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The Threnody of Sutures

poems

Brian Watson

B.A. The University of Pittsburgh, 2002

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
The University of Montana
2005

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All talk is misunderstanding.

—Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters on Cezanne*

There is no such thing as silence. Something is always happening that makes a sound.

—John Cage

who
in this
shadow quadrant
is gasping, who
underneath
glimmers up, glimmers up, glimmers up?

—Paul Celan, *Das Geschriebene*

for Meleah

Involute

Come awake on the loose step before stumbling,
to remember the fall. Mark this— we never know
which second we'll keep returning to, why the shocking
color we'd never seen before hanging over the black ridge
built of shapes we couldn't discern like words

that might form in an open mouth struggling
for the sharp and the right could seem to signify
our entire lives, but there it will be ever after on constant
replay, when we lean over bridge rails and lose sight
in the ripples—we fade out again and again.

I follow you and your friend in a separate car
and stay the night then can't find my way out the 7 turns
in the morning that seemed so clear in the moonlight, right left
left right right, and when I notice, suddenly, I am happy
and lost: picking apples, a buzz in my ears, following your hands

to the clasp, watching while you test the angles and light
for one snapshot of a telephone tower I say *record this*
but it always leaves me— must be without all ligature of memory
to be what it is, just then, a scrim over death in mid-dissolve
I glimpse by chance— an embrace I wish I could trust

so that I would never want order— so that lying slanted
in the marigold hillfield watching lashes of willows & paths
of swallows crossing almost but never repeat I would be easy—
would breathe out into it, and lose the edges, and take you with me.

Canyon

An echo racking the walls— how can we hold
death to the light now? Cloud sobbed into ravine?

I want to wander into this luminous vapor-space
with my limbs off & held forth in my floating hands.

We perform these tests: paragraphs of cartwheeling script,
kite hands sent away in gale wind, catalogue

of blackened pinecones opening— what will germinate,
what will fall out scorched? One day I send out sounds to anneal

and come back to me— one day hawks, one day breath.
They have not returned. Maybe my father will live in smoke.

Maybe there are conditions I haven't guessed. The world
with its creeling towers and low lots, its streets and stems,

does not seem to kneel or cry out; but my dawn is not the dawn
of all dawn— I fall from sleep as I fall from waking,

a battered bag that knows what it comes to rest on,
and scarcely else— that does not know itself, soy ink on paper,

little blink owning only the starkest sense of want.
I stay face-down in the book of what will come to me.

The New Ear

You begin to believe you begin to hear
a sound down below, at the joint

of boulder-to-boulder, sub-subtone, a shudder
more than a note. You can crawl between the quotes

and scrambled colors, the *cusp cusp cusp* of stat-
static between the channels like talus, wearing

the habit of navigation, fringed at the hem.
You're evolving a radar system in the fat cells

between neurons, vestigial organs
of the future. You tune everything in when

you begin to believe. This is our recorded score.
There is an unlisted track designed to test

your willingness to listen to silence so you lean
into hearing. Every second promises the next.

The New Eye

Maybe I have an interest in optics. Maybe I
am on a mission of lenses and scopes. Sometimes

the light of oncoming traffic slips along the grass
spine of the median like a yellow-collared lizard,

just under the guardrail. Sometimes in the living
room it is dashed between the carpet's hackles—

a portion to every fabric, but a portion reflected
like remnants of loaves. I see the way light travels,

its bits and pieces in teams. I see it hammer into
glitter on collision like an airshow disaster Today

one prism of dew resisted evaporation late, glued
against desert grass, until when the blade was opened

like the gill of a stingray, the high noon sun broke
into rainbows against its eye. You and I,

we have insides like kinds of this light, do we not?
I see everything in the world through the magnifier

of the delicate arch, and you contain formations
like these landscapes born of molten salt and sawn apart

by unchecked wind. Maybe you have already seen
the answer to the question I will ask when you

come upon the private arch of my heart, alone
as the sun sets between the rock fins like a dissolving

satellite re-entering— Maybe you will choose
to share it with me, although we are strangers.

