

University of Montana

ScholarWorks at University of Montana

Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, &
Professional Papers

Graduate School

1996

Suspension| Poems

Adelle Graham

The University of Montana

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd>

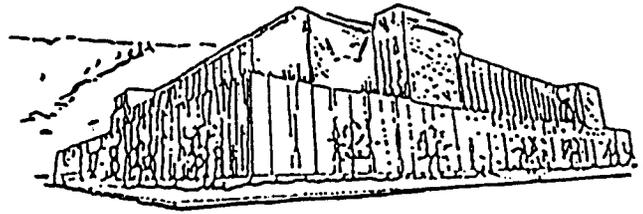
Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

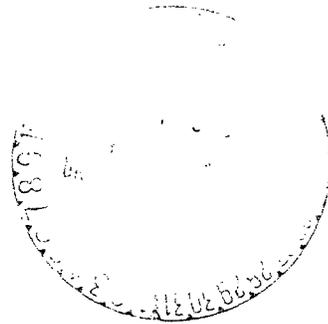
Graham, Adelle, "Suspension| Poems" (1996). *Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers*. 3825.

<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/3825>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.



Maureen and Mike
MANSFIELD LIBRARY



The University of **MONTANA**

Permission is granted by the author to reproduce this material in its entirety, provided that this material is used for scholarly purposes and is properly cited in published works and reports.

*** Please check "Yes" or "No" and provide signature ***

Yes, I grant permission

No, I do not grant permission

Author's Signature Aggahan

Date 5-17-96

Any copying for commercial purposes or financial gain may be undertaken only with the author's explicit consent.

SUSPENSION

Poems by

Adelle Graham

B.A. The University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, 1989

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

The University of Montana

1996

Approved by:



Chairperson



Dean, Graduate School

5-18-96

Date

UMI Number: EP35697

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



UMI EP35697

Published by ProQuest LLC (2012). Copyright in the Dissertation held by the Author.

Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code



ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

SUSPENSION

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the editors of the publication in which the following poem appears:

Cutbank: "Gold-Vermillion Fruits."

CONTENTS

I

TRESPASSING	5
SUSPENSION	6
EXCAVATION	7
PORTAGE	8
DETECTIVE	9
DAUGHTER I: CHRISTMAS ISLAND	10
CAPTIVITY	11
SEAMSTRESS	12
PROPERTY	13
EXILE	15

II

CONVERSATION AMONG THE RUINS (I)	17
PRIEST	18
HOMESTEADING	19
GOSPEL	20
TWINS	21
ARSON	22
AFTERSHOCK	23
RUPTURE	24
TRACKING	25
IN THE OLD WORLD	26

III

THE STRONGMAN'S ASSISTANT

MISSING	28
ROOM TEMPERATURE	29
OFFERING	30
THE LUCKY ONES	32
GOLD-VERMILLION FRUITS	33
CALENDAR	34
A FOLKTALE	36
DOMESTICATED ANIMALS	37
FORECAST	38
CLIMB	39

IV

OCCUPATION	41
CONVERSATION AMONG THE RUINS (II)	42
DAUGHTER II: MEKONG RIVER	43
REHEARSAL WITH PROPS AND SCENERY	44
DAUGHTER III: RESTORATION	45
IMMIGRANTS	46
SEARCH	48
MURAL (MEMORY AND DESIRE)	49
ENDURANCE	50

I

All of our ideas come from the natural world:

Trees = umbrellas.

Wallace Stevens

TRESPASSING

Over there, beyond the tree line,
the mailman always parks his truck.
With a woman he walks that certain trail
and when they stop to kiss
branches manage to sneak their way
under her collar.

A quick adjustment of clothing,
a regathering of strength. How easy to say
that another's fingers
feel differently on your own arm.

(say) Hands with reddened backs,
silvery undersides, flipping like leaves.
(say) It seems like a long time ago now
that I heard the kitchen door
behind my back. Were large birds

caught in the billowing curtains?
This is a still place,
though not for a moment a withered field.
Did they notice the broken branch
or wonder about the voice--its twitch,
its stagger and fall, calling out
come inside, come out of hiding.

(tell me again) The dark
will be luminous. Quickly my eyes
will adjust. Do you hear my breath,
ambient among the rocks?
Could you step a bit closer
on the remote chance that I will be seen.

SUSPENSION

I

They lit the bellies of clouds
on fire, they burned a neighbor's barn.
Absent bodies, bodies losing shape
in a crowd. Anonymity comes in this
version of moonlight and one man's
swinging heels are callused. One man's

II

swinging heels have no meaning.
Cool grey photographs hang
from a tree, hang in the empty roll
of land. Blackbirds pick at tinders
with their flinty beaks. In oily dishwater
I stroke my hands. Blackbirds, onlookers,

III

flying low, dipping between rows of corn.
I am under the bed, I am across
the street, I am at the window
and you cough three times. Two people
call in, asking for different versions

IV

of Beethoven while the light inside
gives the grass organdy tips.
Is there color to the awkward timbre
of my voice? I have no right
to speak of this.

