashed bottles, slept face down on the brown,
tightly rounded carpet. I must accept
the results of action.

Alone in white sheets,
I must accept results, doctor. Centipede
in the shower—up from drain or down
from wall, doctor? A wave
of slither and legs. I must stand
in their firecracker flashes—eyes singe
my skin with hornet stings. Hands to eyes,
hands to cheeks mean weak. *So
goddamned weak*, the suicide's father said.
A wave of body and legs, dives of crows
flash full. Suicide flew

from a waterfall not long after
the other funeral—car smashed over canyon,

front doors flushed open, bodies rolled. Silhouetted
sequence. Not related,
they say and I loop thumbs
to butterfly hands across a half-lit wall. Stop
in mid-shadow—distance locks
like oars in final time. Could've been,
could've been—and now his face, blocks
of clouds and stones. Again,
he wants. I must step carefully, now.
Could've been. I am echoed
in the standing, silhouetted across
the wall. But, he is not

behind me. Instead, rowdy party-goers
smash across tables in real-time. *We remember you.*
Fishmouth glances, disgust.
Your face is red. Intention, regret. *Your*
face, did you hear? Not his. Mine.
My fault. I am to blame

for the dripping all over his carpet. *You're so red.*
Waves of hot and blush and swell of red.
Standing in the test of balance, spilled
wine. I am to blame
for the spreading red. His wooly couch.
They said I'd be fine. The blood, I mean blush,
hasn't, not yet, dripped to my shoelaces. Said.
I'd be. Fine. Pills. Insurance. Weeks. Months.
I'd be—and I never squirmed—

arms stretched—under the suffocating
pillow, never suspected rage. Never knew
the threat of his trembling, worm-sliding
world, wouldn't have noticed
cars passing in blocks of shadow,
crows across the wall. They'd say

it had nothing to do
with me, busy beer blurts, naming
my fire—*lonely, throw-away aftermath*—
my reverberating cacophony.

Where is acceptance after time evaporates?
They'd say it had nothing

to do with me—their oozing ripe legacy of blame—
waves and waves of it—left at my doorstep—
flashes and frames—they think I'll pluck
each hornet from its comb, carry the humming
name—swallow, swallow this prickling shame.

Breaking in Continuance

Perfectly cut wing, a sliced almond,
flecks blue a slab of gray sidewalk.
Half flight cannot cut wind. Leaves curl sandy

in crumpled fullness and surround the fallen
feathers. We are not located in only one part.
Half-expectancy of death.

Prismatic slingshots
in the kitchen sink,
I store them
with my mother's hands,
with sun squares
and carpet. I store swings
and sticking sand together.
I store a tongue

a snake a lake under laps of sky.
Waffles overlap criss-crossing syrup
and we parade words. I wait for you
while insects silhouette the curtain.

Lime the twilight. I won't scull my way
across. And there are no more days in this space,
moat of forgiveness. Platter of half words

like "miss" and "take" and "shame" and "pull"
Sometimes the will pushes
(I could never get to) you.
Consider how cotton sheets and shirts
stick, and I can only touch
the searing chips of pavement
burned into knees
after the bicycle
skimmed against curb.
I called you him by accident.

The A of A

Space and time relent to things—the hill is
hooded roofs, not the yawning sphinx.
I can't console the way pine
smoothes mountains to splattered cacti
along the freeway. No space is born—

only palms for moments against
hot sandstone and then days already fleshed
through the canyon. My skirt shivers
under knees, wrapped up high. It is easier ungarnished
to count the ticks up a side paneling of cumulus.

My hand whirls to the abyss of periwinkle
hazing cliff and water, scooped from the vacuum.
I remember fingers dragging water across a windowpane,
flies sipping at doll lips trapped on ledges.

How can we have the arabesque of always,
the wristflick of that slipcover—when already
light and words have un-gripped through fingers,
entire seasons have suffocated the squint
of eyes trailing sun?

Wind-Brush: of Real

Again, Eurydice.
Would she have willingly given up
bark and spreading moss in the opening
of spring, wind-raked hyacinth
against those white palms?