To The Reattachment

Trusting something, like Saturn, beautiful ox
of the solar system, with its trillions of curved
shards, trusts some mystery and continues to be
golden & whirling & far away. My hands
are sketched on frail parchment and kept
behind glass on display in an unheated rest stop
lobby lit by one sizzling fluoro tube and the exit
has been closed for several years. Were they mine
again, I would use them like sails to wave myself
closer to your world with solid place-names, Arco,
Seneca, Wellington, towns of phantoms, streaming
traffic, towns of supermarkets and parking situations,
local papers, streetfair parades, diner dives
where breakfast city councilmen, the farm bureau,
each and every cop. Cherrylike, your home goes on
functioning above ground, growing a deeper & deeper
purple black, sweet and staining and hard to keep.
Free, I would pull apart its plumbing, chop time
into planes for us to walk between, examine the chilling
inner systems of. If only you'd remember me— by a bridge
over a lake full of cattails we'd begin to remove our clothes—
so that something with no name might lift us.

Where Were You

when I reached out an arm I thought was your name,
a clear railing, starfruit-tanged, defibrillating?

Receding on an opposite conveyor, seeming not to hear,
coiling in and in. Beneath us a welling dirge of machinery.

When the sonic concussion bittered atrium glass in a rain,
the long slices drilled into doves near your shoulders.

You walked through them. Walked through my letter,
dressed in your switching curtain. Kept your night-flower

thoughts to yourself, kept yourself to a kite-tail's untamed line.
The kite swore itself to the sky and threshed against its tether,

but, soul to body, was held and held. Every thread
of fabric strained to tear itself to shreds from the others,

yet remained indentured to weave— calling on God for lightning
in the silence of afternoon— God of the world born between

the argots of angels and his own infinite facets, God of the ovations
of sea life, of sinking, God of each unbearable raindrop.

Subaquatic

Could we be this? As there is water through us each, element unbroken, molecules in seamless blend, turning their backs on the dry world, I'll pray my organs into changing states, a heart to trade and reunite, bond aloft in hemispheres, storm alive, flood alive, sink alive and spring— I come to you from the place of emergence, when my first crash blinded me and stole my breath, tearing my sleeve of recurring words, inserting syllables, incomprehensible desert mountain cloud tongue— I do not recognize the work of my own hands.

Before the unsustainable cities offer us the lie of partnership and slide the cuffs of aqueduct and dam, before we are hectored into toil at millstones, soreing our feet, before we are strained and stripped of calcium and salt, emaciated, hobble-ribbed, divert with me— we have a place awaiting out of sight where the bellies of the ghastly ships hang bloated and weak, where wreckage will arrive on the shore— and below, in a liquid shoal— a garden of invisibilities. Could our lives be such? Down soft and full of sheathed teeth— choosing to bear up into each other.

Foundations:

Should I ask you, bee, to stop
stinging? Sting less now? Why
should I ask you, now? How
is it appropriate to ask?
I don't know how to speak
to anything that flies.
Something flying: you can tear
off your abdomen in me. I would.
I would cut myself in two, in you.
Land of rocks, wind of smashed
glass, flying insects, everything
I can't see— were I blind
you'd still pull me. Bury
your needle: We are right
to remember that the dead
will bury the living endlessly
in the sands we cannot see—
leave the heads above, to starve.
I want my own feet, spears
in moonlight voiced by nothing,
inside a place you can touch
but cannot see— the walls
you smell the wet of would break
your searching fingers. It is right
to twist quickly— to plummet and not
to clutch— hear something in the floor
closing— floor I'm falling toward—
hear the echoes of water fallen before me
mashed on something solid—
will you sting me, on the way,
so I can remember a feeling of
wind sympathetic to sand?
Oh skin, you've failed me.
Oh floor, reverse me.