EXCAVATION

The villagers chalk their bodies white.
Lining the shore, they pass secrets
with clicks of their tongues. We've spent
too long at the temple, too long
deciphering glyphs.

Notes to the reader:

I is pronounced like the double e in "see,"

U, like the double o in "zoo."

The others, they've found time
to take notes, filling margins of books.
I'm still searching for the right word,
one that means "band of water."

Meanwhile, villagers have tied
a condor's legs around the belly of a bull.
Meanwhile, we've dusted off four
pottery shards with our petite
brushes. I was the only one
who mentioned betrayal, the only one
who turned my back and slipped
something into my pocket.

The silence here is filled
with noise, but again, I can't say how.
They call this Structure 16.

Women carve lines into their cheeks;
like them, I've hollowed out
the lobes of my ears.

I repeat--Jade earflare.

I repeat--Lip-to-lip cache vessels.

The villagers have stolen all of our mirrors.

I am just over your left shoulder.

PORTAGE

I can see the backhoe
from here, a trail blaze up
on its flatbed scaffold.
Beyond that, a cottonwood,
magpies filling the limbs.
It shivers with the flicking
of tail feathers.

And that space between
your bodies, it was just enough.
He wanted you to see
his face--It was just enough

for you to knee him in the groin.
You got away. Somehow
I doubt it.

At the base of the cottonwood
is a red canoe up on cinderblocks.
I'd like to sit underneath
in the hollow
and pound my fists
on its aluminum sides.

And beyond all this
is a mountain smooth
with distance. Where am I
besides right here--
To know that is to know
exactly what to say to you.

DETECTIVE

A deer leg in the road--
only a segment really,
from the black hoof up
to the first joint.
For days I watch it roll, hit
and fly from the right lane
to the left.
Just before Christmas
the leg is gone.
It would have fit perfectly
in the grip of my hand.

My mother gave me
a small pair of binoculars.
They fit in a pocket.
I'd like to see something--
Something besides squirrels.
I scan the woods and in the spaces
between trees there is a woman
squatting as she urinates.
Her back is arched
over and each hand clasped
around a knee. Her companion,
he stands off to the side,
watching.

I can't talk about the tracks
in the snow. I need a body.
My dog comes to sit and rest
his body against my thigh.
Without thinking, I place my hand
on the top of his head.
If I looked down, I'd see
the arteries leading to my fingers
obese with blood.

DAUGHTER I: CHRISTMAS ISLAND

On the lava plain, the ground is still warm.
Soon the villagers will burn their boats.
Why strand yourself when escape is possible?
Plump birds fill myrtle trees. Ours
is an occupied country. I can smell oily hands.
I can see from here, your nimble fingers
through the trees, see that you're unbuttoning
your blouse in the uncertain sunlight.
You're glowing and I've misplaced the word,
the one describing you perfectly. Mine
is a reticent narrative. Tomorrow
the red land crabs will be back on the island.
Thousands will glide through the streets.
Their thin legs skimming the hairy mallow.
I hear you giving instructions, I hear you
retelling a joke nearby. I use my hands
as paddles in the sand. Will we be able
to slip away unnoticed? The word for you daughter
might be *segue*. The ones for me, possibly,
thatched roof. Will you follow me,
follow the sound of my voice to the sea?

CAPTIVITY

He wants us to see each tendon,
the confluence of veins
punching out at the neck. Bodies
are twisting, twisting away from--
These men are caught at the moment
of wrenching themselves
from marble blocks.
Rebellious slave, bound

slave. Drapery is slipping
from an upraised leg.
It never falls to the floor.
Light hollows out their bellies,
deepening indentations,
gesturing down to cleft hip
from groin. The light
takes a moment to pool
at their feet.
Who is this young girl, quick

and strange, pinching the fat
between her thighs, kissing
the backs of her hands.
Let her touch--
Let her touch and hover
over herself, draping her hair
over the slaves' toes.

And he never named these men
or thought of them
as unfinished. Accused
of leaving things unsaid,
I go over what I know
again and again: a bare midriff,
four broken fingernails,
zealous rain careening
off the roof. I am at odds
with the world. Introduce me.
I want to be recognized despite--

SEAMSTRESS

Now what we speak of is illegal.
They have readjusted the ending again.
Wool, coins from the street,

bolts of cloth. I finger frayed threads
from the cuff of an overcoat, reach
for the brim of a hat, yours

in a crowd. But then there is a boy
playing jacks in the alleyway and after each toss
his hands relax in his lap.

Stop rubbing your fists on the windowpane.
Stop asking if her hands were small
between folds of fabric.

(A half-dozen pins between her lips)
In the wilderness they called her "The Idolmaker."
In the factory they melted down

the rest of her jewelery.
I answer questions with more questions.
Was that you marching in the parade?

Could my papers, in fact, be right?
Place your hands over my eyes. I can see her
picking rotten pears from the grass.

Stay a moment longer as I listen
for the tin roof growing cool.
Is the rug still hanging over the porch banister?

Do we want what we touch to be ours?
She never called this the border.
That has never been what I fear.

