

Clever title here

Caroline Kessler
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“Avoid the flourish. Do not be afraid to be weak.
Do not be ashamed to be tired. You look good
when you’re tired. You look like you could go on
forever. Now come into my arms. You are the image
of my beauty.”

—Leonard Cohen

OTHER EPIGRAPH HERE

In South India

They call me Jezebel, so often that I've forgotten my own name.
I left it somewhere in Mamallapuram, where the elephants are etched
in stones as big as the mammals themselves / lost it as I was climbing onto the hundredth
train of my life, shaking my bare shoulders at all the sari-clad women.

Out of necessity, I sleep in a small bed with four large men—
(all my adjectives are simpler after all this time with them)
we debate religion and sex—
the only two reasons to get on our knees.

Here, I am the harlet. In an autorickshaw, the driver asks my name
and I improvise—*Elizabeth*—aristocratic, British, wealthy, rounded edges—
the opposite of myself.

(I'm sharp, unmarried, American, obsessive.)

Come on boys, be outrageous with me!
Sure, there are fewer rules for you to break. But still—

The wind funnels through the three-wheeler.
We pass elephants/goats/grows/dogs/boars/cats/horses/camels
I am all of them, none of them, nameless.

Introductions

My actual age > the age you think I am.

My finger, counting the rings on a split oak
One for every year—

My back: 9 freckles.

Connected dots = a rocket ship (your hand, a pen, last night)

Remember?

Here, look!

(Back to you, my back)

Your tallness, the smallness of my bed.

Your finger pointing to your ribs & my bed, *yes, yes, I'll fit.*

6 nights, we stay in my bed.

The 7th, we rest on the street,
coating ourselves with dirt.

To the sky, *alleluia.*

We always want more than that.

My brown book: my handwriting, your name,
this list's end.

(The list = every person who has been inside of me)

The number? Too high to say.

Do you believe any part of me?

The humidity + my hair = a cloud

The hill, my bicycle: me, hair swirling, laughing into oncoming traffic.

Funny/Love/Broke

“It’s kind of about letting go of that feeling of my 20s, that feeling that I will do absolutely everything, I will have sex with everyone, I will go to every country.”

—Miranda July

I’ve given up coffee/tea/cigarettes/alcohol/driving/everything
fun/I don’t know what to do with my hands anymore

tiny hints / the light /
blonde /
hairs

// // //

Train & tram whistles / I
practice being a mountain
wait
chugchugchugchug/swish/

open clackclack
hissssss,
to the airport
to pick you up

// // //

the whole city
from my bed
□azienki, civilized & royal gardens
so green—
I wish it had never been invented

...

eat breakfast naked: scrambled
butter.
I’m never hungry anymore but you

eat drink stay
more
to fill the time.

...

your shoulders, pretending

...

fillings, the metal plaques

...

acrobatics / bed /
that is our country

the dictionary—
what it says!

yanking
out the pages

we make our own language,

all the ones
we knew
didn't say enough.

// // //

your shape—
surprise!
I'm still working
—I need new words

// // //

stop dreaming
/why/

earlier that day
I intended to burn myself/
to have something that close

your skin
reminder—pinking / freckling
surfaces.

Globicephala macrohynchus

Cameron is a short-finned pilot whale, but lost—
nudging boats along Georgia's coast, trying to find his way.
He is unlike the rest—
they rub their slick skins together, always
trying to push through the waves,
vying to be nearer to each other.

He is the lone cheetah of the deep,
infamous for chasing squid
thousands of meters beneath the sun-lit sky.
He lobtails, slapping his flukes
in songs of bravado.
He skyhops, pushing his head
through the water's curtain,
to feel the sun on his up-turned face.

The legend says that his fins
used to be hands—he wandered
along the beach, palms down,
inverting his body among the dunes.

When he was a baby, he only showed
the top of his head above the water. In the bathtub,
his wet curls were antenna, waving in search
of a sign. His tallness is never-ending. He's outgrown
all his clothing, even his skin.

He tries to make his teeth whiter, so they can light
the way in the sea or sky's darkness. I try to make
my handwriting bigger—I want my hands
and my poems to be massive, to be billboards—
so I can write him messages and he will see them,
no matter how far away I am, no matter how fast
he is swimming or running.

Postcards to a friend // Dear Joseph

Isn't it strange that the United States Postal Service can read this?
It's not so private—the opposite of a letter. I could tell you
anything. Or nothing. The state's secrets. The names of my lovers.
The number. The color of my socks.