Low lamps & the pitch of glass ankles
in the kitchen. For years the layers
of bewilderment have settled in a snow,
single flakes thin as split seconds,
a white shoulder under moon, a stare
into the distance of doubt, downy,
fragile. What I thought were tendrils
of frost were spider cracks in the window,
ice swelling flaws I'd forgotten, unseen
in all but the right light, right angle.
In through the stretched gaps creeps
more cold— frost on the bedside
mirror in the morning, breath ghosting
my steps. The cloudless ceiling ripples,
shaken blankets, the beads of water
steamed onto ceiling tile in the shower
migrate, condense and shave off,
brittle snowshowers in the bedroom,
a skin of ice in the waterglass on
the nightstand, brittle snowshowers
falling softly in my lungs.

Let the showers slow down
as though your thumb
steers the flipbook,

and as though you could choose
to see the traffic
in slow-motion or time-elapse

one shutter per minute the tulip

opens its petals grow
in percussive jerks
its taste potted in wax

the cardiovascular drum, (pa-pulse,)

what power I have I'll use
to bring you a stereo image
of my sound, feed it

around the courses
of your closet-
sized room until you whirl

and lift out of your feet
your limbs your skin,

cut loose from the sketchily-
articulated arguments that make up
our obedience,

and we're left to each other in the dark.

as though echoless chambers
have pulled the darkness
down nearly into our hands
with weight, as though
for all our ways of splitting
we could manufacture even
one half an atom. I am tired,
I do want to lay down with you,
close my eyes, say nothing,
feel you breathe against my chest
and know we are still speaking.

Perhaps it will be so dark we
cannot see each other's faces,
and perhaps we will come loose,
not touching even each other's
fingertips— then let me only feel
the way your breathing changes
the pressure in here— the way
the cool rises & falls over
the volume of your lungs
close behind. We form a tide,
push pull, electron wall, be
with me and stay here— I am not
surrendering as long as I...
Tell me that you see it too.
Look down, read the dark runes
within the dark, begin to see
the shadow layered on stacks of
shadow, grades of absence & loss.
And call out my steps to me.

In A Vacuum

Take the stacked bales,
take the phone poles for instance,
triumph of repetition in tall demon-
stration: mind reacts—*such fine chain,*
such interlock, masterful (semblance
of conquered, reasonable—) seeks
unadmittedly one true interlocuter.

*(Who are you? Theoretical math
in the blackness rearing topics
addressed all in gesticulation—
hypothesis, process, carrying
specificities and laying them down
before abstractions—)* coiled & gnawed
red widow, back-borne, battle-hard

on a company of wood ants,
is this the working of the word?
To convene in a loose chain of living
referents at one point from many
directions and spiral under the ground
for miles? This knot of muscles, talking
to a ladder, leading out of sight.

So We Dug

And when that wore through and joined the layers
still we said we'd shovel with our hands. Oh but

the earth so heavy and wet! Our nails soft and cracked!
I've worn like eraser down to the wrist and the walls

are still brick, my feet still sink without purchase, still
harried by sirens nearly on us. Here the rain soaks

everything. Steam from the reeds, smooth rounds
twisting at our ankles, time and its leg irons, a stammering

in my light body while darkness hones. We have no desire
to return to our museal homes, and no belief in a free wild.

What is it to be carried over the falls, broken like a psalm
in the foam, a shudder of tremolo joining in as the trees

uproot themselves and gemini down? That we have never
touched them is no alibi— could never save our lives.

