MY DISQUIETING TRUTHS
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part I</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part II</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Breasts or The Body

When I was nine, I thought beautiful was the way a woman’s armpit looked like a lake whenever she raised her arms, that hollow empty crevice.

My chest was a sunken-in soufflé at 11. My father bought me my first training bra— baby-blue bows on soft cotton cups. Then suddenly covering up those new knobs, two popping kernels exploding from my chest. I hid as I grew, wanting to order the bodies out of catalogues. I would lie in bed and poke at my hips, hidden under soft flesh, ask them why they did not protrude. No answer.

Once, at the Uffizi, I saw my reflection in “The Birth of Venus”: bulbous belly bulging, capped with a wholly round button like a sprinkle – a garnish, round rolling thighs, awkward knees and long, ugly feet. Too high an arch, drooping breasts that slope downward like a ski jump, the nipple peak.

Fatty cushion beneath her arms. There in the quiet, focused lighting. She stands forever proud behind velvet rope, puckered lips, as she displays herself.
Making Love to David

I turned the corner, blinded by the stark contrast of white on white like coming out of a tunnel. Squinting at the naked, marble body standing contrapposto, nipples erect and vascular arms, chipped toes against intricate paneling, a hole in the domed ceiling shining down on hard curls like heaven-light.

He is a stone Goliath. Disproportionate appendages jut out in the silence. No one speaks, afraid to break his concentration. Something in that fixed stare unhinged me. Two shallow grooves around his navel form an arrow, to guide my sight downward towards his penis and testicles, small and smooth. Both ends of my mouth flex, cheeks flush.

If stone could swell, how big could he get? If marble could turn to flesh would I be crushed beneath his weight? Or would he float above me, eyelashes curled up almost touching brows, wrists pinned above my head, move slow as sap, my diamond shaped body forms under you. Press into me. Be careful not to bruise my neck, fingers part my lips- I forgot how we got here.
Self-Portrait as a Portrait

In dramatic lighting amongst metal stools and easels, I dropped my waffle-knit robe – standing center spotlight, I wondered if anyone was fast enough to catch-draw the flush of my cheeks, pierced my nipples awake.

Seated, low bun, hands folded in prayer, until they asked me to lie down. I tried my best to not look like roadkill or Picasso’s “Nude Woman with a Necklace.”

For three hours they smudged and stenciled, erased folds in my back, added more hair between my legs, pink scars, dimpled thighs like rotting peaches. At the end of each class, I walked around, surprised by the naked woman in grays. Some never drew my face.

I didn’t appear to fit inside some of the page. Took up too much space in the lines. In others, I didn’t recognize the uneven breasts like flattened pancakes or the boxy bottom, dark shadows bold without apology.
Ode To My Toes
It's a pleasant thing to be young, and have ten toes.
-Robert Louise Stevenson

You chubby little Vienna sausages
That have been pulled and tickled, sung to,
Piggies that never did go to market.
That have failed me and fallen down and up stairs.
Lost a toenail or three, bleeding, sent to the emergency room
Six long needles injected in the interspaces
Pull the nails out with pliers, then bandaged like Frankenfoot.

Toes that swell to the dual puncture wound
Bite of a mysterious spider.
Toes that have been the claw crane to sandy beaches
On two continents: Europe, North America.
Pulled the leg hair of boyfriends.
Have picked up sheets of paper,
Straws, guitar picks. Rubbed cat bellies.
Toes that cannot see and go forth, face first
Into the corners of tables, walls, vacuums.
Have curled in pain at the dentist.
Clenched a blanket, burrowed, formed a cocoon,
Let no cold air in. Stockinged toes,
That sometimes peep out from heels.

Toes that have dug into strangers’ beds,
Swung above my head and clung to the spindle headboard.
Toes that have met others under covers.
Stubby fat first with long hairs that I pluck before a pedicure.
The pinky toe is a bulbous calloused growth that I whittle away
With a stainless steel foot scraper and foot file.