Now, I know where my itch to travel comes from. Daddy wanted to
be a contractor so he could move every 6 months—this is exactly
what he said. My laughter: he planted Baltimore roots so fast and so
deep, they go all the way through to my heart.

How cold are your bones? Mine ache with warmth these days, the
heat pooling at my joints.

*

This morning, I stumbled out of a dream, shouting in a British
accent. All night, we roam Pondicherry's streets until the sun edges
over the sea. We take a breakfast of beer on the sand, because no
one here *eats*. They *take food*.

Tonight, I will purposefully look for dark alleys, abandoned fields. I
will tattoo danger on my arms with sandalwood paint, wash it off in
a future I can't see yet, a future that's hiding at the bottom of a
bucket.

*

It had not rained for the entire time I have been in India and then
this morning, I woke up with the thrumming of water on a tin
roof—I couldn't tell what it was, the sound was so foreign. The air
is so heavy today, the clouds hanging over the ocean, bearing down.

I used to write you haiku on postcards, but being here makes me
feel more expansive. Even my hair is growing longer. I am taller
everywhere I go. Everything stretches on—the days, the heat, my
limbs. Come find this new version of me.

three maps of the west coast

francesca, you stood outside
funtastic traveling shows
that was merely the beginning
bicycles & the flat willamette
the station where we dropped
on the ground like breadcrumbs.
out of the mid-afternoon mist
your hands clutching the map
early the next morning
we wrestled oars
the water looked ready for us
more train tickets made a path
red bean chinatown all day
we wandered until we found water
& children rolling in dirt.
boarded the rickety train again
sticky rice in our hair, exhausted
Your voice was hoarse, strained

the van that shouted in reds & oranges
welcome to portland
city of square-menu cafés
a ghostly gate pushed us toward
blue amtrak stubs
they made a path until seattle rose up
our heels ached from crossing every bridge
you taught me how to trace rivers, roads
rowing across lake union, you pointed to the sky
shouted, look at the clouds, the sky
our fingers, dipped in the bay, smelled salty.
on to vancouver where you tried to taste
the cornhusk package—I hesitated. later,
we stumbled upon sloped-banks of false creek
finally, we left your maps in the station,
the adventure ending, sand in our teeth
from trying to take each city in our mouths.
with all the singing & naming of each place

Diptych

1—

The word big
my thumbnail compared to yours
a pin's head
a pen's point
India's tip, where the three seas meet
the word sea
the letter *c*
one poppy seed
a grain of sand
a feather, halved
a bird's clawed foot
the stars from this roof
one jasmine blossom
an eyelash to wish upon
the space between your hips and mine
Denmark's population
the distance I can run before I get winded
my plans for the future
the present tense
space on the bus
5-rupee note
my knowledge of foreign languages
certain gods

2—

India's population
my obsession with the body
the blessing an elephant gives you when you put a coin in its mouth
an elephant's memory
War and Peace
all the classic novels I have never read
the time I have spent in academia
the actual sea
the space between your hips and mine
my fixation on the future
1000-rupee note, too long to fit in my wallet
January's beached turtle, splayed, sandy, children climbing over him
my nostalgia for every place I have ever walked, lived, loved

the number of stars a telescope can see
the distance I will bicycle to get to you: 7,518 nautical miles
the word *impossible*
the sky in Pondicherry, Warsaw, and Charlottesville
the present / the now
teachings of classical Buddhism
holy men
the things I don't say because that would be rude
the lies I tell my mother to protect her
the scars along my arm, elbow, hip, and knee from the motorcycle accident
the number of times I picked my scabs so that they couldn't heal
doubt

Outside the Mitzpe Ramon makhtesh
a crater 28 miles long and five miles wide

I was born in the craggy moan of the desert,
surprised by the rockiness of the landscape.
The drought writes itself into my hands'
creases, the sand swells around my legs.

I pluck pebbles from the ground, holding them
in my mouth. I smear dirt onto my lips.

Sometimes I leave, but my feet feel uneasy
near water—movement without control.
When I'm home again, I press my back
into the ground, making a new spine from the rocks.

The wind whistles the same songs, I echo
back familiar words: *The world is a narrow bridge.*
I hold back my fear when crossing.