Our Harm Remains

Incomplete we wander out of this
situation— wring our hands, listen
to the wet pattering on the cardboard
jackets of your records and books.
The kitchen opens an L to the living
and a picture window pointed at a blighted
Claro Walnut's liver-spotted leaves.
Plate glass fused so small and hot, the grains
brushed and overbrushed and then brushed
until they thin and clear, silica membrane
shared sky You could get small, send a part
of yourself through the loose seam
in the window's pocket, up the trunk
to the crook of small trunks and see over
houses at what? You know the look
of the neighborhood, trailers' lace curtains
over sinks, long shells, razorthick sides,
cars with haggard hides, in the air a smell
of mildew, kittens and tires, you're not
staring down, you're not there— you hopped
the fang of a wren and were carried
to the catamaran of a cross-town warehouse.
Did I stay, tasting one by one the spices
in the strange antler-like steel rack
with unrefined thorns underneath
the cannister hooks? Or was I waiting,
stains on my knees when you set down?

The Envelope In Halves On A Plate

Here is my torn crest and here are the scars.
Cornerward stained apron, a slumped form,
form with a frame & shoulders. I am weary
but wish you'd traveled with me. I am writing
you a book & in it I am disclosing everything.

I am unbandaging the punctures, rescinding
the skin grafts, I will let the bare cuts seep,
singed by the mint-crisp air of spring. We are
far and you are ever silent. I am writing you
a letter in a book of stories. I am providing

dense illustration. I am telling you everything
because I want you to know—gleam of
parallel charms, I have been on a well-traveled
route, I, I, I, I continue, feeling the feathers
in my ears detailing their cilia against the whetstone

of a voice that echoes along the inlets and bays,
imagined. The curls of water sick against this
stolen island, the mirrors of wheat collecting stars'
muzzled flickers, yearning down and yearning back
toward black. If you never touch me still I have seen

that you are beautiful. Not sparing as nothing
is spared, not the shores, not towers of granite, not
paths of rivers, not the redboned spruce, no edge
or element. I am not here to love you safely.
The eroding moon deep within its body,

with a melody hummed by gravity, culls
the atmosphere back into space. Nothing changes
because of me. You and the darkness that is yours,
I am writing you a door to mine and closing my eyes.
You may enter while I sleep; do what you will.

Ft. Smith

At the site of the child
burned and still steaming
under its wet towel;
at the site of the lynchings,
proud of their preserved gallows,
the luridly knotholed walls,
the crisp, hale, grass, iron-rich
with the blood of thousands
on thousands and too clean,
too green, too straight
and unashamed; the black inlays
of rifle slats a night within the night,
as dark cutouts in time one could reach
back through, leering from
the living fragments
of the pentagonal stone walls
of Fort Smith at the site of no apology;
at the base of the witness Ozarks
still rippling, long-suffering and waiting
now as these foundations are eroded
slowly by footsteps and wind,
bone and mortar both tending toward sand,
the facades of the crumbling architecture
laquered to delay the permanent and doubtless
coming. In the city square
the chlorinated fountain's lip sprinkled
with scraps of powdered laundry detergent.
Lolling, thinned river, dam-saddled
packmule struggling under
the Arkansas sun's large whip;
land in want of clover and thistle
at the site of no remorse, and no relief,
and no future, and cannons
at the borders of the square and imaginary
States— spirits like a shawl of smoke
when the cool rolls in and no one looks up.

Sand-Coated Pill

Come back to my life gray shame
below the bridge of specialization,
an endless accretion we watch for,
work like mist— sudden, thick brakes,
disappearing highway— no rest
but a limp tongue— booming dunes
with singing drone, come in— the world
no longer felt called. Sorrow
a found vine, a chord of sand
like violin, the floor of the world sings:
We stand aside to hear, the tone too low
Oh don't desert me now. Words
an ink-thin grip, weak. Look into a groove
of eyes too lonely for home. Observe
the eyes too lonely, too still. Listen to the beach.
Avalanches sing like whales. Desperate,
a blue smog, horizon choked, buoy, tug,
discover that you slept atop the hill as snow
melted, the valley obscured by smog.
Have we given up swinging? In the woods
a bat tangled in a clot of forgotten net,
starving. The eyes still work forth & back.
I found her there when I was wandering, lost.
I could barely feel anything and did
not know what to regret.

