

## Prologue/Epilogue: Parting is Such, Sweet (A New Language for Old Songs)

When not the stars but the fact of their falling like loose teeth from the inky night. When flesh. When celestial bodies embodied. When tides bowed in prayer to a sliver of open window. (On the slippery back of gravity, love was brewing in a warehouse, already abandoning its atoms.) When wildflowers populated a scientific name, a human name, a color, and a wish. (Just because we can does not mean we should hold each other like homeless children.) When the hope to siphon our molecules into tangled tree roots is echoed, as in the collective breathing of the forest. (And we believed and we believed in so much then, including the gap-toothed mouth of a shared grave.) When I've written elsewhere about the frightened moon. (For a handful of days, we were heroes in some masochistic god's favorite novel. For a while, we were written in our scars.) When, how you said it, *my fragile bird heart*. When ribcage is more cage than rib, more sky than nest. When feet sighed *finally* at water's edge. (And immersion was not consumption, though it dreamed of being.) This is a new language to bring us back to old songs. The problem is how my singing might reach inside your chest if there's nothing there to greet it. (When illumination casts blinding shadows. When everything is a metaphor for itself.) In the sweaty palm of gravity, love is browning up its belly, anticipating bareness. When seasons are defined by degrees of longing: the summer an accident-blaze we worshipped as sunlight. The fall of helpless falling. Winter a cast-iron buoy. Spring, you give me allergies, you betray me. (Revolution, you are just another word for orbit.) Mauling the past in a mirage, ache of a dream where we circle and collapse, rushing back to the start.

## Blue Hole #4

On Monday, Mark Zuckerberg gave the Pope a drone  
and I let a stranger fuck me in a public bathroom.

A blue-green sparkle of breath on the neck has nothing  
to do with atoms, or crying. Knocked  
spread eagle on the carpet in grief, imagining  
how the camera pans out. One long, slow shot  
that stretches like a river across the ceiling, or a close-up  
of the cheese shards in the carpet.

Tasmanian devils are being plagued  
by a deadly genetic cancer and I am answering

my own text messages with a list of reasons  
everyone who loves me is wrong or lying.  
I am drinking a margarita from a can  
in a dark desert hotel room. I am writing secrets on napkins  
and leaving them around the house for no one.

Radio says they unclogged an anaconda  
from a river drain, diamonds on diamonds shed

like the memory of a summer night, the moon  
looking awestruck. Like he had seen so much  
and never expected to be seen back.

# Beastly

Call to me from the bottom of the stairs and wrap me in your breathless summering. Confession: my lips are their own puppetry until they're not. Marionette me: I slashed my voice in the orchestrated light, beams of birdshadow pinned up for dissection on the wall. You were the window. So it seems the same knobby brown knees are embellished on a stranger's body, appearing like a great dead lover from a childhood storybook, a wax figure that breathes underwater. So it seems holy repetition requires no funeral. Neither does piercing my own side, like the deer who lies down to be devoured and calls it love. I am not calling you a wolf, but. Carelessness sneaks up quiet and beastly and has sorry teeth. And leaves no footprints in its path, hidden ashes littering tall grass.

# Dissociation, A Radiance

## I

Independence Day and thunder knocks  
the light out of the walls. Shame  
comes soggy-bottomed and I swell  
into a weapon. Warrior singed, throat flooded  
with gin and bleach. I masturbate and meditate. Unshaved,  
I litter my body with animal corpses  
smothered in cheese. I fell through the attic floor,  
split teeth like young corn. July fucked me  
and I was ragged for it. I am making myself ready,  
doused in oil for the burning.

## II

When I was a child teased  
for my name, my mother  
said to tell them *Slaughter*  
was a river running Cherokee, the irony  
of a family tree whose roots couldn't be  
more Anglican, the name a word meaning  
*run*, a warning against pale faces  
like mine, who would snuff them out  
with smallpox, then claim stock in their blood.  
My family was forged by these kinds  
of delicate arsons. When my mother  
was a teen her boyfriend drove drunk  
and shattered the girl in the passenger's seat.  
And that was the first time I heard the word  
*manslaughter*. And did not think this man  
was my almost-father, did not think of my father,  
slaughtered onto a living room carpet. And I wonder  
which of these stories are mine to tell.

### III

My cat carves a crescent moon  
into my wrist. I sacrifice  
my body to Nosferatu  
mosquitos. I sleep on carousels  
blanketless. I masturbate twice  
and forget to meditate.  
I am plumed and pillaged  
by the carnal air, smells heavy  
like gunpowder, summer camp,  
sticky knees and fogged black glass bejeweled  
with far-off eyeshine. A rabbit  
in the trees, maybe. Or something bigger.  
Some terrible glorious afterstorm.