Toes that have dug into my father’s feet
And been led to dance through the kitchen.
That have gingerly tested unfamiliar
Water: baths, oceans, pools.
Lain flat, pads up, been dragged across a carpet.
That have pointed up in three-legged downward dog,
Hallux, pink and polished, reaching – flexing, smiling
towards sky.
Iris

*after Georgia O'Keeffe*

Black velvet folds, enveloping
dark moistness, dry heat.
Each began as a bulb, needed fertile soil
bending towards the sun light.

Dark wet, dry heat
delicious fragrant blooming blossom
bend towards the sun light.
Slow heavy open, release.

Delicious fragrant blooming blossom,
precious, soft creases unwrap
slow heavy open, release.
Prior to flower, a quiver.

Precious, soft supple creases unwrap.
Each began as a bulb, required fertile soil.
Prior to flowering, a quiver of
black velvet folds, enveloping.
The Way Towards Things

flowers lean to sun (sunflowers). bicycles supported left
on the kicks stands near buildings that slope
diagonal shadows reach horizon lines
   bend away
whole bodies propped up (what causes them to lean?)
avgainst (anyone
you can imagine already exists)
   another body slant the way
birthday hats or candles struggle to stay in place,
eventually blow out. when was the last time
you tilted your head back
and looked at something for so long without
blinking that your eyes dried out against the wind?
   (how abandoned houses lean
or snow shovels lean
in december)
I am no Lucretia.

*Rome, 510 BC*

I had no witnesses for my fortress under attack. He did not identify himself. I did not see his face, just his hands propping himself against the wall as he thrust uninvited, unbidden. I could not find the words then, they stayed in my head. Never made it to my mouth. How many others were there? If I don’t tell it, no one will. I share in shame, will not be the catalyst for a revolution. My body of beauty will know no daggers.
Sundays in February

I spend too much time at the store smelling cantaloupes. Do they know what it's like to be left in the middle of the night? Sometimes I get a manicure just to feel someone touch me. Dried salt on my boots, they hang over the edge of the platform. Train is running late the way trains do. There’s a pigeon feather lying on the ground, one of many but that's the only one I can see. It’s the third year of my five year plan; nothing has gone as planned. I drink alone. It’s been a long winter. The worms are waiting just beneath the frozen earth wondering when it will end. If the sun will ever thaw the reflection of the naked trees.
Cats and Girls: Paintings and Provocations

The cats are hungry. One walks across my head pulling hair out, the other licks my arm with its prickly cacti tongue. I can’t open my eyes yet. Daydreaming, I’m naked and draped in darkness, blackout curtains feign night. Because why wouldn't the sun be here? Indolent legs dangle loosely from the edge. If I’m still long enough they'll go back to the foot of the bed. My flat palm against the wall stops the spinning. How many different ways can someone disappoint you before you stop writing about it? But I’m the one apologizing for everything, then apologizing for apologizing. January is so long. I wonder what elephants sound like when no one is listening.
After *The Dancer*

This is no Klimt painting. We aren’t living in the background of the *The Dancer*, in its blurred edges, blotchy pink and green paint splatters forming bouquets, a table, faded grey eyes, exposed nipples proudly protruding from flimsy robe, corner lips upturned. What secret is she hiding behind her garden of roses? (Did you bring her those flowers?) There’s obscurity in the edges but I need solid lines. You can’t throw paint on canvas in hopes it forms an image. (What are you drawing?) It’s all blur. I need circles that close and a concrete table to set my glass. No monochromatic monk robes. I want color in definable shapes.
Copper Heart

Straight to the machine. Probably for the best.
I won’t leave another message.
Who will speak these days if not I, if not me?

In perfect syncopation with the rain
I take my steps away from you.
If seasons could break two people, it has

done so, with wonder, with us.
This is the consequence of actually feeling.
I’m going to have to live with that.

The beating of my copper heart.
I’m in trouble for the things I need,
Waiting for those trains that never come.

I do not speak through the mouth of my wounds.
I am such, then so are you. Your words are
mine at the end. I rise early every evening.

The spring dawn promises new language.
All you say you want to do to yourself you do
To someone else as yourself.
I am nothing

if not excessive to the point of suffocation.
There is a constant soreness of touch
from the burned squash. I bought one
of every kind:
acorn, butternut, delicata,
zucchini, pumpkin, crookneck.