Three versions of leaving

The gin-rimmed glass
pie plates, crusted with age
the soles of my feet
miles of walking
my heart in my hand
all my voices and me
distant as stars
hardwood creaks a protest
I disappear, unblinking
first, I slip my bad face on
then re-hook my bra
rub my teeth with one finger
imagine what I will say
if I return

squatting beside the bed
huddled near the door
brown as bread from
every night, getting here
we edge toward the door
insanity and her sister
singing to my inner ear
it doesn't matter what time
always the sun or moon notices
tie this weed of hair into a knot
button the eyes of my dress
dampen the flowers with spit
when I return
my back bright with dawn's glow

How to make an aquarium out of fish soup

When you drink □ubrówka, bison grass vodka,
it puts down leafy, slimy roots in your mouth.

In your mouth? Yes, I am. You are in mine. New tongues
for both of us. Mine, Polish. Yours, love.

Did you just say *love*? Oh, you meant loaf. Loaf?
Brown bread, open face, melted cheese, open mouth.

The most traditional Danish food is an open-faced
sandwich. The most traditional Danish face is yours.

I want to be so skinny that I disappear in your button-down.

I have a box of buttons in my closet. Maybe they will
remind you of me. Me of you? Those small, still eyes.

Say *Polish*, the kind you use to shine your shoes.
Everything is softer—sounds, soles.

My questions, you humming *yes*.

A bicycle without brakes

These really exist! I built one from a forgotten frame,
a pillow cushion for a seat, and wooden blocks for pedals.

Why would you ever want to stop?

If I could, I would cycle all the way from Pittsburgh to Grand Rapids, Michigan, where no one else is trying to go so the roads will be clear as the fall night smoked with bonfires, all the way through western Pennsylvania's hills, into the flatness, not stopping for any of those impeccable silver Ohioan rest stops, not stopping under the eastern Michigan sky, big but crowded with stars, not stopping for quaint, collegiate Ann Arbor and my poet-friends there, not stopping for a midnight sandwich because I forget my hunger when my legs are splayed out to the side and I'm *coasting*, refusing to stop as I blow through the typical cornfields, yellow silk catching in the spokes, feeling very Midwestern, not even attempting to stop until I get to Allendale, a sliver outside of Grand Rapids, and not until I make it to that deceptively circular planned manicured community development where your grandmother lives, and I make one lap around the man-made pond for good luck, trailing my hand through the chemical-y water and feeling up the fat fake fish for kicks and not until I ride right through the back door, made of slippery glass, and into your bedroom on the ground level and I catch the bike on the edge of the felty pool table that's thick with dust and I catapult myself into your massive bed, where you are sprawled out, sinewy arms wide, waiting for me even though I never told you that I was coming.



ראש הנקרה
Rosh Hanikra

The trouble with desire and its siblings

lust and greed
you want all of it
the whole world
showing off
ridged edges
wobbling insides
slick with exertion
that rise and fall
wide-mouthed, I want
already and again
still, while we lay here
we gulp the same air

they smell of danger and nearby saltwater
you want what you can't have
the squirming oysters
with their three-chambered hearts
shaped like human ears
lemon juice smeared on our wrists
I can't tell you from me, me from you
the ocean's pull
the sharp of your hipbone
before you've even left, I miss you
our limbs folded around each other
breathing our whole selves, like the oysters

My brother & the moon

The story of my brother's birth is the most repeated history of my life. It begins:

While inside my mother's womb, his fingernails grew to dangerous lengths.
He scratched red ribbons along his face, leaving crescent-shaped imprints under his eyes. Upon emerging,
 he calmly unraveled the umbilical cord from around his neck.

Despite this, I know he is the smartest boy in the whole world.
My frustrations don't stop the retellings:

When he was an infant, my mother stood at the nursery's doorway,
listening for the breath's hum in his tiny chest. She heard him whispering
prime numbers, as high as he could, to fall asleep: eighty-nine, ninety-seven, one
hundred & nine—

These days, my brother wanders through the house, tapping the walls. He ascends
the stairs with the blink of an eyelash. He ruminates on the carpet, pressing
his coccyx into the ground, propping his legs up against a wall, letting the blood
drain down to his hips. I'm aging when I do this, he tells me.

Each afternoon, he runs one hundred & eleven miles in a prime number of minutes.
His chest is calm at the end, & I'm proud of the muscles in his legs.

At night, the moon of humility shouts to him. She only speaks
in numbers divisible by seven. He's too busy listening to her
 to hear my small jealousy.