His stretched underside of neck,
angled chin must
spider cling bright now
to all black movement.

And yet, for a short while,
he was wet denim
banging against her ankles.
Did I ask you—she stops.
Did I ask you to come back to look
back for me, pick me
out of the crowd of looping labyrinths,
of drooping-eyed
dark? I am not
your Eurydice.

Still, he stretches
the entire length of neck,
chin—white and high
to stare at the tops of trees,

excuses himself to do so.
But how, he says,
even the black black crow does it—
alights on the bristling top branch
of that lit-fire aspen,
the very tip-top,
and then lifts
so easily away.

Leda's Confession

We sit together on my bed. Sleep-deprived
I arrive outside myself.

You are surprised there is a difference
between shame and fear. Swans

have been stealing our fruit
so we must remove them
alive. Force my hand to touch. Press it deep
in the billowing silt above the drop.
Swallow the news. Rocks and cliffs

are joining, while lakes puzzle
over tumbleweed wind-blown and hunched
as whispering mammoths to the barbed fence.

I settle of course for a gorge
of guilt. The sun will not pass,
rolls us under the marbled din
of the canyon floor, would sting my lips still.

The Pumpkin Eater: And What of Those Windy Nights?

A mash of orange and sticks and strings.
She hears him munch outside;
must pack the gnawed holes.
At night she watches his eye up there,
his hands roaming round.
And so she learns
the curve of shell,
offers through air holes.
She hears him munch outside;
he almost chewed through.
A woman, a woman, a woman,
you know. He almost
chewed through. And what
of those windy nights?
Wind and hair and hands and
reach. Oh, to wriggle
out of his peripheral—
and yet. And yet. The shell—
What is it? Is it the vine
scraping, twisting,
screaming? How many
has he—he will gorge her if he can.
And so even the vine's hold will.
She offers through air holes,
flops to her knees.
Gypsy a dance, he thumps.
She cannot move, will be gorged.
And then there is the stillness of—
is this how?

In the Pew

Wooden table slides. Chairs, books, lamps
beds, bodies lurch upstairs. Crash
across the floor. Fear shocks, drops
drags my stomach awake. A man can crush
breathing. Guilt, my guilt, thumped
in stomach in chest continues
in upward glance—surely, the news
will always blue-light the bedroom—
Domestic affairs. Surely the news will break
into temptation, gust over oozing hands,
despite what's bred upstairs. Surely, someone.
Someone will. In the pew, I forget the prompt
for bread. *Only say the word, woman.*
They make me say honor delight forgiveness,
sin, call it a myth of night sweat. But
up there, beside the bed, she is
hardly breathing. Documents and the news:
His oars crave caress like singing. Who
names shame? *Genuflect, woman.*
He teases her freedom as a guest
in his grip of arm hands hair neck
the expanse of. Barely. Breathing. How many
times—Will he—Surely,
the news will share thoughts on domestic
cats and violence. Quiet.
Quiet now beside the bed.
A rhythm in rhythm like breath
like her rocking, shaking flesh.

Tidal

Air blusters the girl's cheeks her mouth
in the thrill of summer balm. Gray clouds
bulge and ripen, commit
to body. The beetle, bold in black,
flops against chlorine-shined blue and
the girl pumps up

and back and up and back, chain
squeaks high and higher against the steel and
sturdy framed 'A.' Barbecue wafts. Bees flick
flick to pop-kiss meat. Waves
and joggers pass in the swift swift
crunch of feet to dirt path. Can words

get left behind? The beetle, black and marked
against crisp blue, swirls
squirrels legs, flows forward, flows back
against floating ball, rushing out of the way
of shepherd's hook, of boys' fingers
paddling from tennis shoes on the deck and a joke
pushes, rolls to the deep end. Ankles
roll her feet around around.

Then a push forward and back, a sudden plunge
of body and a drop
like sandals from gripping toes
as wind champagnes the ears. Up
and back and up
the stomach flies, plunges, and flies
until a stretch could reach, could just

reach—What of
the disappearance? Hand plunges.
Their shoes pound, clod, pound
deck and gravel. Knees are bared
between socks and pants as they drop to deck.