I roasted them all; pulled the tray out
and ate each one over the garbage can,
frenzied like a Maenad. Cupping curved,
warm, waxy flesh in my hands,
taking the soft gourd to my lips.

Palpable wants drive each moment
forward without hope or agenda.
I learned the word *glutton*
by stuffing nine pieces of Juicy Fruit
in my mouth at a time.

It’s just that there’s too much
of everything to know anything
at all but it doesn’t stop me
from trying to have those conversations
we never have. Like how no one wants
to talk about cement sadness.

At 14, I learned
the word “depression” when I swallowed
36 Excedrins. Lack of moderation
on my part left no room for the sound
of my mother crying. (There weren’t enough
channels to choose from on the hospital TV.)
*Golden Girls* drowned out her sobs,

“But I am a good mother,
I am a good mother. I don’t know why
she would do that. Nothing was ever
really wrong. I am a good mother.”

And I knew you were, but the charcoal, orange juice,
half-moon pills were caught in my throat. I could
only stare up a Dorothy and Blanche quipping on
that pink, floral couch.
Better Than This

I sat in my car listening to the saddest songs I knew, those achingly slow songs. The New York skyline lights the dusk in front of me playing kaleidoscope games with my eyes.
I remember how you said, “I love you, Monkey.”
The words play over and over in my head.
I want to record it from my memory want to make a song of it want to cry and dance along.
If we weren’t so complex we could just sit back and watch the small tragedies we create. Instead we let them linger.
I cry when you call me, drunk, with claims that the parting has become excessive.
I can’t imagine we know any better than this but we’re so much better than this.
I think it’s possible we were born for each other.
I Woke Up in Indiana

Between broken blinds, deep cold November shines through.
Like mercury you move across the room,
I remember I’ve forgotten there’s something I need to tell you.

Gaping breaths across my neck, goodbyes, but what else can we do?
I long to press my face into your chest and listen to you breathe.
Between broken blinds, deep cold November shines through.

An empty skyline, nights remind me most of you;
So far from New Jersey, where I used to lie beneath, spread eagle.
Instead, between the broken blinds deep cold November shines through.

It gets so cold in this small town, there’s only hearts of two;
I’d give up all of me that’s hungry, just to watch you sleep.
And I remember I’ve forgotten there’s something I need to tell you.

I’m sick of this distance that takes me from you,
Autumn returns things to their place; return to me.
I remember I’ve forgotten there’s something I need to tell you.

A phone call, a big love or a plane ride too;
Some distance can’t be measured in miles.
Between broken blinds, deep cold November shines through.
And I remember there’s nothing I need to tell you.
This is How I Say I’m Sorry

Some nights my spot in bed
is against the wall. Left side
to the pillow, hands in prayer
underneath head. I wonder
what I look like from behind.
If the valley of my waist
that rises to the peak of my hips
Is something so alluring
you see past the anger.
When did I begin counting
paint bubbles on the wall?

Crushed face, stiff body,
curled in like a writhing stink
bug. On the worst nights; nose
touching cold enamel, so close,
breathed out fog. Hoping if I
press hard enough against
the wall, the gap between it
and the mattress will open up,
let me in, swallow me whole
and I'll disappear.

But I know that if, during
the night, our toes touch,
we find neutral ground.
Know if your heavy
hand coils around me
we’ll call truce until dawn.
Bare back against your bare chest,
the only thing between us: air.
I awaken you with my mouth.
My apology.

Your sweat becomes my sweat.
The sweet, salty savory of your skin.
Teeming wet. I let you cum
inside me. Fill me up.
Forgiveness is bittersweet.
I wonder how long we can hurt
each other this way.
It's in the way you say my name,
    or sometimes, don't.
Domesticity, Without You

Twilight makes it harder
to see the watermarks on
stainless steel. Routine
keeps me hovering just above.
A dead cactus. Clashing
pillow cases. I run
the dishwasher three times
a day but only check
the mail once every five.

One day I’ll stop
asking about you.

Saturn Returns

The end of civilian twilight.

