

INSIDE OUTSIDE

by

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A thesis submitted to the

Graduate School-Camden

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Master of Fine Arts

Graduate Program in

Creative Writing

written under the direction of

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Camden, New Jersey May, 2013

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Inside Outside

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This collection of poems and short fiction explores the Weird: the dreamlike combination of impossibility and reality.

In Another Trance

The winds are coming off
the moon, are calling
Let's go to the beach
where the ocean licks
the soft sand.
Stand half in (half out)
of the water, the stable
sand
mixing
there. The closest we can
be to the moon.

Bering Strait

Besides the tools and gods, did the hunter-gatherers leave us other things? Carrying light packs, maybe even sleds, they must have passed the time with gestures and words. If love hadn't been invented, sex had. But what about the aphrodisiacs, the cooing words?

Coming across bees, they called their lovers Honey, and when dressing their kills, Sweetheart. When you call me Darling, I hear the british voice come through: light on the R, the L, the G. Tell me the sound that conjures the image of the first Sweetheart, covered in fur with fire and spear.

The Phases of the Moon Bear

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A ‘Moon Bear’ is so called due to a small mistake made years ago by a Natural Forest Magazine journalist. The caption under the photograph read, “Small Colony of Bears Discovered on Outskirts of Moon Crater.” Moon Crater was a large gully off the banks of the Moon Nile which flowed for 8,197 miles from Mount Whitecap, down the rest of the Carcharhini Range and ended between two hillocks newly formed (geologically speaking) off the Eastern anchor, Cirrus. Those hills disappeared just as fast as they were created, so powerful was that Moon Nile. They were riven and riven, until they became what they are now, lacy sandbars that slow the efflux enough to water a wonderland of new species.

The bears were the first mammals found and, so, were very big news. A striking photograph of three bears was chosen for the announcement: two large bears kicked up dust as they dug their feet in to spar. A small bear in the background ignored the squabble, walking in peaceful profile toward the Nile which was just out of frame. The three bears were all the same size of course, and the photograph perfectly captured the detail of the new bear’s facial personality. Tufts of hair grew rounded off the ears and a creamy highlight circled the nose in a perfect bulls-eye, just ending at the bears’ sloe-eyes. They reminded the photographer of curling stones, and the scientists wanted to call the new species something to do with stones and ice. Once they double-checked the Latin it would be a matter of time and paperwork. Also, they needed to double-check that the bears were not offshoot polar bear inbreeds.

The caption would have read “*Ursus Glacies Petras: Small Colony of Bears Discovered on Outskirts of Moon Crater*” but they rushed the job and the Latin was left off.

One: The photograph was so drab that aesthetics mandated it be released in black and white. It looked more striking, regal that way. Now, there were no plants in the shot, and there was no frame of reference for the viewer. The bears could have been any size and they could have been anywhere. The photograph was just enough not to be a blank slate, but it invited the viewer to be creative and use her imagination.

Two: The word *colony* is generally used to signify foreign things, like termites in a basement or maypoles in the woods. Bears didn’t colonize Yellowstone Park or zoos or Canadian cliffs, so something was new and different about these bears.

Thus, Moon Bears.

It took years for the journalist to be forgotten for placing bears on the moon but, just like the inventor of the suit, the apple pie, or the atlatl, the journalist’s name and the renown was lost.

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The name ‘Moon Bear’ comes from the concentrically placed patches of color on its face, specifically where the borders lie. The snout is lighter than the rest of the face, as if the creature had just pulled out from snuffling a castaway bag of flour. Descriptions of the up-close animal often contain a comment on the bulls-eye its face makes when it looks head on. The less creative simply say it looks like a raccoon and then move on. It looks nothing like a raccoon.

The first tourists from California saw the bears, took pictures, and drew. They lazed in the hotel's large swimming pool, recuperating from the exhaustive hours-long bus ride. A man on a lounge chair flipped through the charcoal smudges in his notebook and listened to the other tourists wind down. A woman pulled herself up to sit on the edge of the pool, and called to the man, did he want to play a local game with them? She dripped on him, even wrung out her hair onto his shins until he stopped ignoring her and agreed. They went to the bar, ordered six drinks with fruit on the rim, and she mentioned that a bear in his notebook looked like a planetary system: Earth as nose, snout as atmosphere, and eyes as two satellitic moons swirling around the edge.

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Once upon a time there was a song made by the wind. It cracked the pine cones in a rhythm in a rhythm in a rhythm. It left the forest with the shaking of quaking aspen leaves, went north and got cold and slow. It got cold and fast. It got heavy and pulled brown wet dirt up and carried the smell. A bear felt it change and it dropped the berries, stepping on them, leaving his paws blue-stained and sweet. In a clearing, the bear began to sing and growl in a gravelly dirge. He didn't want light-hearted happiness--not that type. A black bear sang with a fish in its claw, met a fat bear with a bone in her cheek, and they left to another part of the river.

Our bear stayed firm, singing and stomping his feet how only bears do. A bear heard and stomped the sand off her feet. In the spring, their cub slept rolled in a white ball against the blue of bushes and whistled in her sleep.

I miss the sea
so much that I

at night I crunch up broken glass
into pieces like rocky sand

Spiel

What happened to the trees covered in snow? They were so heavy and cold. I heard they used frozen ice underground to keep their trunks cool. The big ones, the big old ones with branches so strong that they don't break under the weight. It's true they used the ground to keep themselves alive. The branches grown out and down like a teepee covered in fat petals. They had to exist, because the mud butterflies collected their nectar to make bowls as heavy as dutch ovens. After the nectar boiled down to grain, the butterflies planted, divided, and stored the rest. Mud butterflies live off one kernel like orcas live off one breath of air. Most of their time was spent on perfecting the thick consistency of mud; just right and it could find a mate in anything. They didn't even need to leave--only imprinted their little body wing outlines on a blueleaf of the purple tree (a mature leaf) and it was done. The leaf blowing through the winds would give the visual, the scent, to the wind. You can see strings of mud in the air if you look closely, or at least could have. We don't know which one is the purple tree anymore, like we don't know how to make black pepper dance. If you stare at this painting long enough, if you listen closely to the voices in your ears, you might understand why they say, "I like that thickness" and "he started painting in the asylum."

Distel and Evelyn

Distel transformed the small den into a nursery over the weekend. It took three coats to transform the walls: the calm stingray blue was covered with a white primer, was covered with an orange pink paint, was texturized with a few sea sponges now soaking in murky sink water. They didn't attract each other, floating independently like two buoys.

Distel was the artist, and he loved the nit-picky act of painting more than he loved using their cramped workspace for an extra six months. Distel had moved the desk and the computer out to the corner of the living room with the help of Mr. Moraine, when Evelyn had barely started to show. He wanted the paint smell to be completely gone, wanted the room to feel comfortably, naturally arranged. To Evelyn, the baby didn't care what color the room was but when Distel pointed out Cool Watermelon, she agreed to let him paint the den.

At first it was easy. Distel was soft and eager to please. There was a little thistle tattoo on Evelyn's ribcage, and a little apple for Eve on his ass. Sometimes his suit would slide down after a few big waves, and Evelyn would grab at the leaf and stem growing out of his waistband like it were going to wash away. Evelyn's cravings were normal (no dirt or pennies) and Distel did his best to satisfy them. The one thing that Evelyn did want, always, was watermelon.

So, watermelon took over the fridge and even the freezer, displacing the frozen pizzas and Ben & Jerry's tubs. Distel blended it into drinks and served it in cookie cutter shapes. He put it in salads, served it salted, and made popsicles. The watermelon made him feel useful; he could anticipate the hunger and its cravings, and could put a bit of

himself in the details. He became aware of food presentation and used watermelon as his medium.

She went through six watermelons a week, Distel learning to slow down and carry one from the car at a time after a large melon lolled out of his arm. It lopped itself in half on the stairs in front of Mr. and Mrs. Moraine's apartment. One half rocked steadily on the worn wood while the other cantered down three steps, rind over meat. Evelyn said they could just cut off the exposed part; there was nothing wrong an inch down. But Distel couldn't move past the hairy tufts and sand the gourd had accumulated, and Evelyn tried not to show how it bothered her when he threw it in the trash.

