

## SCARS

My body has pains in it and I put them there.  
I wear the scars like a badge of honor.  
Sparkling, circling gemstones  
have lit the way  
on this path  
of silvery scars.

Memories, attached to places, then my body  
marks itself with deep things  
underneath,  
with thoughts of embarrassment,  
my daily dose of shame presented,  
stashed among them,  
all bunched under my skin.

Winding up tighter, electrons swirling  
in my atom's pants

positioning  
quickenings  
springing  
ricocheting

too much  
not enough  
not really right  
all right now.

## BALLERINA

He says he can do anything he wants once  
inside this form. My Aunt Alyce sent me  
a music box that plays his waltz music—  
“Tales from the Vienna Woods.”

There is a three-sided mirror in the purple-lined  
lid of the box. The little dancer pops up  
with a flourish.  
I touch her. I feel the stiff nylon net of her tutu,  
watch her spin around.

I like making her twirl. I wear her out, she comes off her armature.

Before I learn what Strauss said  
about the music,  
about his secret freedom.

## AUNT MATTIE I: KITCHEN TABLE

First, she married my Uncle Plato.

On a visit to town one day, there was a woman.  
Pointing out Plato,  
and within earshot,  
the woman said,

“That’s my man.”

Plato had a tragic battle with the bottle.

Mattie made things work,  
made things heal.

Her calling was seasonal;  
she followed the harvests.

After she was through cooking,  
she went about preserving,  
serving every last bit,  
feeding those in need.

We played a hand of seven-point pitch.  
Her kitchen table had a covering where  
Mattie shared things.  
Smoothing the vinyl cloth in front of her,  
she would say,

“That’s how it was.”

A plastic tail, a rhythmic wag, the fake dog  
stares from Mattie’s kitchen windowsill, yapping  
at all front stoop movements.

Only seeds of *red* zinnias were saved for her walkways.

## MY MOTHER'S HANDS

She has the biggest hands in the neighborhood.  
They are stronger, even, than my father's.

They are tree-burl knuckles on night-crawler fingers.  
She likes saying she can open anything.

Belle contorts her mouth, bears down,  
then ends with  
a twist.

She especially loves thinking about her strange talents  
while shuffling cards.

With conniving eyes, she tells her children,  
"I play to win."

Her hands match her massive teeth, tired jaw,  
and weighty overbite.

She is most proud  
when announcing to her public,

"I am here, on planet Earth  
to make everything even."

## A NEW SCHOOL

Firemen hand out red plastic helmets  
after the safety assembly.

We, the helmeted, are held together  
in front of the school, hatchlings,  
emergent through yellow crosswalk lines,  
toward the world on the other side of the street.

In wild woods a turtle  
with a red #3 painted on its back.  
After a couple of days I take #3  
to school in a cardboard box,  
for Show and Tell.

When checking on the box the next morning,  
#3 is not moving.

I console the class at my new school,  
"I can find another."  
They all laugh.

I buy a little turtle at the dime store,  
take it home.

Soon, I find a hole through my turtle's back  
exactly the size of a boy's index finger.

Strictly on instinct, and in tribute to Turtle's spirit,  
my own shell begins assembling.

BIRCH LANE, DAVIS, CA 1962

My kitten goes to the bathroom on Belle's bed, and so, the house falls apart.  
Dad leaves with his gun.

I have a haunting dream.  
I see a carnival, with all its houses:  
Fun, Crazy, Fright, Mirrors.  
A woman whispers, "Wonderland, Wonderland, Wonderland."

The inconsistencies, the ignored,  
the story.

She spins around.

"Who do you like better," she says,  
"your mommy or your daddy?"

"Daddy."

I stand in front of him.  
Tall, shimmering pheasant feathers are Scotch-taped to my paper headband,  
opalescence across my crown.

"Dad, did you shoot my Alvin cat?"  
He looks straight into my eyes.

"I did."

## TORTOISE

The pioneer swims the dark current,  
drags land up under her belly.

She prefers her right arm,  
follows its accidental arc,  
hits her nose on a stone,  
slides down,  
slowly starts up again,  
for another go.

Strong,  
under a heavenly crafted shell,  
her dented geodesic dome, lovely swagger,  
looks for the ancient burrow.

She will live a hundred years.

Sisyphus,  
meandering endlessly,  
no decreasing sense of purpose.

PARK BENCH, AUGUST A.M.,  
MARY FOX PARK, ALBUQUERQUE

Her conversations  
have a pickpocket's touch.

They tore down the old mansion  
for this little park.

People get married here,  
bring their kids to play.  
It is quiet at dawn, except for the birds.

Along the curved walkway  
she sits primly under a mimosa tree

says her name is Pat  
but seems more like a Patricia.

I wait too long and then,  
"I'm Joan."

I'm in my yard one morning.  
She walks by and asks why I don't wear gloves.

I look down at my hands,  
red and swollen,  
caked in mud.

She compliments my blouse.

"My house is on the southeast corner over there.  
My son says he needs to sell it now.  
I am going to live in a rest home."

"Would it be alright if I visit this park sometimes?"

Pat's memory steals me back.

STEVE BURT 10/2/54-4/5/73

He wants interesting stands of grass for his first place.

One late-August afternoon,  
Steve drives the rusty Wagoneer,  
we gather wild turf  
all over Gallatin Valley.

He lives between the worlds  
of kitchen-table Canasta  
and another.

A place without nouns.

He masters the art of spelunking,  
takes his Montana State tennis team  
to Davis, California.

The procession of moths in tennis whites  
stays briefly in our home.  
In two months he will be back at college.

He rides his golden bicycle up into Hyalite Canyon,  
just before the last snowfall,  
and with a blast,

he stops his own heart.