I'd ask him to translate her shoutings, but he'd turn his face away in disgust.

I ask, Is the moon the same as the womb?
His answer:

he takes my curled fist & closes his long fingers over my small hand, burying it in his own.

Postcard to my brother

I am forgetting how your nose
sits on your face, how your mouth curves into itself.

Do you even remember me at all?

I am 8,763 miles away. What does that mean?

I remember: your face, a window,
my eye against the hard black back
of the camera, trying to shoot you
through the red solstice moon, its orange halo—

Postscript—

You emerged from the moon's womb hips, white as new bones!

I saw the whole thing, huddled in the kitchen sink,
small and squatting and waiting
for the truths you would tell, the palms you would read.

Long distance Cameron

The letters stacked up to mountains
outside his nursery / fort / dorm room /
grown-up apartment—

My brother can barely push the door
open for all the sacks of words.

Sporadically / in exchange,
I receive envelopes full of
punctuation /
things that spill molehills
onto the counter:
coconut / cucumber seeds / sand from Korea,
a place he's never been but his girlfriend has.

His blue voice across the metal can of a telephone—

Bananaphone, bananaphone, are you there? //
We hoot like owls with laughter.

Whistling Georgia wind!

I don't even have a return address these days.

I want to be bigger / anything for sight.

I teach myself how to fly a plane /
It's easy!
Waiting / the clearest day
Across Atlanta / swooping a message /
through the clouds—

Loudspeaker / strapped on /
Obnoxious, dingy songs:
Leaving on a Jet Plane and
Writing to Reach You—
I have to be obvious.

Simultaneously /
An army of carrier pigeons /

Heart-shaped sticky notes
labeled LOOK UP /
miniature binoculars /
pours in the windows of his house.

Everything / doll-sized.

Days / moons /
My mailbox brims with shells /
shaped like ears /
they tumble out of the metal box
chipping onto the pavement—

I kneel /
press one after another to my ears,
waiting / listening / for anything other than
the dull humming sound that is perhaps
just my ragdoll breath in my chest—

Letter to my jaundiced baby brother

You only know things close to the body: your skin chafing
against the tree's gray bark, your mouth

stretched wide in infant-song, wordless. The mourning dove
wanders in: a comma perched atop your tongue.

Glance down, a moth has joined the dove. They're singing
myths so loudly, you're not sure which is your

voice and which is theirs. You feel their whisker-wings in your mouth.
You try to lift your tiny finger to touch them, to feel their pulse

on your yellowed hand. They quiver not out of fear, but amazement of you.
Already, your skin is turning, becoming like the pink

of the dogwood blossoms. The color deepens as the tree ages.
Let the sturdy dogwood keep you company

while the sun glances over your eyelashes, your lips, your belly:
the day passing its warmth through you.

An evening with my brother

You'd think they'd learn by now. You'd think they'd talk to each other,
he says, shaking his head. I sit on my hands, keeping myself quiet,
not saying, *they're stink bugs, they can't tell each other not to keep*
flying towards the light.

Instead, I lean back on his bed, staring at the ceiling's glow. Now,
we have memorized their shield-shaped bodies, copper bands
of their antennae, blue-metal depressions of their backs.

They congregate, preaching from the windowsills. They hold a séance
atop the microwave, start a book club on the top shelves, organize
a rally in the pantry, beating their wings in unison.

He has trouble falling asleep, worried that one will fly into his open mouth.
I warm the milk, pour the water. We count Proth primes, let his white noise
machine hum its song. None of this works. The stink bugs start a drum circle
on the dresser, distracting us. *Let's play the what if game,* I suggest.

What if you could write a novel on grains of rice and string them together?
What if there was a mountain with only one side? What if the stink bugs
were secret agents, spying on us while we slept?

We spin new machines and draw altered landscapes until I am out
of words and my brother's breathing evens out. I watch him
from the floor, letting the stink bugs land on my forearms, bent knees.

The lack of light makes them brave, examining my skin. I tip my head
close to them, and whisper secrets of survival in their language,
making *thwip thwip* sounds with my tongue, like their wings.

Ghazal for the weekend in Cleveland

What if we were honest all the time? Sure, we've asked this hypothetical before.
What if we tried it? Ask me what I want. I'll examine your pupil and say: you.

