

**In transit,**

faith roosts inside a hatchback.  
It breaks down near a farm just after sunset.  
We undress in the dark. Raw milk nuzzles

into our dreams. We wake laden with tasks:  
a dirt road to gravel, saplings to splint.  
A cistern spools the summer rain, and slugs

grow fat as cherubs. The white dog, Paloma,  
with her long teats and sphinx eyes, rolls  
away from her pups, slamming the door

of her sleep. Tio drills us on herbs:  
*Se llama salvia*, we bark, *se llama*  
*menta*, until our cheeks grow hot

with our naming, teeth purr in the curve  
of our jaws. There's a tree at the center  
of the garden. Tio touches its trunk—*Se llama*

*Llorando Sangre*: Crying Blood. It sirens  
the scent of sage and mint, its roots wrestle  
with the worms. Tio says to cut it back.

Clumsy machetes split bark like a shin. Its name  
bleeds out into the copper morning, slick, limbless,  
blooming now with butterflies and bees.

## Of the Tribe of Summer

Mini-Cleopatras of the backyard creek,  
what faith shakes us from the bone

of make-believe? Sometimes lions, we  
stretch sun-lengthened limbs, laugh fierce

bells of lilac. Sometimes meat, we dream  
the soft darkness of mane pressing us

downward as we're devoured, each invisible  
portion of flesh. Grasshoppers rise from the bank

in silent applause. July parades her pregnant belly  
straight down Main Street, splintering shutters

with school-girl swagger. Dry sheets rust  
to clotheslines. We light our throats with butter-

cups, witch our hair in silt the sheen of night.  
We, of spoon-bending mind, of voodoo

nouns, shift board into plume, lift as one nude  
into bloom along the roadside. Water whispers

from our skin. Old men in pickups avert their eyes.  
Others turn and turn. Before we melt back into the forest

of our clothes, we hula hoop our hips in bee-haze  
heat. Each grin a lavish display of blackberry ink

or gleam of blood between our teeth.

## The Doppler Effect

On the sixth day, the fire began to hawk  
spectacle and risk like a circus  
on the outskirts of town. Its black

megaphone projected a crackly waltz  
that singed me to sleep and out  
with sparks burred to my sleeves.

A wonder where a cough should be.  
My house was safe, so I wafted  
to Main Street. Usually deserted

by eight, it bustled, an Italian piazza.  
Boy packs circled girl packs. Drunk  
college kids, home for the summer, collapsed

on benches, wrapping each other  
the way cars wreck. I found my friend  
who lost everything swinging alone

in our outgrown playground, gorgeous  
in her despair. The smoke seemed to live  
in her hair the way rain lives in clouds.

We pumped until swings groaned  
like trees in the throat of flame.  
The scent of the whole forest released

inside me like a lover, and the unclaimed  
damage I stored in the dusk of my body  
flickered. I thought I'd been spared

too much. Even now, when friends  
knock on my door, scorched refugees  
from some disastrous affair, part

of me wants to dance on their living  
room rugs to the music of embers.  
To pirate the art on the walls

as it curls. That night, at the height  
of the swing's arc, my eyes bit down  
on those burning childhood homes,

a god-bright gash in my lids.  
With distance, it's shifted  
from blinding to merely

the smooth red of scarred skin. Like  
the caesarian that hammocks my hips.  
A sort of half-smile, tightlipped.

## Little Brother

1.

Shadow, pest, first friend, you  
would have followed me anywhere.

Up the pale limbs  
of walnuts that thin into umber

leaves at dusk. Into the vacant  
lot next door, we tunneled

waist-high foxtails, unearthed  
cat skulls. In the wood-

shed, I lifted every log.  
With the same bravado,

I swept your room  
for nightmares. Shadow,

2.

pest, first friend, you *shadow*  
would have followed me anywhere. *Pest, first*

*friend, you lift the sun* up the pale limbs  
of walnuts that thin into umber-*streaked tresses*

*to your nose, your lips*  
*as she* leaves at dusk *I would follow.*

Into the vacant *anywhere*  
lot next door, we tunneled *as she explains*

waist-high foxtails, unearthed cat skulls.  
*Better by my own hand, babe.* In the wood-

shed, I lifted *by my own hand* every log  
with the same bravado as before bed *babe*

I swept your room for nightmares. *Better to*  
*give it away.* I recognize the way

*as she explains* you pad your chest  
with breath *better to give it away*

to appear stronger than your frame *as she*  
*explains* and you tell her whoever gets her hair

*your nose, your lips* is the luckiest girl.  
First friend, I never knew *better*

what we'd do with a monster *than to watch it*  
or a black widow spider *watch it slowly*. Shadow

3.

pest, first friend, you lift the sun-  
streaked tresses to your nose,

your lips, as she explains—  
*Better by my own hand, babe.*

*Better to give it away*  
*than watch it slowly*

*clog the drain*. I recognize  
the way you pad your chest

with breath to appear stronger  
than your frame,

and you tell her whoever gets her hair  
is the luckiest girl.