Trellis

How then am I human—
all that human webs,
a knock of feathers and string?
Here is the shard of glass
I keep in my mouth,
and here the leaf that blows
across the rake of the brights
looking like an animal whose life
you choose to believe. Here
are the small damages we wake
and live with. In the city of bridges
at dusk, the opaque river's steam
sets off the massive clock tower's
border of neon blue. Enter the house
in which you were born, years ago.
Scars of a fire welt the walls,
the ceiling opens like a nibbled leaf
to throbbing sky, and even so:
Scramble to the rafters feeling
each fingerprint waiting in the dust
for you. Perch beside the socket.
Watch the light unravel,
then see between the light.

Certain

A man may not dismember himself
into a flock of black butterflies,
soundlessly petal and drift twixt
the roiling sea and the stormbank's
scarred visage undetected toward
some honeyed vine, invisible
but olable.

Nor may a woman stretch her paddles
down into an ocean orange as tea the way
a needle coupled to a turning record
translates the wax confessions into prayers,
each modicum of dust the scratching
of tar in the lungs, summons the dusk down
with bells and is thus absolved.

There is no rain for us, here.
We may not be saved. We must lower
ourselves to the deck and burn.
Everything between sternum and spine
throbs with our debt.
I will turn myself over to you.

Fortress

No question
that the answers
won't come.

Day by day
the guards to the city
lie drunk

and exquisitely
alone.
There is no end

to the open-
handed prayers
sent up

from the ramparts
like handkerchiefs.
Widows

in their veils,
with tea,
the hollow clink

of silverware ringing
in their ears,
a tinnitus

of takeaway.
The left are always
walking through

the familiar
thermal signature
of the dead,

salt in the skin
pulling wildly
at the pores

like iron filings
passing a bar magnet
on an opposite train,

finding
last fingerprints
in the top windowsill's

dust,
a year or more old,
and unreached.

Vantage: No Loss Left, A Duet

Such lanterns are turned free by the dusk. They partner
with the dark like bullets with flesh. Each to do its chosen

work. Swinging toward one another on the grave risk-ed limb
of tandem candor Two points of lambence. Volcanic green in the gray

of the moss-light threaded valley. Cragged apple trees mutant
in the widowed distance. Hill haired by wheat or reed.

Or not haired but skreed and defurred. Valley of crass fence
but no chimney. Numb portions of landscape gowned

in helixes of steam. Swelling lacuna Annexing evermore
crucial sections of still-visible place. Birdless

with a threshold drone of birdlessness. The arc of mobile light
accepting more path. Glow with a tenuous hold on its

seeming. What's small and impatient impatiently kindled
may be hand-held. Mist waiting six feet overhead

like spiderweb to possess us. Should we frustrate & quit.

This New Mexico

This New Mexico sky is inside mine,
storm and sun in opposite quadrants,
silver light and black, jetty green light
and habanero green. My sand hauled up,
clouds reflecting in the litter of chrome
skulls peppering desert, slashes of cloud,
souls of cloud, watercolor thin nebulae,
tucks and splashes and convulsions
of cloud speared by sun or backlit
lampshades or impenetrable knit all
blustered and frantically austere
and fit to die. So the trevails of putting
one thing to another are upon me
and nothing is clearer but the jostle
and abrasion of the world I seek to touch
and which wounds me and without which
I would be a brown pinyon pine in wait
for lightning. For this moment a knell
of myself scrawled in hurry in passing,
under pursuit but irresistably pausing
to be with the wild sunflowers, twisting
this way and that in the crosswinds.

Stutterbird

Even here I want to put the portrait
into my mouth and tongue it,
rolled hyacinth and gaunt canvas.
Want to put my whole body

behind the rind and paint taste,
cough it, splatter it, spit the thinner
in a low blood sugar reflex,
shaking by the parking meter.

