

# ALLOY

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## THE PEAR

Back in the Day	5
Handkerchief	6
Pre-Portrait	7
Oliver	8
Alphabet	9
Summer 1972	10
The Worst Gift I Ever Got Was a Grave	11
'A way of happening, a mouth'	12
Elegy: My Brother at 18	13
ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE BEGINS TODAY	14
My Brother's Body	16
My Mother	17
The Pear	18

## MARLENA WAS A MERMAID

Poets on the Alien Planet	21
Homunculus	22
Marlena was a mermaid	23
Snow White and the Huntsman	24
The Way Home	26
Mrs. Hood Confesses	27
Pinocchio After 40	29
Orpheus, Resigned	31
Icarus Decides	32
Persephone of Maple Street	34
Whatever You Call It Will Be Its Name	35
Dear Mrs. Death:	36
Alan Shepard Is Created As God	37
Dear Atlas:	38

## MIGRATORY

Migratory	41
Baking Ghazal	42
Squash Blossom	43
The Burn	44

Love Poem	45
The Fiery Skipper	46
King of the Death Match	48
Mustang	49
How I Know My Son Will Keep His Job	50
Nineteen	51
Anniversary	52
Oblation	54
My Dog, Long Dead, as a Tiger	55
Tonight, Everyone Is in Love	56

## THE EYE

Part	61
To Galileo, Grinding Lenses	62
One Could Have a Cape Made Entirely of Buttons	63
The Eye	64
How to Build a Bird	65
Poem to Franz Wright	66
Machine, Horse, Rider	67
The EOSINT M280 Laser Sintering Machine is ideal for precision fabrication of medical implants.	68
Red Study	70
Loss of the Thing	71
Dust	72
To Galileo in Autumn, When the Atmosphere Cools to Stillness	73
The past is alloy, gigantic	74
Apple	75
About the Author	77

# THE PEAR

## Back in the Day

When I smiled, it meant I was happy.  
Everything arranged on the bone  
china platter of my face  
was there for ballast.

I mean balance. I could be  
as composed as a salad or  
as tossed, all torn edges.  
When I cried,

real tears came from the corners  
of my eyes. My lungs sighed like trees  
and pink doors blew open and shut  
in my four-room hut.

Or heart. What I said to my mirror:  
In the year 2000, you'll be 36. You'll be 50  
in 2013. *Que sera!* The mirror said black,  
answering back. Maybe that

was more of a question.  
Maybe "happy" is the wrong word.

## Handkerchief

My grandmother taught me to iron  
by practicing on the blank  
page of my father's handkerchiefs.

Each one was flat and white as a ceiling.

I perched on the stool beside her,  
just six, knowing my father  
would fold square my effort, all day

I would peek from his breast pocket.

The iron: so heavy that I used  
one hand to move the iron, the other  
to prop my arm. The stool wobbled.

Hair stuck to my cheek, one damp curl.

Who would teach a girl to push  
such a heavy, scorching thing?  
Who can feel wings beat, sing

the white song trilling from my throat?

## Pre-Portrait

Like birds we turned our necks  
toward the black-eyed camera.  
Someone pitched a best version of us

and we committed. Affixed  
ourselves, a ceremony  
of twist and primp and lacquer.

There was laughter, our glossy teeth  
sparking like hammers, jostling, uncertain.  
The room pitched, rustling the curtain.

We set eyes on that infinite  
aperture, future: found  
this portrait there, fixed like furniture.

We committed to memory:  
the camera laughed  
back its birdie. The future

came on like medication,  
twisted, fixed back on that eye  
and its certainty. We froze

just in time:  
Now the flash  
hammer swings down—

## Oliver

Seven when I saw *Oliver!* on TV. I so loved that.  
Soon I would be half an orphan too, but I didn't know that.

My cheek on the rug. I knew that we had everything then.  
In my world, even unloved orphans sang. The movie showed that.

Raggy orphans, singing, trudged before a placard: God is Love.  
At once, my doveheart beat with things it never knew before that.

What God *is*. I was less and more orphan, knowing. That proved it.  
Suddenly, not just mine, love: all. A shock, almost a blow, that.

I saw too a second way the world is: true and false, at once.  
Orphans singing. God and hunger. Love, and what is below that.

Seven, loved, I watched. A musical show about orphans—strange!  
Still, I can think of two. Love, what can be the reason for that?