Beetle smashes between ball
and tile, finds grip, finds
grip, reaches for dry—a delicate reach,
gripped and sturdy. Then tidal calamity
and in the sudden, plunges of pearled
bubbles, now bobbing back up, legs
swirling, shrilling, there is no difference—up
and back and up—until

quiet—until a stretch could just
reach—some words were left behind—neck
rolled, face catches shine of flat sky, head
spills back, then over face, back
then over—water above water, their voices
left behind as bats flicker, bubble
the deep and tree-lined dusk.

Fleshing the Details

Give me a salt-chipped pier
creaking boards to the end,
the forgotten clover
of lips. Instead, a slough

of scrabby men who fish.
You must loudly bluster,
I am not a slob. Think
of me as a clean friend.

You will shove primroses,
a tightly screwed jar of
honey. Hands in pockets,
I do not think of you at all.

You will shove hands toward
my waist. Too much pull
for the familiar
I must grab your ears, pinch,
deflect your sonnet gaze.
I do not think of you. That's all.

If I Must

The mantle cracks a tunnel like paper-mache
and they drive me to follow the deepest buried hum

It was thought I would slide
as this black tulip tunnel bounces my satin din.

But I am afraid to swing this flamed hand.
What did I spell? What words? What words?

Their linked grooves snake imprints
across the throat. And I hear

a door thumping its supports,
wind breathing in and
out the ballooning back.
I can see through it

see a woman double over.
I see numbers pop my ears.
I beg toad-sized rocks to clobber these sounds. (Shh:

a secret—I stole all the sugarcubes,
sucked them dry, pinched in fingers
until they collapsed
as empty as *o's*, as ants.)

They told me to bet meticulous
on blended sentencing.
But all I can think is ivy wild, hurricane hands,
head bent, eyes pouring sand.

I wanted once. To swallow, bloat, and—
But no—No. I'd rather. Scream. Rather hold to beach
with sleep swelled hands,
grit it like crumpling shells through fists—Yes—
Yes, I would rather have wind storm up my back
than cower in a cradle of doubt.
Would rather love the slosh of paint curving canvas

with these hands. These hands that now salute—
 Paintbrushes, my lipstick, and chalk.
 And I would rather not
walk under a tree and think
this is where we could have. This
is where I could have. There could have been
a magpie, grouse, a dove. And this is where I could have.

III

Sliding Phonology

Do not trust the native speaker.
Simply re-enter, the way hips and shoulders
shock and loose to dipping roll of water.

Unravel to tread the flick and drip of no-speak
between willowed-hair framing the water's gush.
Stare between us bobs the breadth of water,

collapses this space to present tense.
Wet skin breathed into neck
translates the liquid into *Don't forget*.

Surface for a backyard door screen now,
door squeak curls to comma—glimmer
of the already said. Let the mother
catch you, let hands scoop dough, scrape teeth to fingernails
for the grit of wheat and *bilabial secret*.

And when she does, fly dragon fire and milkweed
to the house with a blue door opening
as the sun sprays dust across the sprouted fence
where women hum low, hang sheets and sheets of wet.

Before imagined moments,
 minutes even
to sprinkle measures
 of time of logic
over myths over ocean-view orchids,
the sisters plundering sand dunes
the sisters with their sunk
and flying foot run
 will lightning bug away
to a wedding with cliffs
and gusts of sea, to a summer
sprayed like dresses
across the driveway, to that buzz
 of space

you cannot enter,
you cannot forget. Have you

forgotten the waded river,
bloom of thundered sky
so rusted now in the dander
of a passing summer fly?

Peer out the blinds for house fires
burning spumes or cooled rivers
panting the story just told—neither of which
will help you stand
in the popping kaleidoscope—

scarves quiver, exhale softly from nails
pounded round into white walled sentences.
Call them silly. Call them
wind, red. Call them free,
swift wings guarding this palatal thirst.