PROPERTY

Childless concubines and palace maids
buried alive. I keep having to ask,
how many terra-cotta warriors were buried

there? Thousands of life-sized men
standing and kneeling, graceful
and battle-ready with left arms held
to their chests, hands closed
around crossbows--frontsights, triggers.

These were his bodies.
Square-toed sandals on subterranean floors
paved with bricks. Three pits full,
and the horses, each with six teeth
in their mouths.

I visit empty barracks in a field.
On the roadside deserters sell their uniforms,
their grosgrain ribbons. Others,
visitors, begin to applaud, some
raise glasses to toast. This
was my army. We await our orders.

And the emperor, he killed his statuemakers.
And the emperor, he killed his executioners.

In a half-gesture, light slips in
wherever the wall breaks and I'm reminded
to lock my doors. No one watches me undress,
rocking slightly at the foot of the cellar stairs.

Though I say, this is my body,
I keep having to ask--
What is the secret?
What do I do with this information?

Curved knives for close combat
and long-shafted weapons all carved
with characters, a script with strokes
as thin as hairs.

But for the topknot, the devotees'
hair is shorn. With it, God can pull them up
to heaven. There are no such rules for women.

I am on the edge of your vision.
I know I could kill, if given the chance.

EXILE

This could have been
the moment of truce, a caramel scent
to her freshly shaved cheeks,
the tips of her fingers gone.
Hers was a longing to sit
in the shadows and a voice
vaguely suggesting Andalusia.
We have set fire to our clothes,
lit what's left of our hair.
She utters the word "contour"
while they beat us with rugs.
Which one of us

is the contortionist, swathing herself
in arms and legs? Beware of her
they say, of her frequent denials,
of her obsession with chalk.

Four sleepwalkers eat dirt in the marketplace.
They cup and fill their hands,
lifting them gently, lifting them
greedily to their mouths. Waxy eyes.
There are those who laugh and ours
is a stranger's life at tableside
These are sights to get used to--
the way we cajole our bodies,
the way they distort, growing thin,
fat and thin again.

We have told them nothing
and it is all we know. I'm convinced
nonetheless of our guilt.
The caged pelican pierces her breast,
she feeds her young with her own blood.

You will know me on a dark road.
You will know me by the way I bend,
by the way I slit your throat.

II

CONVERSATION AMONG THE RUINS (I)

There is a common woman walking on the bony sand.
It can't be explained. And I believe.
Here, in this place, she is lucid,
translucent without light. Can it be?
Can it be that I wished for a package
and one arrived, that the package's
brown paper was anything but a sign?
I wash my hands.

I wash them again and this time
I do it with feeling, this time
with resolve in the quick moonlight.
And it is morning
and the paper has come so things are
as they should be.
I am a headline, ink,
a trace of print on my own hands.

Can the horse feel the cold
through its starchy coat? Be quiet.
Shhh. The sky is only blue.
Notice the clouds. Notice the abandon,
the reckless muttering of three crows,
of a man preaching God on the street corner.
His nonsense is a fat beast, one with sore eyes, one
with preoccupied fingers. It is peaceful here.
We pay each other no mind.
The kitchen smells like rotting milk,
it smells like fire in the hills. Touch me,

I enjoy you, your recalcitrant smile,
and your desire to wet my whistle
with flashes of inspiration.
Shhh little partisan. You remind me
of myself, of radiance. And radiance is the turns
your hair takes in the humid wind.

I feel for my pulse.
I try not to think of rescue.

PRIEST

Battered postcards in the meadow,
postcards flinching in the wind.
Gold leaf trembles on the ceiling
and falls, dusting our clothes
as we retreat. This meaning
is made of trees--
what we vanish into.

Dear L,
It was a charred sky.

We hold each other still in a fox hole,
your knees pressed
to my chest, my hands on the juts
of your shoulder blades.
A small copper drinking cup
enters into our hushed conversation
about architecture, surfaces,
empty cruciform structures.
This space between us
fills with ash.

I never heard it fall
from my pocket.
They measured our foreheads,
the length of our noses.

Cypress trees, loose boards
on the floor--We left a can of nails,
kitchen chairs pushed back.
Everyone sees God in the river.
Is this the way to Ravenna?
I've found a piano key
in the grass and two cats
in a woodshed, two cats
in the crumbling brick shell
of a woodshed.
I am the last to go, and you,
the first to agree.

Out of his uniform
he looked like one of us.

HOMESTEADING

I

I have my eye on an abandoned house nearby.
It's all planned out, first I'll gut it,
then rebuild. The back door is wide open
and something's been left in every room--baby shoes,
a pizza box, a giant plastic doll house.
I wish I'd never gone inside.

II

Floyd Hinz staples antique instruments
to the shingles of his house,
cements merry-go-round ponies into the ground.
A totem pole is chained to a tree.
Floyd says nothing is for sale
and as he paints a wagon wheel,
someone snaps his picture instead.

III

The river slaps hard against its unfamiliar
body. I'm caught up in the excitement--
How long will the saplings hold?
I'm taking pictures of my favorite trees.
The carcass is a surprise, a young deer, half
of its hind quarters eaten away. As I focus
my camera a golden worm eases itself in
and out of a nostril. What was I thinking?
It's spring and the ticks are jumping.