The Cahuilla know Joshua trees lack
annual growth rings. Prickly hands
reaching to the sky in prayer
never get old.
On the I-95

Phosphorus colored beard -- scratchy on my cheeks; red light kisses. We talk about neoconservatives and Tchaikovsky’s greatest hits. You are driving us home.
If I were an hour of the day, what time would I be?
Noon: anxious, exposed.
There is a hunger the baby carrots cannot quell.

Tell me
again the story
of how we met.

Tell me
everything.
How The People We Once Loved Become Strangers Again

The Wabash River is flowing to our right as we drive through Hoosier country. Misery is motivator, and you’re going home. I’m getting sick reading about Parmenides and his study of what makes a human human and how change is illusory. Instead, I think out loud, wonder how to ask my mom who she used to want to be. *I know she didn’t move to America to become a bank teller.* You smile and tell me God will take care of everything like he did with you and your mom. *I don’t believe in God though.* You tell me to pray.

We stop to pump gas.  
Later we’ll weep over mangos  
because you can’t find a ripe one  
and I don’t know how to tell the difference.
Canto

It’s always wake up (sleep facing white washed wall) –
to empty sky. Sidewalk is easier to forgive than the past.
Walk down,  tilt your head and swear,

I swear, there is sun but it’s nowhere to be found.
Can’t escape shadow here or see rooftops.
Answers are easier to teach.                 It’s the breathing in and out.

The remembering to stay on the road without swerving.
Loneliness is immeasurably difficult to conquer.
Deficit of touch. Learning to trust darkness.

What if I were brave enough to find my father’s guns
or take the balisong to my wrist? Instead, I swallow
pills because it’s like food or cum and I’m good at that.

At full belly. At excess and strangers.
Feigning interest, entertaining needy men who throw me
on speckled Italian marble, (moon chips, they call it, color of ashes)

but never stay the night. Who only call me “baby”
and hold my hand when we’re fucking. Head hanging
off the bed, fingertips grazing the ground. Swan diving
backwards. My heart. (This dispensable
sullen force.)

I’ve seen the ocean, thought its blooming beaches
too bright. (My walls were collapsing.)
Found myself in water, arms grappling

to catch the sun. Pretend this black tar quicksand
that holds me is my mother’s womb. Then,
I will be alive again.
Rumination

so many fires start in my head
-Brenda Shaughnessy

It’s bad again at night when the sun
is sleeping. I can’t find the pause,
switch, shut-off button to stop
the sprints in my head. Thoughts
in explosions like a thousand kimonos
falling over my eyes; no sight, a frantic
exit for air, suddenly aware of the possibility
of nonbeing. I am finite. Once, I was more
than this public embarrassment,
more than a nightmare
waiting to be realized. Now
sequestered to my small house,
I never meant to be this alone.
I can’t get out of this place that I’m in.
Brick City

Newark: you are red rectangular rising elongated towards sky. Flat-roofed, standing tall, from ground up empty lots of overgrown weeds feral cats abandoned factories holding up against Nor’Easters and a New York City skyline. Constant siren sounds ringing, ringing
and it’s hard to find quiet, even in our heads. They say bricks begin to crumble after time. We are decaying like this city in which we live. Gray clouds don’t stop cherry blossoms from blooming.
**Morning Announcements**

Dan didn’t come to school on Wednesday, the day he was to host our high school morning show. Instead the principal appeared in his place on the TV—told us what happened last night. The students huddled around his words: *Dan Ehrlich hung himself.*

Dan, seventeen, too young to buy a gun, intelligent enough to knot the rope efficiently. He called his mother last, she found him first – noteless, purple and limp. She cut him down, where he finally fell and called 911, although nothing could be done. At home, they were bombarded with guests, condolences, and questions to answers they would never know.

On Friday, we gathered at Temple Emanu-El, all hoping someone would jump up and scream “Just kidding! He’s still alive!” But no one did. Instead we talked about how he’d race to get the closest spot in the parking lot, how graduation was only two months away, how we liked his freckles.
On the Anniversary of Matthew Shepherd’s Death
2002

The top employers in Paducah, Kentucky are Western Baptist Hospital and Walmart. There isn’t much to do but have babies or quilt. Quilting Week Festival is every April, though, and it was October. We were invited to a bonfire.