Hands through hair—blinks
of presence—call them *gold*,
call them fingers splayed free and ticking
as dusklights' din etches a name
blackberry, fire, and August
across foreheads spilling to sand.

Cascade of Forward

The body teeters, driving miles
like slingshot. Our connection lingers
taut as salmon swirled
in eddies. We robbed
place from hill, left only
a lion's showering of summer.
But to say *I miss* collects
our bonfire too soon in the prism
of sky where we shear and stick.

The mind rubberbands
fuses us to background.
But yes, I do. Heavier, though.
Monstrous as in time barreling
into empty bowls of thunder.
And again, your fingers salt
my hair, slicked back now as read.
We fly ripples of wind snakes through desert.

But I drive this present without you.
Not time present, though. And time past—
no, not yet.
A sudden shock flight
of crows and I pound just under
the bowl of rib cage. Which is to say

you were there. Which is to say
in my mind we have always. Why wish
to speak clarity? I wish to say vertex,
horizontal and diagonal fused
in explosion. But this remains:
you mouthing my swirl
of whispered night highway,
We must wait to see what holds.

The Nudging

You and I smash grapes now
under feet. Now wet blankets
in the bathtub. We squish a flood
of freezing water, blankets
collapsed. Toes stain pink
in cold. We bulge
round in circles now—

like an after dinner wash cloth
rinsed and twisted in the sink, our weaves
exhale, now inhale with pound of feet—
my voice

melts lavender as a drive
through July's dusk fields. A philosophy
of mint and distant caves—
we kneed, pull, squeeze—fingers,
feet, lifting, dropping, and

I want at least
the farmhouse wedding,
swine broiled underground,
the dancing—

more simple though, than that. Yes,
just hands, familiar motion
of fingers to lips—yes, think of silk
and scarves as we breathe—hands
gathering, collecting—as we breathe
each other in wind beats, slide through

each other, smashing, parading into the cold,
wet blankets, until toes ruby into husks of numb.

Offering

The clawed out dirt den, the oil furnace. Spider webs,
wooden stairs, a single lightbulb, of course. I fear
black widows will brush off low webs to my hair—
like the one that dropped
into my sister's thick, black curls.

I reach clean hands
around the fiery oil contraption
to restart the boom
of muck drizzled heat.

Flames burped earlier
at Earl, his fireproof, Eskimo gloves.
I followed his boots out of retirement
and down these stairs

in my cllickety clack heels. He came
from a funeral, raised a hand to appeals
toward apology. *At this age, it's expected*
is his answer. Then he directs me

on the best way to maintain the oil run—
so this time
I bring a rubber spatula down,
offer it straight in front of me
like a torch, a silver cross
to cower anything
in the six inch crack between dirt and house—

an extension beyond
the furnace. Eyes and eggs, I think. Eggs
and eyes must be everywhere.
Thirty minutes away in a career path cubicle
my sister waits for the call:

Heat's back on. We continue like this
through the winter. Sometimes, I sleep in sweaters

because I won't consider night
in that basement. And finally in the spring

when the heat doesn't need
to kick start the morning,
we soak the entire house
in lemons and cloves. Yellow-black
smut streaks and streams the walls,

tickling down forearms, like maggots, moths.
These walls saw The Crash and now run
their used up voices, phone calls,
dinners, door slams and tick tick tocks

all the way to our elbows. We step on ladders,
book shelves, and couches, plunge hands
one after the other in sloshing buckets,
to sponge off the shapes glued with the heat
of an entire year. We sing the oil from our walls.

Cusping the Identity

We forbid nothing
and so words continue in dozing sloths
then sometimes stomp and pace
tiger-rocks across the floor.
I am not afraid of duplicity – the crunch
of dead chrysanthemum across the cool adobe stone –
to warp a fire even, the unbendable,
to land at the back of the mouth,
to assimilate into one. Who'll miss me
when you're gone?

Dragonfly zips across hills and we
dare to hold feet still, even for just this,
to wake in Grangeville, Orofino, to live
for real. The doctor said, pray.
The doctor said I could someday. I could someday—
But what's left of these almonds, shattered and pierced?