By mid-June, Evelyn was reticent to go the few blocks to the beach. Getting ready plus walking time plus finding a good spot and settling in was no longer a fun ritual but a sweaty chore. Her belly was huge, her boobs were huge, and her feet were huge. She wasn't in control of the body that had become hers, and the unease reminded her of hitting her teenage hips on doorways and cheap diner tables. Distel tried and sometimes succeeded with a gentle cajole, but he had given up and left Evelyn with a big bowl of watermelon in front of the aquarium glow of the TV by the beginning of August.

He entertained himself with the hot sand and the occasional jaunt down to the waves. But once he dove in and cooled off, he was uneasy. There wasn't anything fun to do in the ocean alone. He jumped over some big waves, but then staggered out and laid himself out under the umbrella to read about stolen paintings and other famous lost artifacts.

He knew Evelyn would be back at the beach with him soon. She loved the ocean as much as he did, and they would be even happier with the kid. Every time he climbed the stairs with a watermelon, he carried it carefully. He loved walking in the door with it, seeing Evelyn in their tiny house just a few blocks from the beach. He couldn't wait to tell it about this time of their lives: when they were just a little family who loved each other so much that they stayed in their cozy shell even after they could afford a bigger one. There was something about being a dad that was so immediate. He was removed from the whole experience and couldn't wait until he could feel it for himself, without Evelyn's stomach in the middle. He practiced with the green watermelons, sometimes balancing one on his hip at the grocery store, but he relished what was happening inside Evelyn's stomach. She grew larger and larger, and the more watermelon he brought, the sooner the baby would come.

He dropped the beach bag just inside the door and glanced over the back of the couch, but Evelyn wasn't there. There was an uneven light coming from the bathroom door, and Distel didn't call out to her. She was humming, something she never did. He opened the door and looked through the mirror at his wife in the tub: her stomach protruding from foamy pink watermelon water, like the ocean at sunset.

Her voice matched the soft candle glow of the tiled room, "Hi, thistle." He said hi and sat down on the toilet, leaning over to kiss her on the top of the head. The smell of her unwashed hair in a bun on top of her head held a hint of fruit. "How was the beach?" He told her the waves were warm. He barely even felt them. Then Distel excused himself, kissing Evelyn before he left for the kitchen.

As he placed the cold jug of water on the counter and shut the refrigerator door, he saw Eve's dirty dishes. A thick watermelon rind curved on a white plate by the sink, with a seam of hot pink flesh still on the rind.

As he placed the green rib down on the plate, he felt suddenly at ease with his body.

Make Your Own Poem!

The trees of _____ stars
 winkle and brine in the _____.
 Groaning in the _____, branches
 bend and sway. In _____ grass,
 _____ blankets bob--red plaid boat
 with fraying braid edges. Squirrels clutch
 tails up like _____. Colors _____ on
 eyelids and warm wool stuffs _____--
 so many other tasks, things inside
 want finishing and will want _____.

green, sun, gloaming, thick, bloated, parasols, waver, noses, longer

“Ugh. So He Calls Me Up and He’s Like “I Still Love Yooooou” and I’m Like, I’m Just, I Mea, I Mean, This is Exhausting, You Know? Like. We are Never Getting Back Together. Like Ever.”

Sleeping in the same bed
but they don’t fit like they did--
the blankets pile
on her side; a tectonic plate forms a cliff.
How much time has passed, that
sleeping patterns shifted?
She wakes
sees his fingers reaching,
his arm relaxed yet purposeful
like it was painted on
a ceiling. Her finger reaches
out. She is Adam and God in
a touch. A quiet thing, maybe
not important.
A few atoms sharing space.

She Said, When She Saw Him Again

Please breathe on me

for a little.

Get your nose and lips

against the hair

behind my ears and exhale.

Snuffle and nuzzle

my smell into your lungs

so deep I can hear it in my knees.

Granite

They made thick thunder
under the running surface
rolling into each other
by the gentle snows and rains
turned to mean stew in the dirt.

Robin Hood and Prince John

Clothing

When Robin Hood wants a new coat, he borrows one from Prince John.

When Prince John wants a new coat, he commissions one from the Royal Tailors.

Spare Time

When Robin Hood is bored, he shoots arrows through spaces between leaves.

When Prince John is bored, he counts and watches servants roll gold coins.

Gourmands

Robin Hood's favorite meal is tree grouse, slightly blackened.

Prince John's favorite meal is bread pudding with gold leaf raspberries.

Footwear

Robin Hood only wears shoes when he goes into town.

Prince John only wear slippers, unless he's in the tall carriage on the way to see the Queen.

Eastern Thought

Robin Hood can see the aura of trees.

Prince John can see the aura of money.

Views on Killing

Robin Hood never shoots the kind of bird that has stripes on its breast.

Prince John never shoots a man without a witness.

Libations

Robin Hood will drink wine with his friends under the stars near a roaring fire until he stumbles, and sees colors.

Prince John has a glass of wine with dinner. When powerful people come for dinner, he drinks juice and wine so it appears he holds his alcohol well.

Power of Words

Robin Hood never lies, but will deceive.

Prince John chooses his words carefully so, on paper, he never lies.

Sunrise

Robin Hood wakes up sometimes to the wet nose of a pig.

Prince John will destroy a servant who forgets to wake him.

Busybodies

Robin Hood repairs pilfered arrows as he winters in the forest.

Prince John does not do anything with his hands. He is not allowed to fidget.

Sounds of Words

Robin Hood can't read words longer than three syllables. He claims anything longer is bourgeoisie.

Prince John uses long words, singing them to himself at night. He loves long, foreign words the best. Félicitations!

Acclimation

Robin Hood can move just like a reed in wind, if he needs to.

Prince John announces his entrance into every room with royal chimes. He doesn't hear them anymore.

The Arts

Robin Hood defaces wanted posters, adding mustaches and missing teeth with mud.

Prince John is trained to identify all of the Renaissance Greats.

Darkness

Robin Hood feels at home during the nighttime. Wishes he could always hide within his outline.

Prince John never travels at night without torches and fifty armed men.

Tea

Robin Hood sometimes chews mulberry leaves. They faintly remind him of tea.

Prince John takes his tea however his visitors take it. He finds it give him an air of superiority and nonchalance.

Sleep

Robin Hood sleeps on a mattress of duck feathers hidden beneath a boulder.

Prince John sleeps on a velvet sheet with silk lining, under four-poster blackout curtain, under a glass ceiling looking at the Big Dipper.

Acclimation

Robin Hood can move just like a reed in wind, if he needs to.

Prince John announces his entrance into every room with royal chimes. He doesn't hear them anymore.

Untitled

a hill of snow
breathing smoke,
settling down.
a tucked-in house.

Everything I Know About Her

When she sings it sounds like broken bells
crashing in the waves
and they say her hair's so long
that ties won't make it stay.

When she drinks she drinks it all
and sees in black and white.

But though she loves those ice age scarves, deep
fish glow in her eyes.

Oh

Oh American Apparel I love your ads.
Those tiny black and white people
in the City Weekly, on bus skin.

Ahem

In the store I feel shy looking at
what you're wearing as you wear it
and look at me in nothing else.

Those thigh-high socks look great
with accentuating panties
As your model lolls like a mermaid
on her beach. The hair covers her
chest like when we were little
and played at the pool. Underwater, we
Shook our heads and fluffed—
Sometimes asked if our hair moved
like there were waves overhead,
tides coming in.

I've looked at women so many times
a day that I see them as I rewind
that night in bed. My boyfriend
doesn't know why I come home
so heated after a few hours of shopping.

I like the no-photo shop look of your
guys too. Their cheeks relaxed
as if they are walking forward
weightless. I like that they wear colorful
briefs. My boyfriend's ass would look
ripe and buoyant—a burst of raspberry
as he takes off his suit pants
following my eye as he goes

about making dinner from frozen
Trader Joe's veggie burgers and curry sauce.

Other models stand sideways
or even against bushes
to look thin and skin-tight,
but American Apparel, your
ads are so natural
that people say they're pornographic.
Maybe kids shouldn't be seeing
so much skin, but I like the pooches
and small breasts and bulges I think
most of us could accommodate.

Let the kids see American Apparel
Employees sell what they sell!

Aside: I heard of one guy who wore briefs
to work and I hope to see him rewarded
soon on the side of a bus in them.