Right on Mayfield, left on Holly, there will be an unpaved road on the right, turn there and take it to the stop sign. Make another right. Y’all-ull see us.

We drove down Nigger Way following flames as high as fireworks. I looked at William, who brought his boyfriend, and said, “Girlfriend, you ready?” as we stepped out of the car and walked over bottles of Jameson, towards howling, dancing shadows.

Back of their pick-up trucks flapped open like alligator mouths, rifles hanging from the edge, tiny teeth ready to snap. The three of us trudged through the mud. I held William’s hand to protect him, if at least for one night.
Mrs. Richard Hoare Holding Her Child by Sir Joshua Reynolds

He left the child’s face unfinished, abandoned baby. In some renditions, they’ve added russet colored, beady eyes

to the infant and a cavernous mouth, open, and screaming, gasping for air. Her cream skin, his blonde hair.

Blended bodies. Continuous palette. The child’s left hand, outstretched, leaning against mother’s shoulder. Her mouth agape as if to sing with pride.
In America

My mother walks out onto dewed grass in a plaid robe and lavender slippers to get the newspaper. Sits at the table with the dog. Plays Maria Bethânia on the stereo as she gets ready for her job as a bank teller. Dad will be asleep when she leaves. He works from two to eleven, stiff blue Dickies, “Antonio” ironed on the left side. He always smells like oil. “A lithographer,” I’d tell my friends, embarrassed when asked, trying to hide what he does. “He prints paper.” Works six days a week, only Sundays off. My parents stress to me and my brother the urgency of graduating college. In America, we travel with our green cards and wait in lines. In America, they never see the spelling, always mispronounce our last name. Tell me how they used to have a Portuguese housekeeper and how our food is so good, “Oh the bread,” they say. In America, the four of us have dinner together on Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter; though we stopped going to Church since we’ve moved here.
Elegy For My Grandfather

Your favorite salad dressing
was olive oil, lemon, salt.
I laughed at your long, white
nose hairs; the way you
slurped soup.

I couldn’t watch you,
near-corpse, as they stretched
your legs and arms like pulling dough.
Each day your head tilted back
a little further towards Avó in heaven.
Eventually, your heart
sucked all the blood
from your body.

Sometimes you’re here,
in dreams, already bald.
Cheeks still plump.
You never speak. Just rock
while you peel the skin from
the kiwi.
Elegy for Etelvina

I
Someone captured the last time you smiled
in a picture of us, noses mirrored, almost touching.
The same crooked, pointy nose with a bump.
I wish someone would take a hammer to it
flatten it out, widen it to fit my broad face.

It was your birthday, your last.
You cried your candles out,
Face wet as a bathroom rug.

When we left, you stood at the door,
waved. I wish we could have taken
you with us, away from him.
Earlier, you whispered to me,
to say hello to my mother,
because if Avô Simões heard
he’d slap you to the ground.

II
You were a mother to two boys and a girl,
whose malice could only be learned from her father,
your husband, who gave orders until you died.

III
Her picture hangs on the wall with the others,
candles among them, in that closet across
from the old bedroom where her husband still weeps
because there is no one there to make him caldo verde,
so he kneels all day in front of that room,
until it is time to feed the chickens.
The Portuguese Language Orthographic Agreement of 1990

Eliminated the dieresis from the language completely
(Adeus, pingüim!) and excess letters (que óptimo!)
But it only changed about 1.6% of the European words.

Just as I was learning our language,
the rules changed. But at 70, you adapted quickly.
After long mornings on the beach,
Avó would be in the kitchen peeling potatoes,
we’d sit on sticky leather couches,
and practice translating words,
leave the sliding glass doors open and let the heavy
Algarve air breeze through with sounds of the market
and screaming soccer fans from nine stories below.

I’d ask you how to say things like termoços
and caldo verde in English. You knew,
because you’d been to America once
and watched our news, read the papers.
I learned that the word for train is different
in Portugal than in Brasil. Distance, the same.