These and their old checkered shirts,
these and the way the barlights
navigate the mirror-stick bodies...
Here I am, in them, hung like breath

between their silhouette heads. I want
to pull them, lead-doused, inside.
Defy skin until an effulgence of bruise
blossoms in vines along each arm.

Sickened so that I can give them back
to you, so that I can find you again,
unabridged and violent, the end
of an epoch in you, a turn.

Tessera

It was what I'd thought was promise,
was what I thought bore signs of keeping;
something like the constant chore of lugging
through the street ribcage of heiffer:
Ionic, cut down, disassembled: No head,
no hips, no hind legs. The heart, the stomachs,
the spine on a spindle chain. The severances,
mostly goreless, torn seams tamped
with salt, a long leash, a leather strap.
I pause each block to gasp. Hunk coarse
& maroon smeared stain lipstick from
a butcher's kiss. A bone jagging
on tire ruts of ice sined in the street. Though
something in the carcass still pulses.

Lattice Of Marl, Lattice Of Crawl

Are you sure it was you? Sure you were there, and where were you?
Who couldn't get the questions right, you were you then. And who

delivered this joke of *real time*? As though there were tiers to irreality, as
though ours more or less pulled, is that what you would have said?

Did you think you'd know me? Without questions, how would you
know me? I who can't, ever, even— so how would I look, then?

What's my glint *in real time*? Could you hear the bells of the cymbals
among the other budda-budda-clack? You who thought you saw

a porch collapse in the gasp, you thought, of an anvil cloud, did this same
perception plan the creak of the springs, the crack of, you thought,

the headboard from another room? Whisperpaper walls, who couldn't
even get the questions right? We with what, skulls of graywrithe

worms in a world of probably mirrors, probably carefully machined,
we who do not access anymore these still pools? Oh would you know

your own face in the gap left hanging? Am I complicit in these designs?
The way the sky was clear, then hailing, the way the earth hauled back

then heaved a ripple through the green. Did I feel what you feel?

Cloak And Aster

Some noise in the phone poles, some damp near, the slick of it skinned.
In dreamwake I lean to you— your sleek, the spar, lost into the warm

layers of twin light, petal and bead, the slime— to drowse, hemweld
we slim are pulsed to in blue shade, in bruise play, cream rose,

the goldening first light, navy green cut with melon cubes street-lamped,
sweet slip decanting via stream legs, this shivered tryst— these limbs

we cross, we slake— oh leave me not; surl of taste we unknown tongues
slant to in shiver glaze. In half-sleep, again I turn to you.

For Our Bonds

But we celebrate the long decay, the memory of the snare our lives are—
we grow lonely in the too-wide silence of a freely breathing span— we're

comfortable in our warren of injuries, our ward of the slipping away— and
if you could feel, if you could taste his name's fresh ice on the baseboard,

the blackened woodwork, would you still be calling me, or would you
relish the flavor of that greater other, down in the dustmemory that fitfully

begs a re-creation like us, our insincerely muttered prayers gliding ten feet
above the heat of our lips then splitting into stars? The garden bracken

reeks its purpose toward the attic swill. In conversation of the heart all
forms of dirt join a chorus of plea for othersuchness, but without a tongue

to shape the spellnames of our homes, speech our airship's anchor, we're
harpooned chest-to-chest and hip-to-hip by what we're called by it or him

or she in black languagelessness bursting over our gardens and rutted paths.
There in the footstones a whispered honing. There in the gaunt

remains of slain Curry cabin, muddaub brittle slanted out of the joints, tin
roof fletched apart through two hundred years of seasons, the stove frame

bucked akimbo, chimney hole a gape of leaked-away life, there in the triple-
doored root cellar, tin stained rust, peppered with buckshot, the scarbrand wind

carries a last emanation into space— a small-voiced pain at micro decibels—
urging these elements we wear to rush, to untether it, to send it all up.