I can see the girl with the socks
after the clouds cover the sun
and I am eating Jose's enchiladas
with salad. My boyfriend
sits on the couch with my legs
on his lap because they're cold.
We watch Jon Stewart and share
a plastic cup of water. We've eaten
late because I hate the microwave,
but the plates are on the floor now.
I hand him the cup and as he drinks,
I fold my neck to pull my hair
as close as I can to my chest.

Long Shadows and Steady Currents

The family has lived on the island for seven generations. It used to be green and plush: an old growth forest. There was once a small inlet with calm waters. There was a small current that swerved in and through. The kids used to float on small boats from one end to the other, running along the beach to go back and do it again. That was a long time ago.

The family no longer lives in the stone house. Grandma does, but she is barely living. She doesn't leave the house to walk the beach, as the beach is in the middle of the bay. The channels of current dig out the land, year after year, and the island forms a large medieval 'C.' Every apartment has an ocean view now, and the air-people are as loud as ever. They drink their imported liquors with homemade milk and run from end to end of their apartments, which seesaw and shake.

The inlet has become a large cove, almost larger than the island itself, depending. The small stone houses are still there, but their gardens no longer produce fruit and they sit small under constant shade. Huge piles were installed decades ago. High rises balance on the thick stilts; in thick winds they sway but do not crack like wild bamboo does. Though, there is too much sound to be sure they do not crack or hit each other. There are so many buildings, the odds are high.

The family has a long memory and has pictures of what the island used to look like. They miss their home--they look like nobody else and alone belong here.

They have a plan. On the art fair holiday, the buildings sway and creak. It is the first time and a sign. The family volunteers young Dalca, who has been practicing with an ax and the trees in his mind.

If

If I were allergic
to seawater, he says
that even on dried sand
my belly could break out in hives.

It feels like a turtle nest:
my skin on the rocks though
I choke in the fog and
my legs itch on pier boards. I
go back. Gulls dive. Each
wave break sublime makes
me cry and swell.

This tastes good enough to see blue.

Coney Island Yesterday

The cotton candy
felted itself into a ball
in the bag overnight.
Lights in our eyes
from lastnight.
Pulling away pieces
left holes and chunks missing,
Bugs Bunny bite marks
between friends.
We ate it for breakfast
with a dainty decorum
(coin-sizes, pinkies out)
like pink and blue scones
dissolving layer by layer
into our cheeks.

Wine Enthusiasts

In the wine cellar,
light turns to heat
so quickly it evaporates
light to dark
cool to warm in the corners.
Spots of sweat like
vivid notes on the staffs
of your plaid shirt.
The earthiness gathered on the
stone floor, sediment on the
high-tide mark of your glasses
like horseradishes at the end of a dull
day--too impatient to bear decanting
after standing upright for two whole
days. Worth the wait, they say,
but surrounded by the magnums
and hard wood shelves--upside down
like bowling pins waiting to set
like a bundle of laundry stuck
in a chute, time is dropping fast.
There is a time when patience,
looking for floral and spice, goes
too far to dull.
The smell of hot bricks, wet stones
to keep the saliva in your cheeks,
those tertiary notes hidden in the
texture of your hair.
The last hint of fruit and zest
hidden behind your ears.

The Homeless Man

The homeless man didn't just want money for food, he wanted money for a doughnut. And not just any doughnut, but a crème brûlée doughnut from The Doughnut Plant on Norfolk and Grand. The sugar crust on top haunted his dreams, keeping his covers crumpled and his legs restless.

The homeless man wasn't above perfecting the pronunciation and enunciation of the phrase, "Would you please spare some change so I can eat?" The *would* specifically over *could*, so the reply implied "I won't," rather than "I can't." His emphasis fell on the thirds: Would you *please* spare come *change* so I *caneat*: please, change, caneat. He could have said only those words, but he saw that being polite and putting forth the effort got better results. Caneat was a word the homeless man liked to use to encouraged surprised reactions from passersby. It complicated an everyday request.

The homeless man didn't have a dog or an instrument. He relied solely on his voice and his 'look.' When he could be picky, he liked to wear a nice jacket. He once had a jacket with silk lining in the sleeves, and he was devastated when he lost it to the guy who hung around Washington Square and made irresistible bets.

The homeless man was homeless, but there were so many walls in New York City that he felt he was only technically so. He sometimes bought books from the tables on the sidewalk, quickly so they couldn't shoo him away first. He ended up with some good ones, but sometimes bad ones. The homeless man liked the one about the dog turning into a wolf, but not so much the one about the wolf turning into a dog. They came as a pair, but he ripped the book in two after he got it. He threw "White Fang" at a squirrel soon

after, and went to sleep under the shadow of a tree with Buck lifting his head like a chinese pillow.

The homeless man didn't mind when people gave him food. Some men asked for money but turned down an offered meal; the homeless man said *I don't mean to be a bother*. Once, the homeless man rewarded a young couple who bought him dinner at a sit-down place with stories. He figured he was a sort of hitchhiker, and that he had the attention of two people. The homeless man thanked the young couple before the waitress came to ask about dessert. He said he had to be somewhere, and the young couple didn't crack any jokes. He thanked them, took the man's phone number, and remembered to grab his jacket from the back of the chair. When he got far enough away, he looked back and watched the young couple share a piece of chocolate cake. They sat close to each other but laughed when cake got in their teeth. The homeless man liked that they weren't talking about him.

One hot spring day, the homeless man found a kitten among the beach grass and blown out newspapers at Coney Island. Whenever he felt too scrivenerish, he came out to see the waves. He asked for money as he passed Nathan's, and that usually took care of him for the day. He was covered in free ketchup, and bent down to wipe his hands on a newspaper when he saw the orange. He straightened his ragged coat, walked to the aquarium, and displayed the kitten, luring it with a piece of shoelace. The fifteen year-old boy at the door accepted the orange kitten and left to show it to his girlfriend, who worked at the exit door. The homeless man liked that jellyfish didn't need brains.

There was a place for everything in the ocean--even the Marianus Trench had glowing, blind monsters in it. Fish moved in waves. They belonged. God created rocks, then created barnacles. God created the water, then created plankton. God created waves, then created anemones. God created the moon, then created tides. God created magnetism, then created tidepools.

The homeless man loved tidepools the best and got to see a recreated tidepool in Newport, Oregon a few years ago. That was before he was homeless. He stood there and watched, hand keeping his collar close to his neck in an embrace more meant for effect than need: the reverberated cold splashing off the turbine waves wasn't cold, no more than the wind outside. He held his coat like an old movie star. He made sure not to touch his face even though his cheek itched because he had just touched starfish that felt like hard carpet. He also pushed up his sleeve to touch the fin of a stingray swimming in a sandless pool. But he didn't linger there--a ray tried to escape the pool each time it lapped the ten foot long pond. Its fin slipped out of the water and flopped back and forth in the air like a pancake in tongs. Light reflected off the smooth skin as it tried to swim up over the small barrier, and then he couldn't look any more. Into the salty wind, blowing off the shore.

The homeless man went to the ferris wheel after he was done with the aquarium. He watched the lights spin and flash in front of the dark sky until he thought they were stars. He didn't have enough money to ride on the ferris wheel and to take the train home. But, he was homeless so he went on the ferris wheel.

Other people rode the ferris wheel to be on a historic landmark, while other people rode it to be in a confined space with a crush. The homeless man rode it without planning, preemption, or forethought. He wanted to, so he did. He rode around and around, looking at the tilt-a-whirl and boardwalk games like a peering god. He liked the lights and how dark it was at the top and how it got brighter as his car lowered.

It was the exact opposite of the ocean, like the waves were a mirror. Or visible light and the sky was ultraviolet and the deep sea was infrared. Light only existed in the middle of the road. It was some sort of thing, the ocean surface was, that separated the same from the same. The hellish heaven and the heavenly hell.

The homeless man fell asleep in the tall grass and dreamed about swirling seahorses with candles in their tails. They were fat with babies and the heat from the candles formed a caramelized sugar layer on top of the sand.

The doughnut.

It was given to him by a woman walking past, months ago. She carried her umbrella high above all the other umbrellas and water cascaded down its clear plastic onto others. Layers and layers of umbrellas. She was probably new or visiting the city, and she handed over the light brown bag with what should have been his line: “thank you.” She crossed the wet street, shining like a shell.

He woke with sand in his mouth, his stomach growling.