I’d ask you how to say things like ketchup, kiwi
and I love you. You’d laugh and grab
my chin, pat the top of my head,
Minha querida neta
Minha neta Americana
Minha neta favorita

Today, I listen to my mother cry about how her siblings
are fighting over your gold and gardens.
Though Portuguese has 26 letters now, instead of 23,
there are no still words with the letters k, w and y.
(my family fights with fewer accents and hyphens),
ever say I love you in any language.
Sometimes I think it's better you're not here to see this--
the savages they've become.
Avô, how do you say I miss you in Portuguese?
Summer in Algarve

My grandfather and I played dominoes on our makeshift table made from the top of the cooler as my brother chased the barefoot bronze man selling *bolas de berlim* between tourists and towels, ran to reach that smell, those stuffed sugar coated fried balls of dough eaten best on a hot day, after a salty seaweed swim in the Atlantic. Avó beneath an umbrella roof plucked chin hairs, made fun of my American accent.

*and you, grandfather,*

*held the cool black and white spotted tiles,*

*tried to hide your shaking cupped,*

*gray and wrinkled hands. Your move.*
Ode to Pastéis de Nata

The pastel
with its exposed middle
sweet yellow custard cup,
palm-sized
sun confection
egg yolk dream
rustic curled cream
smoothed stirred in a *bain-marie*
poured into flaky layered
dough shells
that hold crispy brown
burnt center
sprinkled with cinnamon mustache smiles
Ode to the Circumflex

That bears no weight on my name
as I pronounce it in English.
People say,
   Ee-nus
   Ee-ness
   Eye-ness
   Einz

I correct:
   Eye-nez.
   Two syllables.
   Rhymes with Pez.
It doesn’t rhyme with penis
   or ketchup.
*How pretty. What nationality is that?*
   Portuguese.
*Yes, you look ethnic.*
*I had a housekeeper named Inês.*

At some point in my childhood,
post immigration,
I decided Inês would become Eye-nez.

Ee – nezsh

Ee: the same your mouth makes
when you say cheese for a picture.
Ne – like aphid.
Zsh like the sound
a whirring fan makes.
What the circumflex does
to my name in Portuguese:
it makes your tongue
touch the back front teeth,
protrude between the row
of Chiclets, awkward
sounding, unsure
of the way it makes
you feel when you say it.
That powerful chevron-shaped,
bent little hat.
Feed the cats for me, Dad. Be back Monday.

My father has a glass eye,  
real one lost to a motorcycle  
accident during his hippie, weed-  
smoking younger years in Portugal.  
Looks more lazy than sham.  
It hasn’t hindered any tiling  
project, Bronx Zoo trip  
or scratchy mustached kiss.

Far from the chicken farm  
where he was raised,  
we’re still more alike than  
not: sharing poems, running long  
distances, and surviving bouts  
of depression. I carry  
a pink tape measure in my pocket,  
like him, and get angry  
when I’m hungry, too.  
Elusive parallels keep  
close enough to make  
my mom jealous.

I come home to a note  
On the fridge:  

\textit{Cats fed. Brought pears,}  
\textit{too.}
What mothers do unwanted. What daughters do need.

I found the photograph of the day
I was born.
I looked like love. Then,
when did the fracture
become a break?

I’m beginning to sound like your mother
*and her mother*
*and her mother.*

We’ve learned
to be different
blossoms on the same crowded sill.
Fighting
for the same sun.
Mother’s Life

When your mother died, and then your father, 
you canceled Christmas – plastic pine 
and red felt bows kicked to the curb. 
When Tio Zé passed, your birthday 
was canceled — a date you shared 
with him. Soon, there will be no holidays 
left. You say, “What’s the point?”

Mother

for two of us, you’re still alive. 
Though your face betrays you— 
you don’t want to be.
After the Wars

Your dreams of becoming a rock n roll star died in Kuwait or Afghanistan when you carried Shane’s stomach through the trenches of feces and blood to safety. His memorial cuff bracelet emblazoned on your right wrist. Four wars in as many countries and years, home safe but the deserts sucked you dry. When the camouflage and artillery was put away for good, nightmares of falling from helicopters, smell of mortars, baby wipe baths, meals in mermites.