To un-pretty is not a word.
They un-pretied me to save, they say.
To un-shine is not a word, like magnets and clouds.
I halfway expect what's bared here
to breathe a harder light
than the sway of late August hilltops over gloss of car.
But in these, our fire and still days,
someday is shined is yours.

Gorge Driving

Shirts billow,
dust devils carve the face.
Sun and men bend wind to slash
lined land. Slate
of cathedral bird quick-splays
the windshield and hands burst forward
to stripe across the face.
Should the vacuum of forward motion
be forgiven? Between carved
mountains, a piano splays and twirls off truck,
tilts missing teeth to graveled freeway crust.
What dialect now? Gusts of surging smoke
rush lungs easily where dust drifts in sheets
across molded pavement. The river
slithers silent direction. A dam purges
in bulging, rolling walls
of water. Beards and glasses,
bleeding blue ink curled under suit,
steel bridge, a shirt that meant
something as it slid off the bed. Whose
dialogue now? Green
vibrates voiceless with hums
of rings to steering wheel. Orchards
criss and cross,
wither, bend,
end. How to tilt from now?
Water plows its forward rage. Lean
and lean and spiders dart a rail.
Eyelashes flutter, fingers flash.
Instinct only and direction now.
Yes, more. More. Swallows
dive and never miss the tunnel
of water's gutted trail.

Willow Shell

Exhales surround after a panting summer sun
dissolves into sprinklers straight
and round and straight and around. The sleepers can
only have pieces. Labyrinths of evergreens
drift into closeness of sleep. Together
they hear themselves, sunken

beneath the tree-lined rim and sapphired fields
that sing the black cool of crickets
where oak and aspen clusters give over to galaxies,
twirls of sage, rush-dusted spiders. Together they hear voices
cooed into strings, toad to nightingale. Canyon
walls in the dark. Do they also hum a single heat?

The valley drifts this way, wafts the boulders as burnt
where they once heard themselves
gully-spilling each other. Purple *What of
the expectation of ending?* slicks the twilight.
Mountains ooze into the sanded desert floor and
The kind that thumps just above the stomach together they hear
the wind *The kind that shudders, echoes in rings*
swing onomatopoeia, *to the one who stands an etched
silhouette* a lift of fire *on the other side of gorge*. Would she

travel barefoot, even to the violet shell of sky
to conjure him wild, wolves
breezing auroras around dragonflies and mice?
She holds her head between knees, would claw the marble herself,
suck the opal breeze dry until collapsing almond shells
push like sand to the air by burrowing feet.
Together they hear the picked chrysanthemum
curling up *absorbing* into hot of rouged rock.

Under the Stream

Above, conversation spins. Mingled tunnel
of breath. I duck when I enter
so to hear your breath

and breath, sprinkler sheering, sheering tree.
A spider shell crumples. Clicks
and clicks with breeze to screen.

*(There will be a point when I must accept
connection of two's,)*

must accept boxes remain
not just unpacked, but also built-up
as corners of clues of belonging.

Not to be spoken of,

(Don't speak) misplacement that rolls in riddles,
built-up manifestos. Shoes
pin themselves to mis-shaped angles

and it will absorb *(re-form)* months
to disband their serenade appeals.

Towels heap two's. Wet
and dry and spiders hoard.
Warped shoebox: new
to used beads and buttons,

ink and mangled checkbook,
your scrawl, still dashed to cardboard, tape
and a reminder: shut me off *(what is on?)*
when you leave.

*(I must accept not knowing if
you'll wait for me, not knowing – my hand
lulls up and up your chest your breath.
Street lamp clicks and hums the aspen breeze—*

would you run when I—and what about)

the old man with orchids, he did not
round pursed lips to sound.

Forehead of fingers, palm cupped to eye,
his suit waiting for living for dying the same time.
It drapes him. Lonely

how he folds
into the black and sticky
table. And he taps
taps flat broad fingers
to sanded black pew.

I drop from mangled ear chews,
the surface connection of these present weaves
to fall under sound. I gasp I gasp between.