Frogs and Squirrels

If a frog and a squirrel
met while walking their dogs
in the autumn park
with the light going sideways
through trees and dinner
crock-potting at home,
I think he'd pick her up.

The dogs share a bone in
the kitchen, pretend this is
everyday. The frog
and squirrel move
to the couch the same
way hop pause hop pause.
In front of the fire,
Frog tries to remove
Squirrel's fur coat--
laughs and imagines
kissing such a small mouth.

Central Park Boats

Couples as expected:
Amongst all the boats
of groups of girls,
they sit knee to knee
on different benches.

They stoop to kiss and join
while one lets oars lock
they make small roofs,
protecting stoked hearths
while they catch.

Your Poem
(after Kim Addonizio)

You're adorable
You're a dork
You're so young
You're so sure you're scaring me
Your taste is nothing like mine
Your friends love me, don't they?
Your room is my room
Your room is a mess
Your teeth are perfect
You're crazy
You're fearless
You're driving me crazy
You're worried I'll get bored
You're so cute
You're the first to be more religious
Your T.V. will never be big enough
Your smile is so clean
You're going to let me talk about ghosts, right?
Your love of football confounds me
You're sleeping with me in my dreams
Your shirt's so tight when you pull it
off it musses your hair
You're destroying smoke detectors left and right.

Is a poem a song or a prayer?

Leisure

I could be happy
 (for the rest of my life)
 in a fainting couch
 one arm drifting off into
 the open space,
 I would lie
 my head on a pillow
 as I blow smoke up
 into the air, coolly, in a beaded dress
 a man would climb up my legs
 to keep me warm at night.
 a Finnish hound would run
 around on the floor, always.
 I would sell all other
 furniture. I would wear
 no other gowns. No shoes
 at all.
 I would simply lie there,
 thinking and blowing smoke

no.
 I want a claw-footed
 tub too. I want to live
 simply. Have some lover
 boil water and lug
 it up three flights of stairs.
 "Draw us a bath"
 I would wink, while drifting
 in the cushions.
 The sun forming shapes
 from my face
 to body being too warm
 for clothing and Finnish hounds
 and smoking. My hair
 needs to be washed of
 the aspirants
 too-seeping into my pores.
 "wash me," I'd suggest
 we soak and sweat in the
 boiling foam rising
 to overflow from the expanding

water underneath.
Towels circling the tub
to soak up the puddles in a moat,
you'd bring some cigarettes
and champagne--holding
them above your head as you lower yourself.
no waves to be seen.
reclining in the tub, your
chin by my chin,
hovering in our tub
like a heavenly kingdom
with claw-footed feet.

Recipe for Frozen Raspberries

Freeze a box of raspberries:
the whole plastic container
is perfectly acceptable.

Forget about them because
there are other things.

Days later, open the freezer
while you are foraging through
the kitchen cupboards.

Pull them out.
Pop open the lid.

Pull chunks of tetris-blocked
raspberries out. Agitate like

gold in the bowl of your hands.
If they sound like dice in a Yahtzee
shaker, you've done it right.

If one falls, put your
face close to see all
the little red long teeth.

Don't tell anyone who may
ask, but that's all the raspberry is.

Mud

Clouds everywhere. So deep. White, it was as if the stepping stones were cakes of soap, and the garden of soap flakes. All of the spaces between leaves and stones filled in--the swelling smooth of a bubble bath.

The whole world existed in the frame of the window, wooden and undecorated like a painting's. It was a canvas that, by morning, would be scratched up by running dogs, children, and cars. Tracks would dash the landscape--dozens of past flight paths left by cartoon bees.

An arc of light lit upon the snow--coloring it a warm tone. I watched as the dogs paced through it--smelling and prodding. Jo stood at the steps in her boots and my coat. The light radiated from her as she waited. It was getting dark--the clouds had turned from white to peach to juice-stained, and were now barely discernible bruises on the dark sky. The snow continued to blow past the window but it seemed to halt a few feet from the house, though the snow surely drove on past the lights.

**

Jo had emptied the bedside table of its flashlight and was banging around downstairs by the time I coherently woke up. I heard her cooing to the dogs as I slid into my jeans.

My glasses were on the carpet--I stepped on the earpiece as I patted the bedside table for them. They were bent a little so I took them off and forced them to come around. The bedside table was still right next to the bed, but the bed was next to the dresser next to the wall. The whole room compact to the right like a storage shed.

Jo was in the kitchen, eating peanut butter and banana with a spoon. A pair of my boots were standing with their heels against the wall, and I slipped them on; a garbage bag of broken plates and juice glasses slumped nearby. A broom and dustpan leaned back. Leftover glass popped under my boot, every crunch a middle finger at the dustpan. I found an apple in the crisper and leaned against the counter. Thankfully the fridge was against the wall at the back of the house; it looked like a superior magnet surrounded by the toaster, skillet, and wooden bowls.

The sounds of eating filled the kitchen but Jo didn't comment. I wondered if she was thinking of birth certificates and social security cards--should we take them from the house in case something happened? I wasn't sure if the house was settled, and I'd never trust it to be again. The earth had given up on us completely in one night. I knew now what it was to return to a burgled home--the fear, the awareness--because it hadn't sacrificed itself for our safety. It kept intact, regardless of our investment or trust.

"You wanna go out there?" Jo said, appearing next to me with her peanut butter spoon. She moved the sink handle, but no water came out. She put the spoon down in the basin and paused, gazing out the window. She leaned down and patted one of the dogs walking by--it stopped and she scratched its ears. The window above the sink was splashed in mud but she was studying it like the design meant something. The house as tarot card or tea leaf.

Jo held the dogs by their collars and I opened the door. It fell back to me and hit the wall, bounced twice, and rested. I'd barely jumped out of the way in time: violent mahogany. The dogs pulled and whined.

“Flashlight please,” she said. I clicked on the Maglite and focused the beam.

“They’ll get dirty,” I said, and she released them. They ran into the dark, only crossing into the beam twice. They had jumped from the house like we were at the lake, so we made sure not to step out flat into nothing. Two hundred years ago, a broken leg left a limp for life and it threatened us again. Amazing the pitfalls early humans endured. One wrong move and they’d be limping, or infected and dying for the rest of their short lives.

I saw a fox once with three feet and wondered how it had survived long enough for the nub to heal over. The dogs looked like wolves around the ears, but their eyes were soft caramel. Waking us last night was their reaction to danger--we yelled at them from upstairs and they settled down before we could register any shift in our situation. I couldn’t have it both ways--either they came in the house and lay on the couch with us as we watched t.v. or they were wild animals to fend off with shotguns. Family pet or foe.

At least the mud was thick again--it had been thin and weak with rain--and it felt good to jump from the front steps to the ground with a thick slap. Jo cleared the stairs, launching quick from her unsure footing on the skewed stairs. Her flashlight lit up a small cavern, only a little bigger than what our houselights would fill back where it used to be, maybe fifty feet. Roots of trees emerged from the eaves of the cave like lightning bolts. Clouds covered the small hole overhead, but like a flashlight to a quilt, glowing seeped through the thin parts. The cavern seemed to end only a few feet higher than the house--a ladder would get us off the roof. If it rained, maybe the house would float up and out without any help.

I didn't care if it rained anymore, but the clouds looked light and dry. The ground was marked with long striated lines and we found our doormat a few feet away, in a moraine that had been left behind the house.

We turned to the right, following Jo's flashlight, and walked along the side of the house. The hose wheel was gone--fresh wood bloomed from holes left by violent bolts. The whole back of the house was almost flush with the cavern wall--mud crept out to cover half of the rear laundry room window--but the house seemed intact. The foundation had held, but the layer below that had triumphantly, magnificently, failed. It appeared that our house had fallen backwards into a sinkhole, but didn't tip over. It slid back into it and rested, reclined like a wooden rocking chair against the wall.

We were both heavy sleepers and we had slept through it. The dogs had roused us, but it must have happened so fast that we were awake and sleeping again through the entire happening: maybe three seconds. We'd gotten used to the white noise of the constant rain, weeks of rain. A little sloshing wouldn't have registered. Please, God, don't let me die in my sleep, I thought.

Jo snapped out of it and started talking about origins. Neither of us knew much about sinkholes. Improper drainage.