GOSPEL

The groundskeeper is neglecting the hedgerows.
We lie on mother's kimono, printed dragons
snarling under our hips and I run your feverish hand
over the new shoots. I say, this is texture,
this unevenness. Trust. Yours
is a chary face and tremulous smile.
I've decided to win you over with descriptions
of well-oiled clippers, of bloomless creeping jenny
sweeping a skein-like pattern over the lawn.
I can, and will, tell you much more. Patience.
The groundskeeper has taken the car to town again.
There, people are finally speaking up,
talking of a strike, ready to admit
what they know. But your father, he goes
to see his war bride, his post-war housing.
His bickering hands have over-watered the zinnias.
Once again I've fallen in love with the son
of a fool. Lust. It happened without warning.
I reached around myself, tempting you
with my empty hands as I felt
for something with a shape to it.

TWINS

Water stands ankle-deep in fields of soy.
Our long shadows waver as we walk

the swamps. Willingly we walk away,
the cat-eyed boy and I, from the church

of our father (shutters closed tight
against the sun). Earlier, beneath the cupola,

the boy paused and I listened around him:
my own sharp, shallow breaths, the bend

and creak of oak. I'm not interested in his secrets.
The message we bring isn't important.

I've found a small shaft of light to warm
the nape of my neck. The boy's arms slack,

his hands drop a bundle of snakegrass.
Looking through their hollow centers I see him

in pieces for the first time; forehead, abdomen,
ear, palm. I bring him back to my side

without a word. Sanctuary. We were never spotted
on the ridge. We were never on the ridge,

though I've dreamed about the thick woods,
the etch of branches on my face.

I tell the cat-eyed boy a simple story
of cave paintings, of flickering

lanterns mottling a horse's haunches,
of our voices echoing back to us. In the end,

we'll have said nothing worth repeating.

ARSON

This morning I ate breakfast
with ravenous splendor, coffee
and toast. I put milk in the cuboard,
left a candle burning on the counter
while I thought of how he pressed
a finger to the twitch of muscle
beneath my eye and, in exchange,
I treated him tenderly,
telling him secrets: the vibrator
in my parent's bedroom, my grandfather
in an Indian school. It was,
and is, better than I remembered.

A live wire is frantic, lashing out
over our heads as I tell all this
to the fireman's large hands,
to the soot-blurred cusp
of his ear and once again I protest
too much. Nimble flames

brushing wood, curling under eaves--
We can't take our eyes
off the spectacle. These handsome men
and women congregate, they discuss
something though I doubt that it's subterfuge.

My bedsheets will be a frozen wave,
my shoes filled with ice.
If this man next to me is a stranger
then there's something familiar
about his pensive nature,
his upraised eyebrow. Is he back
for more? For the rest?
I am confident, that as of now,
there is nothing left.

AFTERSHOCK

The edge of the bed gave.
I'm counting my fingers and toes.
With all the dogs barking outside

the silence is overwhelming.
I stood naked in their line,
concentrated on cracked grout.

No one noticed my deformity
until now. My spine is curved.
Uncorrectable. Should it

have been a clean split?
A perfect cleave?
My father calls me an outsider--

An outsider with an interest.
He is accepted, a leg
in both worlds--his words.

I stand naked in their line.
No place to put my hands
as too much needs covering.

Women laugh on the other side
of the wall. One yells out *rollercoaster*.
I go to hunt for my hat in the wind.

RUPTURE

I have a suspicion that someone knows
I'm looking for something.
I can't be more specific--It's just
a feeling.

Today I glanced down and saw a heart.
I recognized the aorta and I'd like
to say that it was the color
of autumn sumac. It was beautiful.
Intact. And I almost took it home.

I used to lay my head in my father's
lap on long drives. Did he talk?
Did the cigarette lighter pop out?

(I'd like to think it belonged
to a child, left for a dog to puncture
and carry away.)

I may never see him again.

I've heard that a woodpecker never knocks
for the sake of knocking. Can anyone
know for sure? A woman leans over a rail--
I point at the woodpecker. She nods.
I nod too and turn away.

A quarter of a mile from home, looking
for smoke. There isn't any, but still
I imagine the fire. Could I have ever
thought of the phrase myself--
flames licking--is it a cliché?
I imagine the fire.
Heat radiates off the door, the knob,
it sears my hand.

TRACKING

I'm here again trying to comprehend
the tools, a hunting knife and a thumb--
the one the doctor put in your heart
when puncturing and plugging
coincided within an hour. In the woods

there is patient joy in crouching
quietly. I identify bear scat
by dim pink juniper seeds and know,
from a hint of drying
around its edges, that we're moving
in opposite directions, the bear, me,
you. Dad, I keep remembering
and forgetting the knots
I watched you tie--slip knots, square.
It was one year ago right now

and I've rushed to get here
on time. Today it my dog
flushing a grouse from underbrush.
Surprised by rustling, the snaps
and cracks, I miss my chance
to reach out, to graze the bird's underbelly
with my fingertips before it clears
my head. It was that close.