Pest, I never knew  
what we'd do with a monster

or a black widow spider, only  
if such things existed it had to be better

to see them first. Friend, I'm right  
behind you. Let my fear

make you brave.

## First Night

*Come to bed* you sigh as you surrender.  
I'm still fighting

sleep like a private on first watch.  
The rustle of our daughter's breathing

draws my skittish sight past your body  
sprawled like Mecca across salt-flat sheets.

My dark continent, wait for me  
on the other side. We'll reincarnate

in fan-cooled rooms, in borrowed countries  
where bougainvillea scales balconies

like a romance language.  
We'll glove our hands in suede-

smooth novels, drift through the off-hours  
emptiness of other people's lives. I dream

geckos grafted to adobe walls, a cantina crowded  
with flirt-lashed boys, where American doo-wop

summers from a jukebox and expat couples churn  
with the slow insomnia of landlocked seas.

I sway with our girl till dawn,  
pass her into your arms, full

of the future, like a letter  
carried through war.

## Two Nights in Room Nineteen

*She dreamed of having a room or a place, anywhere, where she could go and sit, by herself, no one knowing where she was.*

—Doris Lessing

Twin queens tucked neat as presents.  
The milk in my breasts hardens like evidence.

How many heroines have died of such a room?  
But there's no gas noosing its slow lasso, no arsenic

burlesquing feather-light negligees. Only snow  
mothed to plate glass, a breast pump's

hydraulic rasp. When my daughter drinks  
she retreats so deep beneath the luminosity

of her skin. I am custodian of every crease  
and pore, fine-toothed comb of toes, each nick-

named bone. Milk defrosts in a distant kitchen.  
She accepts a bottle as evidence. A physicality

to this disconnect, like the gloaming after sex.  
Her father softening against my thigh, smooth

and gelatinous as some shy creature  
haunting a deep-sea crevasse. I thought of that

when they slapped her brined, boneless body  
to my chest. The first time I took a boy

in my mouth I didn't know what to do  
with all that living gratitude.

Since then my body has learned  
how to give thanks, a lesson

it can never forget. Still, I flush  
the milk like evidence.

## Giant Slalom

The race is won or lost in shavings of second. *Now*: the space between starting block and gunshot, between locked

knees pounding chest like a stranger's fists  
screaming *breathe goddammit breathe*. Now,

when I was sixteen I killed myself and my best friend.  
*Hydroplane*: another word for that moment when the story

jumps the tracks. Truth: my body yanked us out of skid  
the way a hand recoils from a pan before it feels the burn.

What I mean: reflex saved us. We both grew up. We  
both had daughters, and for so long I thought this meant

the flesh is wiser than. Forgive me: I've been careless  
every day since then. I've left the door unlocked, gas on,

water running. Things unsaid as if we had all night.  
Once, I dropped my weeks-old daughter in the dark,

caught her between heartbeats. Maternal instinct.  
We've all heard the stories: a woman lifted an SUV

to free her child's leg. Other stories: a woman drove  
an SUV off a cliff. Her child strapped securely

in a safety seat. Shocking really, how a little water can lift  
rubber from road. Think of snowpack as windshield glass:

how rain adheres to tracks we can't see, how skis drift  
an infinitesimal degree. My daughter's forehead testifies

with bruises, goose eggs. Proof: if vigilance and a moment's  
grace is what it takes, then I can't. Understand: I wasn't even

paying attention, screaming my own bad song  
over some other bad song. When the wheel pulled

one way, I pulled back, like a dog unwilling to let go  
of its bone. It's messy, instinct. It's flinch and cringe and fist

around your softest places. It's the baby turning blue,  
and all you remember from that CPR class is the sick

suck of rubber, the heel of your hand squishing  
a too-pink doll on your forearm to the mantra: *Please*

*let this never happen to me.* Absently, we steer  
our children away from the sharp edge, the too-big

bite. But it takes the precise violence of mind  
to know one must break the ribs to save

the heart. *Hydroplane:* the instant before you know  
you will arrive in time—or won't. I still drive that cliff

road. When distraction slackens my grip  
on the wheel, I feel the tug of many paths.

*Now,* they pull one way. *Now,* I the other.  
My daughter, asleep in the backseat. Below:

the bay. Flat as a reptilian eye—