There is a running tape in my head: a pep talk, all day, every day. Keep! Being! Vulnerable!
There is a skirt waving pom-poms in my eye's corner. No, it's just dust in my hair.

Let's experiment with starving: eat soup for breakfast, then nothing for lunch. Gin for dinner.
Let's be the exception. I'll wear my hair in pigtails, you'll dye yours red. Forget the rules.

Normal! Normal! Normal! I chant to myself, a cheer to match the pep talk. Stomp with me.
Normal! The empty bleachers boomerang my voice, *normals* clanging against plain metal.

Who is leaving who? Or is it whom? You're not so sure of grammar, just decisions.
Hoo, hoo, the owl murmurs through the peephole, as you let yourself out the hotel door.

Afternoon: meet me at Sunshine Headquarters. I'll buy the shortest dress, you, the thinnest tie.
Noon's heat: let's forget this place, 54th and Bloom, & duck into a shadowed alley.

Spend all night at the Wine Cave—I'll black out while you sip club soda, bubbling.
Spend all your money & the morning trying to sober me up: coffee, cold showers, cake.

Through the curtain of water, I try to see if you're naked or clothed. The slick porcelain—
through the holes in its whiteness, I breathe my mantra & reach for your hips.

Before I can leave you, you'll sneak out in night's middle. I can tell from a week away.
Before you can leave me, I'll pedal away on my bike, my hair swirling up, blocking my vision.

I take my brother to a rally

and he makes friends on the train with the drunk couple from central Jersey. Carla and Dale like him so much they offer him their Coke bottle of mostly rum. My brother downs it one swallow, no flinching. I've never seen him drink before.

We are packed on the Metro so tightly that no one needs to hold onto anything—we are all each other's support. Behind me, a woman from Boston plays with my hair, then asks if she is invading my personal space. *No, no*, I say as the train rocks us toward the center of the city.

Every time I'm home, his legs grow longer. He could easily outrun me, leaving me panting. But he slows to a jog, and I run faster, and we push our way toward the thickest part of the crowd. He holds his camera up to his face, a fish-eye, a portal. The signs:

*this is not a sign
I cannot fit my political beliefs on a sign
beer*

We laugh at everything, then duck into the Hirschorn, wander through the round rooms. *Let's just stay here*, he says.

Why are you taking care of me? I say.

We turn a corner: a large black square on the wall, shining granite, greets us. The slope in his nose, his long fingers curved around my shoulder—I'm left gasping at our reflections, our imbalanced heights, the electricity in our hair.

Only young shoots are commonly eaten

Grass, asper grass, spar grass, sparrow guts—these are just some of your nicknames.
How do you keep track of yourself, with so many identities?

Do you remember that time, just you & me in the kitchen, your thinness stretched
out on the table, my mouth leaning too close? Miles Davis was playing
in the background, something with a soft drum.

I'll teach you how to play the trumpet, I'll break out my harmonica,
we'll make duets for the moon.

I'm obsessed with the moon, did I tell you? I've memorized its phases,
drawn its face a hundred times, taught my brother
that we always see the same side of its pocked surface.

When I'm not teaching him, we compete: staring contests, silent contests, loudness contests.
We distract each other by pounding our shins, drumming our chests,
snapping our fingers.

I'll be truthful with you, Asparagus. It's nice to just sit here in the quiet, sensing our own sweat.

I want to sing your praises, but I don't want to embarrass you. Okay, I'll whisper them:
the way you soak lemon juice into your skin, how you crisp up in the oven,
your humble head of flavor.

In German, they call you *spargel*. My ear hears *Der Spiegel*. I read the English newspapers.
What are you reading these days?

You told me once that your favorite book was *Dandelion Wine*.
My brother loves the sequel, *Farewell Summer*.

I wish you could meet him—he reminds me of you, lithe and long.
He spends all day reading about the moon.

Sometimes he even pretends he is the thing itself, sucking his stomach in like a crater,
not eating so he grows pale and gray.
He reads all the books I give him to study the moon, because every night is a test.

He rubs spent gunpowder on his neck, because this is the smell of lunar soil.

Savasana

Corpse pose: the last pose in yoga meditation, where the body is in a neutral position, laying down

This field of clovers and leeks:

I'm buried

but still, there's an anxious leaping in my veins.

I'll let the forage moths crawl over my legs,

let the flies click their tongues near my ear.

Darkness creeps in. I already tried

talking to the sky, faded blue—

Silence is everyone's answer.