"What if there once was a giant tree here?" she asked, "A Redwood or Sequoia, or Megalodon tree. Roots taking up this whole space." I liked roots displacing boulders and raising the ground, pushing the shore of a lake further away, so I stayed quiet. "What if this cave hadn't always been here, or had partially been here, and the house was built on a stump? What if this tree finally rotted away and left an exact footprint of its

existence?" She was going on, and pushing the mud with her boot. I liked the thought of a tree root dwarfing our house. I liked the thought of keeping our home down here. I liked the burn in my shoulders as I began to dig into the soft mud with the small spade we normally kept in the laundry room.

Upon Waking the Villagers, Bankers Try to Explain How the Una Blue Bridge over
Frosty Tarn Was Destroyed by a Whale the Color of Unwashed Denim

A photogenic tail poised,
paused diving down
above waves,
posed near broken struts.

Gifted Lilies: A Diptych

1

Yellow, for friendship,
their big pointed petals
droop off their hinges,
landing premature and wet
on the kitchen counter.

A russet dust settles
around the sunlight
but the stigmas stay.

They refuse to turn their heads
from me. Yellow and erect.

2

The following night,
the last alive sheds half
its mane and the thick
fan pulls straight down like a weak
parachute. All in one

piece: five yellow petals
arranged like playing
cards, two teeter-tottering

anthers on filaments. All
down in one declarative
gesture of the autumn outside.

Nothing lives so long as
cut flowers because
every day you expect

them dead. Anthers blink at
me, the filaments waver,
the petals pick up
and scuttle across the
counter: a sick crab.

Fishing

I asked why they called it fishing and they said it used to be fish. They'd found pointier prey since. We packed our tackle and traveled two days to the river--next year, maybe go to the lake, maybe see some moose. Attached film to the hooks like a spiderweb on a branch. They liked it--we didn't know why. Grandma said it looked like light on water--sunset light--breakfast light. I didn't say I agreed. We shivered in the night and didn't talk.

I watched that water until I predicted a ripple--hours. As I watched a circle fade out into the water, a tongue flicked. Gone, like a fish tail. A circle started and dad said "a drip" with his hands. He towed his net slowly toward the flicking.

Water like white smoke hot and fine bursts Dad dug heels in and let line out--branches pulled and flung back away--whooping every time they pulled to the surface. It never made a sound. Only splashing and clicking of rocks. The water grew brown and milky. Dad reeled--the line came in easy. It lay there broken points and all--on ground never stepped on in illustrations: the buck, ready to be dressed.

Untitled

Let's say we're wolves
and we've been through the
summer
heat and it's winter.
Our paws are smeared with ice
like dry spackle between our
pads. They can't move
together with the wedge pressing
closer up from the white ground.
I'm thinking of gnawing.
Lips in, teeth out, jaws moving so
fast they quiver.
I'd slide my teeth fronts
flush with your feet
and cut away with the warmth
of my friction and spit.

Bright Plates

We fasted once a month, just two meals. But it was difficult to forget dinner lay on the horizon line. The sun was a gilded plate; it was easier to stay inside. When it came close enough to land--to touch--we ate dinner as if we killed it ourselves. The light glazed the walls in honey, and lit the dust in the air.

The fire from the oven tanned our hands in seconds, and the rolls were tight with warm steam. We covered them in butter and jam, eating before either could melt. The golden rolls deflated and dissolved.

Grandpa thanked the sun in the blessing one night, and there was an exciting movement in the room. Everything came from the sun, he had said. The Lord had given us the sun, and the food, and we said amen.

By the time the next fast came, we were gone. Grandpa may bless the food on his table, but we aren't there to eat. We found something worth the hunger. And each day as we stalk our prey east, we know we are a little closer to breaking our fast.

Amigo the Octopus

Oh octopus...

Too smart for scientists. Sneaking food when no-one's looking.

Closing your cage door behind you.

A rigged escape: back with seaweed, sand, and broken coral
in the part of town where water is already always inky.

Oh octopus,

Tentacle in a knot, thumping the counter, the bar like an angry fist.

You're disturbing the crabs and clams the next stool over.

No job. So many arms asking for food.

Your wife understands, and warned the clutch not to beg.

Oh octopus.

Hungry. Thirsty. At the end of your wits.

Order a beer. No-one's looking.

Take some salt and pepper packets home to the kids.

Oh octopus!

The patrons at the bar are slowly disappearing.

The Merlion

Once upon a time there was a storm. It was a very large storm, so large that it blew the continent apart, blew islands across the oceans like sailboats. The storm was bored with how things were. It tired of blowing leaves down the same valleys, sweeping waves across the same sandy beaches. One day, it started collecting itself and refused to move until it was ready. No wind moved the grasses. No rain filled the rivers. And no snow slowly crushed the mountains, filling in the cracks with soft, airy, ice. The air had nothing to support it, and it slowly sunk low into the cracks and holes in the earth, leaving nothing but a warm vacuum on the land. It was calm for seven hundred days.

The springs kept the streams going, and the plants kept themselves green. And the rabbits kept eating the plants, and the deer kept eating the plants. But the tigers were sick of eating what they were eating. Just as bored as the storm, the tigers needed a challenge. They wanted a change of scenery. The tigers were anxious to see what the storm was up to. They paced and paced, waited and waited. But the storm kept withholding.

Soon, the tigers got fed up with pacing through the same jungles. They knew the storm was going to be big, and they wanted to explore everything before it changed. They split up. Some decided to go to the mountains, some decided to go to the desert, and some, really just one, went to the beaches. He thought the wet sand sounded nice, though the others thought it would get stuck between their pads. And the water was rotten there. He was fine to go by himself, he said. They agreed to meet back in the jungle to share their stories, and wait out the storm together.

The tigers that went to the mountains loved it there. They loved how the little air up there was cold, and how it made them see their breath. They loved climbing. They loved clawing their way up rocks and steep slides of thick dirt. The trees were different from those in the jungle. They were hard and gray and the tigers liked to climb them and look down toward the jungle. They loved the snow too. When they got high enough up on the mountains, they found where it was too thick to melt. They slid down on their backs, skated on their paws. They splashed in it until they forgot about the jungle entirely. The orange rubbed off their fur, and they were happy to be white like the snow.

Some tigers went to the desert. They rolled in the sand, learned to bathe in it like elephants. They learned to bury their feet beneath the hot layer of sand and chase mirages. They made friends with the big-eared dogs and snakes. They learned to play on the dunes at night and sleep during the day. Soon, they felt that there was no other way to sleep than under the shade of a hot tree.

But the last tiger had gone to the beach. Just as the other tigers were forgetting about their homes, he was barely leaving it. The ocean was far, far from their home in the jungle, and the tiger took his time. He stopped to talk to birds, and they told him all about nests. He couldn't believe they spent so much time making shelter, but they explained that their babies would roll away if they didn't put up some kind of structure.

On his way to the beach, he also met a crocodile. She had slithered out of the mud, followed him and his tail until he heard the squashing of wet clay underfoot. She needed to find water, because the lack of storm had started to dry her up. She'd never be able to eat on dry land. She needed to live on the cusp. The tiger told her about the ocean:

the ultimate meeting of land and water. So, she followed along with him, the mud on her skin drying up and then flaking off in chunks. On the way, they shared stories about the weirdest things they'd seen. The crocodile had once seen a coconut, and the tiger had passed by a tree that could hide his whole family behind it. He didn't dare climb it, because its red skin looked poisonous. He wished that he saw more things like that, though, and the crocodile agreed. They went on, every once in a while the tiger looking up at the sky, waiting for the storm.

As they went, the crocodile told the tiger about the death roll. He asked what the tiger could do. The tiger slowed down, thinking. He could hold really still and wait. He could stand on his hind legs and fight. Not a lot of four-legged animals did that, he explained to the crocodile. The croc nodded and missed the water. She explained that looking up from the surface of the water made her feel like she could see everything, because nobody else knew she was there. It was different when she was on land; she was just another predator.

"No you're not!" cried the tiger, "You're just out of your element. I'd be terrible in the water; none of my skills translate."

"True. I'll feel better back in the water," said the croc, thankfully.