You found a job at Starbucks, a convertible and cocaine. I always wondered what that choking cough was and when I offered to get you water; you blamed a sore throat. We used to lay in a twin-sized bed, blowing smoke up at the fan, eating Special-K Red Berries. I’d touch your collarbone, watch you squirm. Laugh. We tried.

I knew you’d never stay. Guitar picks everywhere. So I took silly pictures instead of memorizing the color of your eyes. I think about you most on Sundays. I have taken up worrying less And limiting myself to just one-minute-a-day thoughts of you. Write stories on the back of photographs, wonder if you ever made it to LA.
Baptism

“People who have really been raped REMEMBER!!!”
-CeeLo Green

I don’t remember what was in the drink
that was poured into a plastic fishbowl – the kind
your parents keep your first goldfish in,
the one they know will die.

I remember, though, sipping on the striped straw
sometimes a jab to the roof of the mouth
as elbows cut sides, bare thighs and skin
collisions, bodies undulated beneath flashing lights.

Recall eight-foot high blue glass doors
that let me in. Moment of pause: cerulean stupor.
Recall hunched over white porcelain,
finger pads and palms pressing hard
against the wall like octopus tentacles.
Balance not bending at the knees.
Disgorge.

I never saw his face or knew his mouth.
When was the unzipping, the plowing
into my clenched thighs clamped shut
like a knife into the wrong slot of a butcher’s block?

But I won’t forget the next morning: how
my skin burned as I sat in the bathtub
and poured rubbing alcohol between my legs.
Toska

Rain can’t fall every day but it does for two weeks.
The phone doesn’t ring. Some mornings
when the moon is waning and I wait to cross,
the bus passes, blowing hair into my face
getting stuck on my lips like cat fur.
A man passes and says, “Good morning!” Raised
voice pushes me back. I can only utter vowel
sounds in reply, furrow my brow. Breathe.
Men can sense despair. Or is that dogs?

Later, I let the empty concrete street light my way.
Brick on either side, close my eyes long enough to know
I’m still walking in a straight line but also long enough
to remember where I am. Step over the yellowbrown
snow. What do I come home to?
Sometimes I go to the market just to hear someone laugh.
Other nights, I roll over to the cold side of the bed.
Teakettle whistles. Cats scatter.
When We Leave Each Other

I am embarrassed
by the sudden sinking
barren

    open

wound I’ve become.

Impossible
putting mascara
over fat tears.

Dodging
your absence
with flossing
and trips
to Costco.

We struggle
to negotiate
this distance.

Your purple
plaid button-
down still
in my closet.

Won’t you
come back
for it?

In another time-
zone you tell me,

“I am collecting sunrises for you.”

If I collect sunsets,
does that mean
the whole day
is ours?

What I think
about when I'm
thinking about
you:
  the way your right eye squints
  like Popeye when you're tired.

I am writing
about the rain
because I told you
that’s the sort
of thing I don’t
do.  (I am writing
about you
because I told you
I don’t do that,
either.)

There is an eraser
on the ground.
Who still uses pencils?
We can’t make
those kind
of mistakes.

Let’s play
the waiting game.
Give me
all of your
time.
Little Truths

Last night, your fingers found their way inside me.
We fell asleep to a show about a boy and his buffalo.
Breakfast – a birthday cake. “Make a wish,” I said.
Without pause, you blew out the candle.

We heal from the outside in. It was on the little truths
you told where I hung believability, but under you,
my body broke 3,000 times. I promised
as much as I could. If only you’d have left me

like you found me. Complacency
is the opposite of love and I’ve been waiting
so long for someone to help me split an avocado.
Compass

I want to be Vasco De Gama on your body-
be the first to sail your eastern hemisphere,
explore new territory with no directions, no experience
only the certainty that wherever my journey ends
is where I’m supposed to be.

I want to travel by candlelight,
though oranges and reds are too harsh
for your blacks and grays-
the color of you at night without charcoal armor.

I want to trace your map with my fingers,
get lost in your Arabian Sea,
yield to approaching vessels
and jump off my own ship
only to have your compass guide me
back to familiar waters.