Now, I try talking to the moon—

*Moon, listen! Can you hear my voice, thin
through the rustle of the trees?*

No answer: only the sound of grass between my hands.

Even the ground has stopped talking to me, it's no longer humming
against the small of my back.

And I'm still buried, the new leaves growing
around me, entangling my hands and breath.



MANIFESTO OF RENEWAL IN A BRIDGE-FILLED PLACE

Today, we will draw this old city a new face. We are tired tired bone weary tired of the old ways and the old people and the old steel shadows, so we will take over every neighborhood we can wrap our arms around.

We will join hands, sing *kumbaya*, sneer at ourselves. We will repair our world. We will scatter sprouts and seedlings in the streets, we will go back to the basements we were born in, just to steal the shining insulation and wear it on our backs as capes, remembering our beginnings, reminding ourselves of the change that's going to come.

I have knelt in the grass, on a hill overlooking the city, just to talk to the sky. I used the word *want* as often as the word *thank*. I am selfish for all of us. I am the spokesperson of what we will become.

The day turns to rain and I turn to my left and strike a match for like, strike up a conversation with a gray woman. She interrupts me and I try listening. Her mouth is a fish, orange and open. *I don't know what I want to be* is my complaint to her, I say it for everyone and she says that we will just *become* and no one really knows what to be.

That is not the answer, I want to say, but we practiced being polite, so I am. From her pocket, she pulls the world's smallest drum, tapping it with two fingers as she sings a morning song. The birds and I and the city stop our chatter to listen. When we shout *encore*, she's gone, slipping back into the fog.

Around some of us, there is this haze of future-fear, gathering like knots at the bases of our spines. We can't massage it out, we can't let it go. But we can document it, we can speak in any tense we want.

We will make cyanotypes of our faces, we will go barefoot like in the womb, we will sew new pockets into our clothes. We will fill empty lots and town squares with gardens, full of vegetables we can't pronounce, we will dig up potatoes shaped like babies, carrots pointed like swords.

As we're crossing our 448th bridge, the old woman will appear at the other side, thin hands outstretched. We will walk to the end of it, hands linked, we will be singing the songs we've made up in other languages.

She will greet us with tea on a tray, with rectangular fortunes soaking in the cups. She will play the harmonica while tap-dancing while brewing more tea while reading aloud from the dictionary.

We will listen while untangling ourselves from the prayer flags we wound around our waists, we will try not to fall to the ground, we will try not to believe the sky is falling when we spin in too many circles.

When we cut our hair, we will save the pieces in brown boxes. When we pass the skeletons of cars, strewn on the roadside, we will scrape off the rust and rub it on our cheeks. When we try to buy things, we will remember how we're living, and turn the dollar bills into origami swans, set them free in the river.

We will meet our new old friend in an abandoned barn,
we will write dirty limericks on the sawdust floor with
our fingers, she will blot them out with the haiku her
feet make, we will all bet each other how many sunrises
we can catch without sleeping.

We will fall asleep by chanting under our breath: our
plans for tomorrow, our middle names, our lottery
numbers, our refrain: *we are not what came before us.*

We will hold each other to our bets, we will make promises with sworn pinkies and crossed hearts, we will remain accountable. We will mix lavender and henna powder to make the ink, we will write declarations on our whole bodies, we will hum invented psalms.

We will take young ones beneath our wings, we will introduce ourselves, shouting, and instead of asking their names, we will ask *what do you love?* They'll answer with a novel, we'll sing back their responses, translating them into dying languages.

The old woman asks me, *will you stay true to your word, will you do all things you say?* My only answer is hold up my hands, red and raw from so many promise-handshakes and pinkie-swears and crossed-hearts. My fingertips are prunes from tunneling through the sewer systems, discovering.

When the jazz band enters with everyone playing their song, we leap up from the ground and use our bodies as instruments. We are louder than the band, we dunk ourselves in the river, once, twice, again until our eyes are swollen with the water.

Every day is just called *now*. We create new landscapes, adding another reservoir, another park up in the hills. We call the world a narrow bridge, we criss-cross it every day.

We wander the park trails we just laid, asking questions to the crotch of a tree, we break away from the collective at noon each day, we become an I again.

I meet up with the woman, by accident—she is levitating on a park bench, but when I come closer, she pretends she was just sitting there. *Trickster!* I say, laughing in my loud way. She hands me an onion, says *peel*. I start crying and she starts laughing. When I hold the naked orb up to the sun's glare, she points to it and says *you*.