But the tiger started to think. What would he do once he got to the ocean? He didn't swim too well, sure he could get by, but he couldn't hold his breath for long. He always came up sputtering and drained. If the tiger had known how his kith and kin were adjusting, he might have been less nervous. But there was no way of knowing about their physical transformations, agreements, and concessions. He wondered how they were doing, got

lonesome. The crocodile was nice, she was great, but she wasn't a tiger. And that was what he thought when he had to explain how his whiskers worked, or how he could still grab prey with such a short snout. It was like starting all over again with the croc. But the crocodile was reminiscing one day about the taste of fish, and the tiger was intrigued.

“Those small little things that flit about in the water?”

But the croc knew of big fish, and she said the bigger the water, the bigger the fish grew. There were fish in the ocean that could give the tiger a headache, could drag him away from land if they wanted. So the tiger picked up the pace; he wanted to taste those.

The day they reached the beach, the croc started acting weird. She couldn't hold still as they ate the squirrels they caught. She waddled on ahead, instead of waiting for the tiger to lead. The trees thinned and then vanished. The tiger blinked in the sun and looked around. The croc was gone but there was nowhere for her to hide. A small trail led to the ocean, but the tiger couldn't see her. He stepped onto the beach and wiggled his paws into the soft white sand. He ran back and forth, slowly making his way to the water. He couldn't believe how it smelled. Was it really rotten?

“I love it here,” cooed the croc, floating in the water like a log. The tiger wouldn't have recognized her, but for her swimming to the edge of the water. She bobbed in the shallow and kept her eyes closed as she talked. She wouldn't leave for days, she said. He couldn't help himself and asked about the big fish. He was starving. He dipped his two toes into the water and flicked drops off them. It wasn't a bad feeling, so he did it again. The water was sticky and made the sand adhere to his skin in a soft layer.

The croc widened her eyes, “Fish?” and vanished.

The tiger waited for days, but never saw the crocodile again. He paced the edge of the ocean every day and slept under the brush beyond the sand. She never came back, not as far as he could tell. He was hungry, so hungry. Finally, in the quiet calm of the morning, he stumbled from the bushes and fell into the surf. The water burned his eyes and nose but was so cold and nice on his fur. He crawled halfway out and lay thinking when he heard a voice.

“I almost bit your tail off, lion,” the tiger looked around, half-expecting the crocodile.

He couldn’t see anything. The voice came again, “Lion. You’re far from home.” The tiger looked down to see a large fish at his side. He’d never seen a fish so large and froze. The fish bobbed in the water as the waves lapped at the tiger’s side. Because he was so lonely, he didn’t stop at correcting her. Yes, he told her he wasn’t a lion, but he also told her about how he got to the ocean. He told her about his family and where they all were. She could tell he was lonely and she let him talk deep into the night.

He woke up the next morning alone. Clouds were blowing in, and sand had filled in his footprints down to the ocean. It had been so long that he almost didn’t believe what he was seeing. It had been so long since he’d felt the air move that he stopped thinking. And then it started raining.

And it kept raining, for weeks.

The land didn’t remember how to deal with so much water. Parts of it sunk under the weight while other parts let the water cut straight down. It didn’t seep down gently in many parts. The plants that barely clung to life drank it in and the plants that had died got

washed away. The tiger was pushed for miles, hiding from the rain and the falling trees. Whenever he got a moment to think, he thought about the ocean. He'd traveled for miles and miles, yet had only been at the ocean for a few days. He was covered in water, but it wasn't the same when he was huddled under plants. He missed the in- and exhale of the sea.

The tiger finally ventured out, starting out huddling under tree after tree, but then he gave up. He didn't care about the water anymore, and walked along with it dripping off his eyebrows and tail. He shook himself off every so often and continued.

The tiger walked through the rain until he thought he would never reach the beach again. When that thought struck him, he sat down in a puddle and cried to himself. He could never go home with such a terrible tale. He was so close to the adventure! If only he'd swam in the ocean. At least then he could have something to brag about. But he decided to keep walking until he saw something different. At least if he came back with a story of something they'd never heard about, he could hold his own come dinnertime.

The tiger had walked for two months and was about to turn around and find his way home, but he heard a roaring that was too soft to come from an animal. It barely sounded under the rustling of the tree branches and the wet running of the rain. He concentrated and started walking toward the gentle growl of the ocean, running as it became perceptibly louder. He burst through the leaves onto the beach and found a different scene than what he expected. Of course the rain would cover the sand, but the storm even rained over the ocean. What did the ocean need with more water? At the breaking waves, chest deep, the tiger could see the little cups in the waves made from

dripping rain. This had to be the end of the world. It was all covered in water, it felt like. And the air just congealed over the land, and that's how the animals could survive.

"But how does that explain me?" said the fish, who was now nearby. The tiger was too calm with his thoughts to jump, but he was surprised that he'd been thinking aloud. He didn't think he had been that lonely. And so, both half in and half out of the ocean, bobbing in the rain, the tiger and the fish got reacquainted. They talked about the storm and how it affected their homes. Or in the tiger's case, his travels. He'd had to eat new things, and he told the fish about hunting a bird and then giving up to eat berries with her. She couldn't trust him for weeks, but finally realized that he was keeping other predators away. And he learned what seeds were poisonous, and what kind of places the spider liked to live in. Without his family he couldn't hunt the bigger animals he'd been used to eating, and he hadn't even seen many of them around. It was hard to adapt, but he didn't want to die.

The fish listened quietly as the tiger told his story, and then related what had happened under the ocean's surface. The fresh water had changed the salinity of some parts of the ocean, but it would sort itself out. Some of the octopi were worried about the changes, worried about babies. The fish didn't think it would affect much, but did swirl water around the eggs with her mouth so they could adjust a little bit more gently.

How was it that everyone else seemed to lay eggs?

The tiger had been kept at a distance by the bird because of her eggs; she thought he would eat them in a fit of starvation. Suddenly the tiger felt very different. This wasn't

the place for him. He wanted to go home and eat large prey that he killed with his family. He turned to the fish with a dangerous look in his eyes.

“I’ve never tasted a fish before.”

“I’ve never tasted a tiger before,” she replied.

What? Where was this going? From what he’d heard of fish, they wouldn’t know what to do with anything other than algae. The fish explained that she ate meat too. She had never come across a tiger before, but she liked to share adventure stories with her friends and family too. The tiger and the fish joked and talked about other things, but both kept wondering about the taste. Finally, it got dark and the tiger decided to sleep under the bushes. He said goodnight and crossed the beach, digging his paws into the cool sand on his way. He turned back just before going into the brush, but the fish had already left.

The tiger woke up to see something he hadn’t expected. The ocean glittered under a blue sky and the sand was white. It was dry too. He walked out and touched the dry sand. He flopped over and rolled his head around in it. And then he rolled himself over and over in it, like a log rolling to the ocean. He remembered his family and jumped into the water, submerging his head and remembering the sting in his eyes. He swam out until he couldn’t touch the unstable floor and then dove under until something grabbed at him. He surfaced and sputtered. It still had a hold on his leg, but it wasn’t pulling hard. He took a deep breath and went after it. He came up with a mouthful of slimy wet long leaves. The fish laughed at his terror and then she explained seaweed to him. It sounded like grass, he replied. But she didn’t know what grass was, so she couldn’t confirm. And the tiger could only understand what the fish explained. He couldn’t see in order to really

understand for himself. And sometimes she used words she couldn't explain, or he asked about something and she couldn't figure out what it was. Their friendship was reaching the end of the line.

The tiger explained that night, as they bobbed in the breakers, that he was going to go home the next morning. He wanted to see his family again. He ached for another tiger to box with.

The fish was eerily quiet. The tiger asked and asked: finally, she expressed her concerns. The giant storm had changed so much of her underwater landscape, that she was sure it had done major damage to land. She'd heard stories about channels of water going *between* the land, instead of just around it. She hadn't believed that the land could surround water until it had been confirmed by traveling schools of fish. Six schools all said the same thing.

How could the tiger get home if there was now large bodies of water in the way? The fish wished she could help him, and the tiger cried himself to sleep.

The tiger woke up before the sun. He had slept poorly and he felt strange. His body was sore from sleeping on a rock. The fish nudged him, "I have something for you before you go."

"I can't go!" wailed the tiger in the dark morning. He wondered if he'd ever see anyone he knew again. Who knew how small his piece of land now was. The fish nudged him again, told him to buck up. She pressed something up to his nose. It was hard and tasted like the bit of sea that got between his lips as he dove underwater. He opened his eyes and

grabbed at the hard chip, “What is this?” The fish got her head re-wetted and sheepishly replied that he might as well taste fish before he went. It was better this way, if he ended up not liking the taste. The tiger was moved. He noticed the tiny scab under her fin, and moved his head to pull out a chunk of his own fur, careful to get some orange and some black.