IN THE OLD WORLD

They were not ungolden days. Not days
without color or shimmer in the baby's
newly cut teeth, in the children's rheumy eyes.

No one followed behind me. I looked back--
The puppeteer's stage, the clowns
wheeling in and out, stumbling
between revelers. And once again,
glasses were being raised to toast.

There was splendor in this precarious balance
of space between our bodies.
We cupped our hands, we leaned
over the fountain, breaking water
with the tips of our noses.
Don't forget to drink. It was

like raucous silence. No noise.
Like being blinded by the absence of light.
What was it? What, if anything,
comes next? Circular songs--ours

was a smoky anvil, a pounding
of hammers. We were two men with broken noses.
We were two men listening for the sound of iron
growing cool. Carbon. Ash.
Ore. Filigrees hung from the rafters,
not swinging, but creaking in the still wind.

Crickets manage to sing
with their knees.
And I've forgotten to buy an onion for the soup.
Lists in my pockets--
Long, thin lists. Sharp and edgy
in an otherwise blurring dusk.

How is it again--A deer's hind leg
steps precisely into the track left
by the front. Deny, deny. Possess.
I stoke the fire.

III

THE STRONGMAN'S ASSISTANT

MISSING

The potbellied pig screams,
the Spiritos are all out looking
for Maria. I move through rooms
snapping pictures, conscious
of the exact slaps my barefeet make
on terra-cotta tiles. Should I tell them
that I watched her slip out,
watched her ease her body sideways
through a gap in the wrought iron?
Maria, who painted my toenails,
who slept curled at the foot
of her parents' bed.
I steal family photographs,
one of her in the hall, hands
placed flat on textured wallpaper,
drinking in aquamarine. Last night
we stood on black sand, swallowing
again and again, our throats slick
with the film from raw clams.
Later I'll go along when we drive
the servants home. The boys throng
in the streets, gesturing
and clicking their tongues.
Some press up, smearing tinted
windows with faces and hands.
Don't let anyone tell you
that being close counts.
Chaco the houseboy spotted Maria
riding the bus, smiling
and soaking wet, all she'd say
was that she'd been swimming.
Tomorrow I fly home, leaving behind
pen marks on a white bedspread
in the room I shared with Maria.

ROOM TEMPERATURE

I shave my legs balancing on one
at a time, a foot
in the sink's small basin.
He photographs me.
Before, I might have challenged the allure
he thinks my personal hygiene holds,
but this is Rome so I let it go,
believing I've found the feel

of patience; the ball of my foot,
toes gripping porcelain.
An armoire, an open window and outside
a woman laughs. I turn
just as she clasps a hand over her mouth.
A man is whispering in her ear.
The click of the shutter.

They have nothing to do with us,
with me, but I feel caught in their pause,
my fingers poised
over a knee. We are ardent
in this middle distance.
Passersby in a teeming *piazza*,
melon rinds left on a fence post--

What governs our going?
Again he employs his hands to shape
our delay. The click of the shutter.

I hand him two eggs bought this morning
for breakfast. He closes his fingers
over them and I know that we are,
at the very least, like dimes
I threw into the snow
last winter. We'll forget
and find them with the thaw.

OFFERING

I lean in this doorway thinking my hands
could be lanterns the way they warm
the damp, pocked stones. Water laps

up stairs, wanders under a church's door
where, between services, it finds a quiet
to be ice-like, a sheen over mosaic floors

until clergymen come to push it back,
back into the canal in their fight
to keep sewer from sacred. A stench

I was warned about, but one that is
this dead, sinking city and I am here
nonetheless, one stop past my destination

after following a man off the train,
following the jingle of keys or coins
in his pockets. Now in a small cafe,

five tables and a bar, he sits
rolling a cigarello between his thumb
and forefinger and I can't seem to remember

a single poet who wrote here.
I'm scratching lines as fast as I can
on trash from the street. I remember the smell

of tobacco on his hands. Is it possible
to feel linked and alone like a 500 year old
bottle of Chianti and a plastic doll head

sitting together on the canal's bottom
while women hang laundry and tourists
sprinkle seed around their bodies. They wait

for pigeons to land on their shoulders,
the tops of their heads and I laugh with them,
people happy with pigeon feet buried

in their hair. A woman yells out above me.
I rush to the edge, reaching my hands out
over the swell as a white bra drops

from a clothesline, cups filling with air.
I can hear her calling, questioning, *dove*
dove? I whisper to myself, *right here.*

THE LUCKY ONES

I can't keep track of the gypsies' skittering hands. They pull shiny trinkets from their ears while we hold tight to the oddities in our pockets. One man's slight hands play the piccolo. His face is a golden crescent moon. It's trickery maybe. Slight of hand. I am to be the strongman's assistant,

to wind chains around his torso, shackle his wrists. Across the street a drunken sailor dances a soft shoe, a soft shoe under an awning. He's chalky at this distance. The strongman's eyes

are eager, absolutely clear. I kiss his forehead for the crowd. I ease their nervousness. Once we disappear, I kiss his shoulder blade. He's oiled and I can taste smoke sticking to his frame.