*(Honesty and I'm a thought to touch –
my narrow thumbnail
pressed against your echo, echo breath,
my hand slides. – to hear – Windchimes.
Hand across your lips – a promise –)*

But the dusk and real time
haul me forward. Crunch of windows outside –
comfort as in a round oak table, shined
for an altar with forks and sponges,
plums, red wine.

*And then I begin. I drift to drift.
Voiced or voiceless
there is only one difference
from breath to breeze.*

And the waves the waves. Lawn mowers
and airplanes. A pan for peaches. Rust
and love is a consideration *(Then why should I blush?)*
in the unvoiced distance of our between.
Peach broiled in lonely need and one rises

to breathe (*above, under*) the other. Hand
on top of hand palm and knuckle the flesh between.
Windows and breeze. Puffs
of curtain, your surface, our breath,
(*will you slide this time with me,*
slide me under?) the rustled outline of trees.

When Voices Enter Presence

Spider dusts across doorframe. You stand
with sun blurring eyes
through trees. I never understood
how change is drawn. Streets run smooth
the dusk and soon there will be days
since the collapse of time between us—
the way mines have collapsed
entire mountains into canyons, gutted the way
for darts and sparks of birds.
Always, four steps from the door to you.
I bite my lip, unknowing. Who
will tell our story if trees
don't sprout the phrasing—dragonflies,
chiefs, and swans, cinnamon rolls
sanding our lips. Blinds half-light the room,
shocked dusty before twilight—a glittering of sparks
and deepening pools of—
I never understood how change
is drawn—Pillows plop and flop
across your chest because I don't
know how to say—don't know how—
must fill this space
by collapsing into you instead.

Under Sun

From here butterfly recalls its name:
shoulders rolling a crisp splice, spumes
of water slicked in front of breath. There is
a space between the lower back
and hips. Upper wings arc, *Swallowtail*.
lower wings ball to the end. *Swallowtail*.
Then droplets in the next hip-kick,
swallowed-tail rhythm. Only to be whipped
in rhythm, arced again
as arms open to pull a wall of water.
Determined starts
below the surface—a space

every swimmer knows. Shoulders direct, detect,
and there is. *Monarch*. He stands still as they spin,
arc, and circle the press of branch and leaf.
They spin and freeze, rhythmic crystals.
Monarch. Do they breathe in there?
Then creak, break, and drip
from the monarch pool
stilled at the finish. *Power*
has place. Now dripping
cool and clear and moist, unfolding
of surface, of clarity of lines of allness of—
He flies until his lungs must collapse—
water droplets flick wings. A long
breath. Air only and a long
breath. And he flies. There is space

between lower back and hips
where there is
thin, there is flight,
there is field, there is room enough
to explode a hill. This
is the long you, stretched butterfly
to the wall. This is the long you
as hands reach, clasp deck. The long
you, knowing the swimmer beside.

Thinned and taut shoulders stretch
lines to hips, tight inside the eyes.
A drive thinned

and distant to the wall. There is space
in the long you—a space—*breathe and reach*—
he knows, where flight—*kick and reach*—is winged
where flight—*pull and kick*—is stretched and
bloomed in reach—*reach and glide*—of wings—

Backwards and Forwards Again

Neither the blank clap of hand to surface
nor water trailing slow sheets from shoulder peaks,
nor the eyes on the tongue, audible
evaporation. Where is relief?

Blinks and black shimmer pools away,
you crumple like sinking stones,
the soggy crackers we used to soak
before knees knew what it meant to let go.
During midnight swims,
bodies—

wet and black they continue,
but something still collides and crumbles
like stones beneath us. Sounds
catch and bounce,
still *console* is not round enough.

Think of us as cartwheel galaxies,
crash of matter, our hands
drifting meteorites, dissipate
to blackness, expand

and dissolve like the mud-and-bark ooze
the hose once made,
tipped under the rows of fruit and shrubs.
Still, I say nothing—
Remember the way bark floats
like foam constellations
above beds in the dark.