“Here, we’ll try it together,” he said, smiling. So the fish and the tiger counted to three and then tasted their prey. “This tastes weird,” said the fish, and the tiger nodded. It wasn’t good, but there was something satisfying about it. It was a story to bring home, at the least. But, he wasn’t worried about going home anymore. He still wanted to, at least part of him wanted to see the tigers, but he wasn’t concerned about the logistics. He looked down to see his tail had changed.

“Tiger!” the fish cried out and grabbed at his now fishtail. She kicked her back end up, revealing two tiger legs and a small thin tail. They could both swim now, and they both could go on land. A stingray was watching her eggs, and so the tiger and the fish explored the island. As she had suspected, the land was now surrounded by water, and was much smaller than the land that had preceded it. After they walked end-to-end, they dove in the ocean and explored the seabed. The tiger coasted through sea caves and avoided urchins, as the fish instructed. Days passed, and the tiger craved his family. The fish sensed it was coming, and wished the tiger good luck. She trusted that he knew enough of the ocean to be safe, and the tiger trusted that the fish was steady enough on her feet that she could now bring home coconuts and fresh sand for her family. She had plenty to explore and she was happy to have a challenge.

They said goodbye, and promised to meet up again in a few years. The tiger had no idea how long it would take to find his family, but he wanted to bring them here. And so, the fish followed him until the current changed, and then turned around to watch her eggs. The tiger went on, crossing land and water, on his way to find his family.

Washed

There's a part in my
body that will tell
me I should stay.
When your home is
traveling, you get a little
homesick. Hotel shampoos
and rented showers--
nobody takes care
of something they're borrowing.
I don't mind these
uncaulked showers most
of the time but I wouldn't
mind a new one, even
an old one I can tinker
with. And people who
like what I like so
I can go out and be
able to find a good park
and ruin my garden,
own furniture and
paint the walls
a color to cover
this ghastly white.

Quarry

I tossed quartz, sandstone,
rocks with rings
and bands of black gold.

I tossed smooth granite core
samples marked with letters
and numbers in matte sharpie.

I upturned white bags of grit
and peeled and pried
jagged edges from them

all the while thinking,
this was so much work
I was undoing.

Rocks from different
depths, countries, times
all clacked against

each other in the patch
of discarded Utah land.
I aimed towards the corner

of the fence, a dead garden
overgrown with tall weeds
and packed dry dirt.

There were slides--
cross-sections of rock
glued to pieces of glass.

I brought them back to where
she was cleaning out the garage:
donating her late husband's hats

to the men's shelter, giving horse blankets
to the National Ability Center, and packing
an enlarger to bring to the new house.

"Throw them away," she said when I explained

I couldn't throw glass in the yard.
I held them up, looking at the clouds

through the speckled filter and turned
back to the corner that she had said
there was a story behind.

She turned back to the camping gear,
the logo hats from his trips,
and the empty sample bags.

The Architect's Oversight

The Architect met the Entertainer one rainy night. He was late for the bachelor party, as if he had stayed late at work. He dropped his umbrella in the bucket by the door with a shallow metallic splash. He checked his coat and hat and rolled up his sleeves as he walked into the bar. The band was recognizable but out of place, mused the Architect. He'd never thought a banjo could create such great bar music.

The bar had a low ceiling which opened up near the stage. It almost tricked newcomers that the stage was outside, or at least had no roof over its head. The bartender, Starbuck, could watch the show on a slow night, but there hadn't been one in months. The Architect asked for a couple shots of whiskey to catch up, and he had to repeat himself over the stomping and banging above.

"The worst ones always get the best seats," apologized the bartender and hammered his fist on a load-bearing pillar. The Architect nodded and shrugged a, what'll we do about it? and then turned to find his mates. The main room had small café tables scattered around the rounded stage. He saw backs of heads straight through and though something was off, he couldn't keep his eyes from steering straight toward the source. A lone woman on stage, or at least, the head of a woman on stage. TomTom had a reputation, but until then, the Architect hadn't understood why any performer could stand out in any man's mind. The Entertainer, TomTom, didn't compete though. There was no line of chorus girls or repeatable quality to her. The Architect now understood why the men at tables were restrained by harnesses and collars welded to the floor by chains. God knew what was upstairs.

TomTom, or Tommy, wasn't just a leg or a couple breasts. It was as if she didn't want to catch a man at all. Over the next week, the Architect would watch as TomTom did all sorts of things. She locked eyes with the Architect and smiled as she destroyed a Lincoln log city, dressed as a Mohawk Indian.

Each night the Architect spent in the bar. He never ventured to the café tables and their chains. Even the night of the bachelor party, the Architect stayed in with his drinks, peering up at the stage so bright and far away. He told his friend at the wedding that following Tuesday that he had been swamped with a new project, to which Ben cut in, "We were swamped too," and shoved a piece of cake in his mouth to end the conversation. He may have winked. That first night, as a finalé, TomTom had covered the stage in sludge and skied barefoot behind two sled dogs. The Architect was sure they had gone home covered in it. He could see them trying to cover green splotches on shirts with coats buttoned high, rushing to change into pajamas before their wives. He went back.

The Architect knew from the moment she destroyed the Lincoln logs that TomTom was the only woman he could and couldn't marry. Even at the beginning. As he snuck back into the wedding reception, the Architect knew she wouldn't leave him alone. He felt singled out and vulnerable as his friends drank and danced around the cake while he ate piece after piece.

The Architect carried the plastic-wrapped flowers upside down in the hope that the rain would do most good at the cut ends rather than the colored ends. He felt right with the decision, at peace. There were no annoying bunches in his socks, razor bumps on his face, or rain drops sliding down the back of his shirt. He bought flowers for Deirdre

once, on a rare hot day and they wilted more with every attempt to shelter them. He jogged up the stairs, hoping to salvage them in a bath of Sprite and water but the petals sprinkled down the stairs and he was left with mostly stems.

Which he threw away.

Rain was good luck; the sky was coming to kiss the earth today. TomTom was sitting at the bar when the Architect came in. She looked as small as she did onstage. He was used to seeing her in the light and it took his eyes some time to adjust to where her hair ended and the dark wood of the bar began. He removed his coat to the wrist, then switched the flowers to his other hand. He tried to hide them behind his body as he checked his coat. A little light under the bar exposed her hands and face.

“I didn’t expect you/anyone to be here,” the Architect said, sitting down two chairs away.

“Want a drink?” she said and reached for a glass, “Starbuck stepped out.”

They drank and talked for hours. The Architect didn’t dare glance at his watch, but men started to appear at the coat check.

He turned back to her, “Want to run away with me?” She stood up from the chair beside his, dropped her glass in the soapy sink and picked up her flowers. The glass thudded to the bottom.

“Darling, right after the show. I’ll say goodbye and go with you.” She kissed him like the millionth time and left.

The Architect served himself at the bar that night. Nobody seemed to care that Starbuck wasn’t there. Everyone left to be waited on at tables. He was the only one who

stayed at the bar anyway. Men left and never came back--forgetting credit cards and bills unpaid. Each new patron would venture to the tables too, eventually.

The Architect watched as TomTom gave her last performance. He imagined building her a new theatre--all her own with stained glass windows and leather chairs and finials on the roof. He dropped his glass into the sink and stood: he'd never seen her show up close. His glass fell like a leaf. Then hit bottom.

Ode to Postcards

When writing a postcard you feel a bit daring, even aware. Handwriting becomes obsessively neat and the most boring clichés come. “It’s cold here.” “Miss you.” “See you soon.” When I write a postcard, I lie. All these nosy mail carriers laughing at my Aunt Liv, who just lit her sun hat on fire with a centerpiece. She threw it off her head, up into the air, laughing, and watched the asteroid die in the surf.

From the North Pole, To Emily in San Francisco

It hurt to hear your news or maybe
there's just a draft cutting down
the door--fresh circulates in the dry air.
Things aren't as easy as I thought and shouldn't
they be by now? I wish we had been
kids together to show we were never so
carefree. But the fog in morning burns
off with light. I've spent months of this
night reading--Kafka and Austen--and--
your letter, too, after reading it twice--
threw them all into the fire, which made a little heat.