Each of us is a shattered urn

We feel our way towards the city brightness,
hands outstretched, grasping for the guardrail.

Michael is the leader, he shows me how to build a fire.
I nudge new logs onto the flames, let sparks inhabit my hair.

Silence inches her way toward me, I walk to meet her.
What's in your pocket? she gestures, fluttering.

I show her: a handful of dust & a handful of ash: our origins.
She nods, kneels. We practice being close to the ground.

Zach & Brooke & Mack & everyone shout across the fire pit:

what dances do you know?
what songs do you sing?
what do you love?

Silence & I watch them, pressing our elbows into the earth's
curvature. We avoid high-rises, painter's ladders, chairs.

What dances do you know? What songs do you sing?

We ignore the sunset to stare into each other's faces.
We invent an empty clearing where the three rivers converge.

We stamp our feet for warmth, try to say what keeps us up at night.
We run out of words.

What do you love? Why do you love? Who do you love?

We fall asleep with our spines in line with tree roots.
I hold hands with silence, dreaming of the sun.

Show us your dances, sing us your songs.

Of course, the lighting of the world wakes us up.

We're quiet, remembering our smallness.
Acorns drop to the ground, *tap tap, thunk*.

The three rivers ripple us into the day, gurgling.
We never turn our backs to them—

just shuffle away, feeling with our feet, humming
our songs, reminding each other what we love.

Pondicherry, Puducherry, India
a seaside French colonial town

“The sorrow is always, always a river running behind your house.”
—Marcy McCourt

and behind your house and the river the ocean and behind the ocean, the familiar elm, and inside the elm’s hollow, a the dillydallying sparrow, chanting its tuneless tune to the waiting world, and inside the rare sparrow’s mouth, a web made of floss, where a spindly spider preaches, and behind the web, deep in the spotted sparrow’s throat rests the world’s tiniest shovel and hard hat and headlamp, already on, already on, waiting for you, waiting for you to begin digging all the way to China, or India, it doesn’t really matter, just away from North America where elms and sparrows are so present, they are *less* than scenery.

Put your ear to the ground every so often, dig to check your progress. When you hear heavy drumbeats, you’ll know you’re getting closer. It will be more dramatic than the movies, your ears will ring from the drumming like the church bells of Notre-Dame. And you know what? The drumming is for you! Everyone knows you are coming, they have washed their finest *salwar kameez* and *saris*, stitched the trailing hems, hunched over hot burners for hours preparing black *dal* and soft *utappam* and *paper dosa* as big as the ships bobbing in the bay. Didn’t you realize? You made it. You are as far south as you can go, in the bubbling mess of south India, the southernmost point, Kanyakumari, where the three seas meet

The shore is rocky, made of small stones that resemble rice, the staple of the south. They catch between your toes, because “barefoot inside, ego outside” is the sign (written or unwritten) on everyone’s doorway but this has come to mean barefoot outside barefoot inside, no ego anywhere, you leave it in some non-space, the same place where you keep all your souls and all your sorrows, where the river drains behind your dilapidated house.

Lal Bahadur Shastri Street, or Rue de Bussy

In French, *un plan* is a map!
When I'm with the boys, we don't need a plan or a map.
We just go to the bus station, shout the name
of the most interesting-sounding place,
 (Kodaikanal, Kodaikanal, *Kodaikana!*)
and someone herds us onto a bus.

A new way of reading things—backwards—toes become eyes, watching everything
 from the ground up—forwards and backwards nonsense.

The boys trace maps on my palm, to show me where we're going.
My sense of direction is still terrible.
 Here, we want to get down here!
Here, you get down from the bus, not *off* the bus.

The usual cars/cattle/buses/motorbikes/bicycles/trucks
zoom by, fastfastfast, a blur, and we stay rooted to the ground.
I'm not nervous anymore, but I cannot stop picking at my skin,
or picking up fruit, turning them overandover, feeling for ripeness,
now I'm plucking at the air, pulling the strings of a sitar,
trying to make my song make sense.
 My song is something about myself
 and my Americanness and my woman-ness but it's drowning in the din.

We separate—I can't hear the boys from across the street,
over all the racket, they are gesturing to I don't know where,
all the vehicles honking, the crows barking, the goats mewing.
My song is trying to be louder than theirs—but can you hear it?
 I hardly can—I see my mouth moving but—

I am the only one learning to speak
Tamil—the boys barely know *nundri*, thank you, which is too formal anyway—
 we just bobble our heads and smile and that is enough.