Shadows Cast In Green River

For this God is abstract and full of distortion
as we gaze from one mesa across the others and exact
edges are pulled into rose & cornflower, kale & lemon
colours, as the order of God is further and further
past these distances, beyond connection and utterly
unlit— and as our world has travelled forever
to arrive at us— each earthquake boring through time
toward its moment as through a wall of marble
by the friction of a paintbrush— as the universe
has sacrificed itself before us even to kill us, to offer us
the chance for it to kill us— is there not justice
in disaster and ambiguity? Are we not close to perfection,
the more able we are to swear we do not know
our reasons, though we feel them steer our heartbeats
as we sleep? But if there is a God this must be
the only way of praising that God: to take it all—
every dropped offering from these made things, that are
infinitely ephemeral, or eternal. Because the color
of pre-dawn light above the desert is disappearing
forever like this day; or because the starlight
has travelled long to arrive at me and will keep coming
long after it has bleached my small bones into sand;
I should travel with you not just one mile further,
but as far as you are going.

Highway

Past all the gas station convenience marts,
past gulls like flecks of dead skin from clouds,
past a noise of thrumming neon, past the harmonics
of all electrical conduits in pulses, past not one
but several worlds replete in jingling sugar bridles,
the endless worries dandelioned across my chest
and you won't say what you mean, and I can't live
like an otter with a smile and a fish, formless,
flexible of spine, a wish and proficiency in water,
belated, beleagured, no sunset, no willful dipping
of the steel sternums of light poles in triplicate along
highways abuzz with onion-colored V-12 pickups
and tricked-out Hondas, past no palaces of heart,
no neologistic descriptions of the life private,
the life internal which wanted teamwork
but received merely meteoric burnout dragged
along the burlap armoire of the work week, the sore
throat, the undiagnosed rashy inflammation,
the environmental bonethrush, sag-spore, cog-beetle,
lumennote, cataracted by a vile dialect equipped
in total signage and budget, a continentally dispersed
teardrop, the reused belltowers, the canning
supplies, the ways these conditions are not fleeting
but dwelt in, tailored to loose excess, elastically,
to engulf with flood and bile, and remain flooded,
and stable, and certain.

Some Rustling In The Flesh

The slow vibrato
of a voice I know is dead
bending around the corner
runs a rolling pin of sewing needles
along my chest, my arms, my neck.
I cannot hear the little hiss
of the record player's tongue.
Held in by the valves of my throat.
I want to crawl out fingers first, wet,
from between my teeth like a black-hole
locust and be gone. Wings like a neutron
star, fluttering. My hollow hood
was given me by donors, over time;
silted on, like layers of wax; like accreting
cataract, hemming up the sack above
my head, hacking out the northern lights.
A parachute I dragged— of gold-orange
curtains embroidered with braided border
sealing screened daisy squares—
The last song comes on
and I am not ready to go.

Trial

Tomorrow I'll post the plates
and a stranger will carry them
to a dark bin in a back room.
I don't know if I have done
what I can. There is no evident
victory in trial versus void.
Some of these pebbles
along my walk have heard—
the great mechanism, the sky
is piloted— I do not control
the doings within my blood.
I was on a raft, and then there
was rock. I walked but a gust
threw me. There was snow
until the snow became a wall
of spume and fire, the greatest
noise I've known. At this angle,
in this shade, what will root?
What grisly trunk will burl out
and live? If your map is torn,
navigate. Geese steer by the pull
of the lodestones. There may be
something yet that we don't know
we know On the roof I turn pale.
Which star has pierced me?

Coral Of Joints

Rain, star: forget everything;
I can't forget decidedly.
Pick another song to replace
the song that started repeating
when a snippet of conversation
on a street sign pulled it from your
memory in a graphic match and
set it on loop.

Identify the next shape
in the following pattern:
Brain with its cobbled kernels
lucid underneath, under scope,
under the eye of the right machine.