Glaring

Edith didn't expect anything to change when Alfred was adopted. His first day at the house, Edith wandered from room to room looking for scissors while chopping her fingers together. She tidied silk flowers, threw and re-threw afghans on the corners of the couch and rocking chair. The boisterous couch couldn't be helped by the afghan or anything else. It outshone the rest of her furniture. Six feet long, framed with delicately-carved wood which the cats found ways around: sunning themselves over it all, scattered like sea lions on the rocks.

The day she bought the monstrous sofa she doted on it like a proud new mother. She removed its cushions and vacuumed it out. She oiled the wooden legs and frame. She even got up close with a pair of scissors from her sewing kit to trim some loose strings away from the armrest.

The rest of her house was fastidiously kept. She didn't often have visitors but they could often say nothing more. Looking around, they seemed shocked by the archival quality of her home. But the cats tended to sneak outside through the loosened corner of a window screen in warm weather. The house was kept clean and everyone was happy.

The last thing Edith did before setting the crumpled afghan down was sew a loose button back into one of the deep creases set into the back of the couch, like a raisin pressed into a loaf of cinnamon bread. The couch was saffron with Paris Green pineapples.

Even before Alfred came through the door, the cats had judged and agreed they wanted nothing to do with him. Edith took two bowls from the cupboard and dunked one

into the bag of cat food on the pantry floor. She watched the stairs, grasping the railing as she carried the two bowls with the other hand. The bowl with food wobbled inside the empty bowl, nested like two eggshell halves.

“Spoiled. All of you. Isn't that right, Escondida?” She called out, halfway up the flight of stairs and eye-level with the tiny cat rolling in the carpet as if it were money. Her stubby legs stretched barely to the top of her head as she writhed, enjoying the warm squares of light inking through the bay window.

She looked like a rock rotting away in a happy jail, thought Edith continuing on past, heading for the bathroom to the right of the stairs. All of the other cats were hiding, but Edith was too distracted to concern herself.

After filling the second bowl with water from the bathroom sink, Edith set both on top of a towel she laid on the counter. Like a placemat, the towel was perfectly sized and situated to catch any water or splinters of spilled food. Edith tweaked the towel a degree counterclockwise, lining it up perfectly parallel to both the mirror and the wall.

“The enclosure is prepared! Release the hounds,” Edith called out energetically, then began the long two-step down to fetch Alfred from the car.

They heard Edith rustling around in the garage and couldn't help themselves. Like natives emerging from the rainforest, the cats started slinking out of hiding spaces. Marlowe padded across the hardwood floor from amongst the roots of the kitchen table, Mercury squeezed through the door of the coat closet (which had been left ajar), and Eeyore trotted down the stairs, prepared unsurely, then jumped up onto the kitchen

counter. By the time Edith got back from the garage, there were cats covering the furniture everywhere.

Edith backed into the house through the garage door, holding a long cardboard suitcase with holes punched in it. She shut the door behind the box and turned to the ambush that had been quietly transmitted throughout the house. “You’ll eat when your manners improve, street urchins,” she grasped the handle of the box in front of her and leaned in to kiss Eeyore on his tiny starfish-skin nose. He bolted from the kitchen while those remaining swished their tails, judging and stewing.

Edith pulled away from the refused kiss and headed up the stairs even more slowly than usual. The box became heavier quite quickly and she felt unbalanced, despite her firm grip on the railing. Edith promised herself that the next addition to her family wouldn’t be as heavy. She thought that the cats might like to dote on a kitten or two, and she could wait a few years until they had grown up to adopt another from the Humane Society. The cat who slowly weighed her down as she climbed would make an even fifteen.

There was no momentous day for Edith, where her parents finally broke down after months of begging and pleading and crying. She had been born into a house with animals. She didn’t remember her first encounter with Beatrix Potter just as she couldn’t remember the excitement of bringing home her first pet. Edith had grown up with cats alongside dogs and the one failed attempt: a tiny bird. She hadn’t known what kind of bird it had been, but it had tiny little zebra stripes on its neck. A zebra finch? She’d heard

about zebra finches but thought they must have been bigger animals. But no, theirs must have been a zebra finch.

The tiny bird had been too rattled by the cats at attention underneath its cage, and Edith's parents gave it away to a family down the street after a few weeks. Princess wrangled her kittens underneath the cage one day, in an attempt to show them how to hunt. The poor bird had flitted around the cage, molting and knocking into the hanging perch until Edith's mother shooed Princess away and eased the cage into Edith's room. The thing's heart was beating out of its chest, her mother had said. It kept her awake for the next two nights and though she felt bad for the tiny bird, she couldn't help but want to see the kittens learn to hunt. Their tiny little paws were so small and their tails stuck straight up like they licked a milk-white light socket. Edith would run home from school to see them--sleeping in a multi-colored knot in a cardboard box. Slipping into the laundry room, young Edith maneuvered her hands around the warm body of one of the top kittens, eased it loose, and held it inside of her shirt like an egg in an incubator. She never wanted kids. She wanted kittens.

For the next few days, the coup continually lost support. Cats sniffed at the bathroom door as they sauntered by, and Escondida and Mercury had already thrust themselves up to the shoulder blade under the bathroom door, grasping and clawing for any clue to reel in and study. Edith gently nudged four cats away from the door as she approached. "Soon! Soon!" she cooed at them. She kept the door close to her body, keeping the cats at bay. They could easily have slipped through her legs but didn't make the attempt. They seemed to relish the mystery.

The door clicked shut behind her on a few of them sitting and patiently trying to stare through the walls. A loud torrent of water generated behind the door. Billy the Kitten took off down the stairs to hide under the couch. He'd once fallen into the tub as he was examining the shining squares on top of the water's surface. He stayed under the couch for two days, cleaning the water from himself repetitively as if he'd forgotten he'd already done it.

Finally, on Monday, Edith came out of the bathroom and left the door open. The cats began to crowd around. She had left the bathroom light on and the warm steam swarmed out into the hallway, disappearing into the air around the doorframe. Escondida, with her miniature legs, and Mercury, with her regal posture, slowly approached the door. Behind Escondida, Mercury peered over the squat cat without leaning one way or the other. It appeared as though the police were sending in the bumbling newbie with the gun-hardened veteran, should the situation prove more perilous than originally estimated.

Edith was waiting eight feet away with shoes and oven-mitts on, just in case she needed to pull Alfred away like a rescue helicopter, far away from the growling throng below. She held her breath at the sight of a pure black paw emerge from the doorway. Escondida surged an inch closer to smell the wavering outstretched limb. The paw came down on Escondida, bopping her on the head like a cobra-strike. She blinked in terror and backed into Mercury, who then took over. Mercury leapt over the stunned dwarf and disappeared like a shot into the bathroom.

“Oh dear!” Edith cried, moving slowly toward the bathroom in earnest. She held the door frame with one oven-mitt and was pushing the door open with the other as the

bathroom exploded with sound. A fat thud initiated a round of hissing and yowling.

Something ceramic rolled off a ledge and broke with a clear, sandy crash. Edith couldn't register which relic had just shattered. The crowd outside waited energetically. Ears were perked up, tails were shaking like rattles, and Billy the Kitten braved his fear of water to peek into the opening door.

Two blurry shapes raced through, black following white. They bolted down the stairs without touching them and tore through the living room. Edith was already on her way down, clutching the banister fiercely. She muttered something about lions getting on very well in packs as she was overtaken by a swarm of cats, surging around her legs like a river around rocks, rushing down the stairs to see the action.

Yowling and hissing sounds came and went as Edith descended the stairs. The clanking of metal and the warmer slap of wood erupted; they were in the kitchen and had knocked over the spatulas and wooden spoons. It was quiet for a few minutes, but then a frantic squeal proved that the fight was dying down. Was that what Alfred sounded like? It was an unfamiliar sound.

One of them would relent soon enough, and that would be the end of it. By the time she got down to the living room, it was too late. Mercury had surrendered and was licking a wound, sitting on the fireplace's brick hearth. Alfred was celebrating by stretching. He sat upon the bright couch like a dead star. Loose threads and loops pulled out by furious claws. Fur thrown all over the cushions and blood dappled the left armrest.

Edith lifted the victor over her shoulder and took him to join the other wild animals outside.