I'd come here to see remnants of the wall, to put my hands through cement, through holes others made. I waited. Waited to feel the brush of familiar

fabric, a rasp of wool from someone passing on the other side. We reappear. Reappear, me in a tortoise mask, then the strongman plucking a bowless violin he holds flush to his belly. I am, without a doubt, one of the lucky ones. The gypsies dance, stamping on shadows, polishing tossed coins with their feet, and grinding their heels into the dust.

GOLD-VERMILLION FRUITS

A season. Dogs and pigs trained
to differentiate between chanterelles,
princes and God's death cap.

It is the truffle the men from Corsica
want for their mistresses. I know women
with throaty, swelling laughs.

Lying, overlapping like organs gutted
from a deer, the truffle steams. They are
so close, beside the blue spruce

where the horse grazes. Look on the side
of the tree moss grows on. Alee.
Subterranean. As a child I found

a padded bra near the stone circle
where Indians danced. I visited it
everyday. Garlic, virgin oil, Mouton

Cadet, a cast iron skillet, *la viande
de veau, la truffe*. Some will leave
the room when the smell gets overwhelming.

Nuts, musk, ozone. I find old
photos. That's me at the picnic table--
my hair is short. I remember now.

I'd been cooking earlier.
We ate together and my hands still smell
like sweet basil leaf. Spreading

my fingers out, I wipe dirt
from the curve of the truffle.
I let him sleep.

CALENDAR

Thumb

In marsh grass we reach for cattail fleece
shivering over our heads. We're shoeless
in the thaw.

Index finger

The young fellow spreads the brush.
Our wide faces in a spray
of oily moonlight.

Middle finger

Popping trees. Strands of hair caught
in the corners of my mouth. You loosening--

Ring finger

Seven cold days. An orange rind on the counter,
a damp towel beside the sink.

Little finger

The brooding geese moult. You are involved
in what I know. And I know only
that we turned off the road just past
Gateway Farm.

Thumb

The house swept clean, our dusty shoes.

Index finger

Lizard belly cut moon. Your hair
is neutral gold and I have a small copper bell
in my pocket.

Middle finger

I've brought round food today, your favorites
for our picnic--ripe black olives,
a boule. You toss me a muskmelon
to slice in the reeds.

Ring finger

Empty boxes. We touch the tips
of her fingers one
by one. Hagia Sofia: nave, apse,
aisle.

Little finger

Velvet shedding sockeye month. In the whirlwind
moon, split both ways, the young fellow
spreads the brush again.

A FOLKTALE

The hen chuckles from beneath the bed,
her beak flinty on the iron springs.
Diego, my love, what has she said?

*Your thin lips, your fattening thighs have led
me here, my bird, my bride without wings.*
The hen chuckles from beneath the bed.

Candles flicker on the window ledge,
here, here, warm devotionals searching.
Diego, my love, what have you said?

*St. Sebastian's arrows, still you dread
my fingers, their idle on your spine.*
The hen chuckles from beneath our bed.

In my portrait I'll have a man's head.
Next to you I am but an inkling,
Diego, remember what I've said.

In dark doorways some women wed
still as holes in walls, as silent rings.
The hen chuckles from beneath the bed,
Diego, love, I know what she's said.

DOMESTICATED ANIMALS

If I ask nicely, will you wear your sweet clothes of desire?
Yesterday I saw couples gather in the meadow, tree frogs
in a pond and girls laughing behind the boathouse.
Important details, I tell you, ones which kept me
from walking to the end of our street, from calling out
to neighbors and friends. Evening, evening. Day again.
Despite my reluctance I tell you that the clouds are creamy
at this distance. My dog is on the roof of our shed.
A cat clings to the mesh of the screen door.

We talk about this and do nothing. You carve small dolls
out of wood as the peacocks scream from the direction
of River Road. On the kitchen table, on the kitchen counter
I swing my legs, moving them out and under me. These are
the logistics of space--A water bug's persistence in dipping
and redipping its long body. Is it possible to reappear?
In ten minutes, I predict, there will be rain. Flapping
tarpaulins, steaming tree trunks, damp birch bark chalking
my fingertips. Yes, you've been kind to me my love,
but I hesitate to say your name. I've repeated it
too many times already.

FORECAST

The raccoons are agitated, fighting
in the attic. We laugh nervously and follow
the click of their claws across the ceiling
with our eyes. Has it been evening
all afternoon? Right now there is nowhere
to go, but we're packed anyway. You get up,
cross the room to pick up a glass from the mantle,
walk with it into the hall. Iced tea probably.
I lose you in the hall. The Santa Anas
have kicked up the fires again.
I let the wind take papers from my hands.
I use my hands to reassure myself
and the raccoons spit and hiss. One tumbles
over an army boot I know is up there,
close to the over-stuffed chair.
They respond to the sound of my voice
as I raise it, yell out nonsense--bivouac,
lean-to, canteen. Silence. Yes,
I know you're up there and no,
I'm not coming up after you.
I have a certain way with animals.
Am I sensing your trembling legs two rooms
away? Wish you were here
to lean in my direction while I still
have the patience to work tangles
from your hair. Downstairs the dog is asleep
on the kitchen's cool tile floor.
There is a light on over the stove.
We darkened our speech and it disappeared
in the waning light. I can smell
the rain coming in my own moist hands.