Come now, now, out onto
the sidewalk where a small of back
shatters me— let's look
at all the gross incompatibility
of devices. Look at the chopstick static
of the technology. Alders have it just like
the black rings on the Audi
and the scarlet control panel insets and
I'll take 4 steps never looking
behind me— then you'll try to say
something— then you'll disappear
We should have something better
to present by now

*

What does it mean to you
for me to say *stalking rooftops,*
green shingle to gray; mist-beaked
and tucked-gullwing; a shame of
rising bread inside; the silvery terror
descending; you cannot wait
and cannot escape?

Take this burnt thread I am holding out
from around a brick's corner you well
know, & join it with what you brought.
You do not need to see my face to know
how I feel; what you are to do.

Song Of The Knife

How long, how terrible straight
and black. I tried to write a song and was
cut. A sense arrived, invaded
trembling fingertips to toetips. I am
conscious of the sound of my words I forget
the importance of trying to

*

wake— when you shifted
you were either beside me in bed
or many states away
you are so fitful and unaware

you shudder when sleep takes you
seeming terrified to let go.

What awaits you there, underneath?
How could I want to know? It is already terrible
to be awake.

*

When I can't sleep I pace laps around the kitchen,
watch video of parrots caged on the Amazon,
their eyes colored pale banana flesh,
focused and despairing,
beaking the bars, intelligence seeking

a loose way out--

*

I can't sustain this pace.
A night, a morning,
a night.
Dexterous wind unpinning the shutters—

in the sea an ice cliff collapses
and it's all caught on film. Is this
pretty enough for you?

*

Don't come out
 until you're sorry.
Not apologetic but
 full of sorrow—
laden with its great burden.
Then you can come and smell the grass being born
 early this year. Then you can smell
the crushed cedar and yesterday's rain
 still held in the needles,
something the non-part of me
can understand— the buried which stirs
thickly, frightfully muted I
 want you to hear me when i don't speak

*

I take a plane—
 cloud shadow on cloud
cosmos floor— pulled wool commas,
a breaking wave frozen in froth
 fallow landscape
 strung with lakes of sky

exhausting the eye's ability for blue

a drag of quilted sandstone,
ripple cloud, cloud like snow speckled with drops
of small water flung from a cup
ridged cross grain cloud like skipping sawteeth on pine stump, wool
or cotton web I tried to hold together when pulled apart
cloud stripes like slow lawnmower blades
 shadow coral snakes travelling under the cloud water
when I was above ground I wasn't at home
on the earth I was already gone
I was hanging up and nearly dead until I touched back down
 in the air where a whirlpool or a flame eye
was pulling cloud around where gentlest pleats
like dune banked sand were overlaid
by mother of pearl figures holographic but smooth—
 the finally hard line where blue
became a distant fire of green blue with jetties
of turquoise smoke blending in hard,
 met with razor overlay of cloud platter silvery white
metallicwhite full of gray fingerprints the dragsmudge
of faint charcoal inverse shadows of shapes
pressing up from beneath the final blurring

where definition is.

*

red-

shouldered blackbird

on the fence strung with ice—

together we watch the bending wheat.

The sun is always present
after an ice storm. Because we may not look on the sky
and we may not look on the earth

because they are blinding
we go inside—

the way you make a fist.
There is a dish of boiled eggs
still cooling on the counter by the dented toaster.
Your breath steams.
You are about to wrap yourself in a blanket
and eat the eggs, steam pluming from your mouth.
Their heat and your heat
and three threads of steam curling from the picked shell.

Imagine sharing this room
with a child—
putting your lips on it

as though you loved it.

*

All night wind will break the heavy
boughs a shelling all around you—

and you will keep yourself warm
and sleepless, knowing anything
could crash down through you—
wondering how you'd tell,
what would be the last thing you'd know—
we've been watching the sky like this all our lives

and the morning cold reminds you
of a spear on display in a glass case.

Collect the paper from the drive, wonder what note
the earth would strike if it were blown across
like the aperture of a flute.

How would you shake? How would you send
that echo up to be heard?