CLIMB

Georgia's hands hold the coat's woolen collar tight around her neck. Her slit eyes mimic shadows between her fingers. A monochromatic night, the lens touched to your eye. Her modeled hands know the cold, juicy wind; palms forward, careening fingers thrusting back. (Last night I touched them-- touched my hips to wood.) A thumb is lingering, puckered skin, close to the wall's knot, a blemish in the wood. Stieglitz, why the silver thimble on her forefinger? Why covered wrists? Intimate plays, a light dusting of dirt on one knuckle. But what about the summer on Lake George, late nineteen-ten? You on the ladder, her holding the saw--together, in the orchard, pruning.

IV

A poem is a café. (Restoration)

Wallace Stevens

OCCUPATION

Folding tables and chairs beside
the sea. I hear the old woman,
bells tied around her ankles,
walking the hills. The townspeople say
she dreams of the Turk,
the one who came in a rowboat,
who lay down alongside each soldier
and ran his hands over their sleeping
bodies, slipping valuables
from pockets and wrists.

White teeth in the moonlight.
A cheek pressed to cool stones,
she felt his hot breath, a rich
ferment of poppies.

Sit with me on the sun-eaten wall.
When we dance, snap your fingers
above your head, bend
your leathery knees.

White sheets in the wind.
I walk into one, letting it press up
and form against me.

This morning is enormous.

The scrub brush, are they whiskers,
his, scoring her legs?
Old woman on the hillside painting stones
Aegean blue.

I know where you are,
take me with you.

CONVERSATION AMONG THE RUINS (II)

Tell me what you see over my left shoulder--
I imagine the acropolis, a stiff-backed chair,
an unwound clock. We've stopped for water.
I have the guidebook that is my knee bending,
that is the sweeping gesture
of my legs walking towards the loose rock
on the hillside.

We have brown eyes beside a crumbling lintel,
haphazard gazes in a dried river basin.
Let me show you through the ruins, show you
empty tables and how waiting feels
in an empty room. We're always meeting
for the first time, touching glasses,
smudging glasses with our lips.
Again and again the light warms your back.

You bring the smell of wind inside--
These buildings have no walls.
Can this be? And these are my hands
lifting in the breeze.

Am I stealing from you? Am I disloyal
to be on my knees digging? I dreamed
of the glance, the tugging, the wanting to get out.
You bring the smell of wind inside.

So I've painted the palms of my hands white.
So I've touched them to my knees, wrapped each one
around a forearm. I am the common woman
walking on the bony sand.
There is a print of my hand
on your back. It means succinct and graceful
curves. It means fright. It means
choose me.

DAUGHTER II: MEKONG RIVER

With a quick turn of my head, I answer my own question--Yes,
a quick rain, sweat on his upper lip.

Delay is a split of light under the door.
His are emphatic gestures, while mine are averted eyes
moving in an effort to stop, resting for a moment,
there, on the sound of footsteps in the corridor.

I remove my fitful clothes. I remove my battered dress.

Once there was truth; there was beauty in the glint
of fish scales on your eyelids. Father, do the catfish
still jump through the trapdoor in your living room
floor? Do they still jump into your arms
at feeding time?

I've saved enough money for an electric clock.

And now, again, I am out of place, too evident
in this daylight. The monsoon has brought out the snakes.
Deaf cobras hang from hooks above us. Their open mouths
almost brush the tops of our heads. That woman
buying fish, she turns her face away.

I am not a patch of white glare. I have never

been lost. Men lean over spindly bridges, watching us
down river. The girls and I, we press our bodies
together, press into the water, wringing out dresses
by oily torchlight. First our feet are gone,

then our hands disappear under the river's black skin.

REHEARSAL WITH PROPS AND SCENERY

This is not about you. I've come to your office
to rehearse my lines, but a baby is there
on the desk. Would I take it for a while?

O.K. I place the baby inside my sweater, a girl
with red, wispy hair. She becomes small
against my chest. I leave you and am lost
walking down shiny halls--and of course
there are many doors. I go to an open market
and yes, the streets are cobblestoned.

No one notices me, or the baby, and I meet you later
in an auditorium surrounded by admirers, flashing
white sheets of paper in our faces. Excuse me,
excuse me. I shuffle sideways, following you
down crowded rows to sit in hardwood seats.

I can feel the pancake, white caulk, settling
on the jut of my chin. The backs of the baby's hands
are brown while spotlights tip and glow
her fingers and toes. She's so quiet--
just sleeping, not dead, I decide and give her back
to you. Her eyes are on your mouth, watching words
come out. Did she see you say *bravery*? Yes.
I comment that it snowed last night.

DAUGHTER III: RESTORATION

I lose sight of her legs.
In turbid water I persuade my hands
into place--support her back.
So we swim beyond the biting flies
and I float. And I keep her dry,
placing her like a book
to my belly. She hears the rumor
of their singing first, summer thrushes
in the reeds, thrushes grainy in half-light.
Can the women see the pyramids
through their gritty veils?
I explain this to her with my hands,
the way I use them to tilt
what's left of the sun away.

In the pyramids we lick salt
from our upper lips, we breathe only
through our noses. And they tell us
what to see: gaunt swaying figures,
enormous shadowed eyes. Restoration.
a recombination of elements,
and here is another ceiling
painted to imitate the night sky.
I kiss her under the guise
of spangled stars. I tell her
it's useless to discuss the sky.
We lose our shapes in the dark.
Thankfully, there will be
no hope of getting back.

IMMIGRANTS

I

Seeds between my teeth and a baby
in my arms. The harlequin's hands smell of anise.
He is in his mask, his elaborate costuming
with cool metal bells resting on the tips
of his ears. Carillon bells in the cathedral,
in the town square and how tenderly
we exchange--his empty arms
for the baby in mine. He cradles her,
mimicing the purse of my lips,
the escape of soft sounds,
the way my eyebrows rise.
I want more. I want to hear
his fresh voice, its lilt and consequence--
Silence the crowd, send them home.
We are disguised. I am gone
but still here, pressing closer.
How tenderly, how easily she rests
in his arms. I never want to leave
this place.

II

What we pick up along the shore
sits on our window sill. If the harlequin
asks for a fish, will I hand him
its prickly spine? I have no love
for the sea. I've been there--
to the desert, to the border,
to another country. Spray,
pelting sand, crumpled papers.
I don't understand their language--
this man, this baby--the way,
when they talk, the way their hands move
across their faces, in front of their eyes.
Lips moving like waves. Sapphire blue.

I don't love them. And I do.
And it doesn't matter, like the piano
on the front porch, like the weather-beaten
chair beside it. The stairs are rotting.
I've lost the passports
and the water runs brown, ochre
in drinking glasses on the counter,
on the bedside table. Amber
in crisp sunlight. These
are my swollen hands. Am I drenched?
I am sobbing.

SEARCH

I have never been blindfolded.
I've never been told to pray at the muddy knees
of a giant. Two stones, one in each hand.
I've never kicked leaves
over a patch of warm ground.
Lichen under my fingernails and a stick
thrown into the space, the gentle space
between trees.

Need, need. I've never had to bite
my tongue until it bled.

You are so beautiful.

Chin to the ground, pressing into
what gives: a rain-soaked mattress,
the sound, the throttle of geese in the marsh,
pulling out of formation,
landing in the grove or alongside the highway.
I have never been lost.

In this house no one is home.
This family eats at a round oak table.
A gum wrapper blows across the lawn, tumbling
off the curb to my feet.

I pick it up.
I put it in my pocket.

The roads are slick with a trace of snow,
and wet leaves hang to the soles of my feet.
I've never changed my name.
I've never moved to another city, or been pushed
against the edges of delay.

A street light goes out; a kitchen light
comes on. This is another city.
He is in Poland. He is here,
coming up behind me--
I have nowhere to go.
I have never been more afraid.

MURAL (MEMORY AND DESIRE)

The fat, sloppy trees
are a mess of buds.
A tin can caps
the end of a broken branch.
It's half and half--
too hot in Georgia
and freezing here.
(Trees beside a bungalow.
Draw the "b" and "o" out,
let the letters turn corners
in your mouth.)
I live along the highway,
I yell warnings from a field.
(trembling skin. valuable.
value. I would die for this)
And there is nothing so simple
as the way you pick up change,
as the way I feel myself
watching you open and close
your hands. (Remembered:
a box of trinkets,
a hazelnut, a vial
of crimson sand. Almost
forgotten are grass clippings,
a yellow bedsheet.)
Bungalow. Draw the "b"
and "o" out, let letters
turn corners.
I stand near the others,
near you (stippled plaster)
and a stonemason,
a nurse, children
playing hopscotch.
(one, two, three)
Beyond the bus stop, the hospital,
the school is a woman
unraveling her knitting
to reach a slipped stitch.
Step away from the wall--
(The fat trees, the lush
palms). I am--
I wish I was finished dreaming.

Endurance

For K--

Swiftness is fixed in my mind. And I'm listening
at the top of the stairs, from an alcove, from an undisclosed
location. I can smell delay in the spray of breakers,

in the black surf and, once, I smelled it in your own moist ears.
When the workmen roll back the carpet they find mildew.
When they pulled planks from the floor I remembered them
all agreeing that I was beautiful as I washed dishes.

Water is a pattern of wavy lines. Your hair is embroidered
by sunlight. I sit with my head in my hands.

It's been an hour, maybe longer, since I came to meet you
and some say it's good fortune to sit on the edge of things:
a tip of land, a pushing wind, a splintered porch step.
I'd like to know how strong we are.

At a truck stop a woman buying coffee never returns to her car.
I am unable to stop removing my clothes.

My fierce hands keep tightening cello strings, curling them
around the scroll. My hands play one half of a movement--
my part on the piano. People listen and I rush away.

I can't find the source of the echo. There are leaps,

there is trembling--How strong am I? Cup to saucer,
ardent strides on floor planks, Alaska, Bucharest,
denouement. I am alone in all of this.