To survive, I laugh as hard as I can, until I piss my pants and split my sides,
until I bend over, halved, expelling air: *insanity* or *humor*.
If I didn't laugh, if all of this became normal—
the shoulder-covering and slow-talking and straight-ahead-looking,

all trying to minimize what is so clearly my face, skin, paleness, Westernness—

if I didn't laugh—I'd end up laughing anyway, so loud that I could be heard
along Adam's Bridge and the Sethusamudram,
the sea that separates India from Sri Lanka, my mouth
wide open because I'd finally given up on keeping it closed.

Experiment involving the body

We are a hot mess of cardamom and tamarind,
wrapped in a banana leaf. A leaf, yes!
In south India, all the traditional food—
uttapam and *idli* and *dosa* and *thali*—
is made from rice.

You tell me about traditional Danish food—
the only thing you have
is an open-faced sandwich,
dark brown bread smeared with butter,
stacked high: capers / peppers / salamis / olives.

The most traditional Danish face is yours.
I know this, even though I'd never met a Dane
before tonight, never studied anyone's face
so closely as if to memorize it.

I used to be blind, stumbling through the days,
hands outstretched in front of me, reaching for the next.
But now! If I had to map your freckles, eyelashes, chin—
I could do it, perfectly. Test me. I won't blink once.
Disappear for a few days and when you come back,
if you come back, I will have drawn your face a thousand times,
covering sheets of paper and chalkboards and sidewalks and brick walls—

// // //

We taste like a million billion trillion degrees.
You laugh the Danish river. We can only sleep
on the roof / attempt to sleep.

The mosquitos tell us to give up while the stars
hold their last meeting of the night. We ignore everyone.
We wait for the sun's glow to warm us—

I'm only obsessed with things I can touch, not feel—
or things that can touch me—the sun's warmth,

your long feet, pushing against my shins
as we grasp each other's arms, make a boat
of our bodies, rock back and forth, trying not to fall.

Feel involves the heart, a dangerous game.
Touch? That's something for the extremities,
those outer layers of skin and limbs.

All of your skin makes me wish there was another word
for smooth. In Danish, you would say *blød*. Soft-smooth.
Now I understand why people learn other languages—
we want more than one way to say the same thing.
Our mother tongue, limiting. There is only
so much nuance you can pack into one alphabet.

You fold me around you while the crickets play
their background music. Of course, words lose
their meaning. We just rub our faces together,
cheek to forehead to chin to cheek, trying to feel
our way around, transmitting the night away.

We tire of the roof's gravel—make our way
to the beach across the ECR. The fishermen
squat in exact intervals along the sandy stretch.
No one is swimming, so of course we do—
wade in with all our clothes, let the warmth
buoy us. You hold my hand, my thigh, my hip,
under the water, touch my forehead above it,
anointing me with your touch.

The Saint

James, grow out your beard! Age yourself.

The day you got to India, you started living like an outlaw.
More so each day.

Don't worry—we were all running from the same things.
You're the youngest of the gang, rambling through
the countryside on trains—never buses, because
you can't jump out of those as easily.

Your first drink, your first gun, your first dance.

Jitterbugging / lindyhopping on the roof—we all join you.
Cab Calloway belts the background, a red horn becomes
your face // high-hat marks the time.

You lose track of the hour.

We are living in stone, you / I / the boys. A stone country,
where a blink is a century and by that time, we've forgotten
what we were looking at in the first place.

Stone? Because everything was formed years ago
and never moves.

We are living in sand and grit.
We are too pale for this country—
everyone stares at us, swiveling their necks
like owls to follow us down the street, the length of the city.
We try to let the sun darken us, but we are always covered—
long-sleeves, long pants, long dresses, anything to cover up.

Illusions! Ha.

Here, they want their skin to be lighter. Get it?
They rub mysterious white and yellow powders
on their faces, trying for something just out of reach.
Paleness = wealth! Happiness! Prosperity!

I know, I know. You want so many things—
all the hands in the world aren't enough to hold everything.

James, are you ready to cross the border?
Come on, crouch in the car's trunk.
We barely make it without drowning in the humidity.
You want so many things—all our hands
aren't even big enough to hold all of them.

Elliot Suits

after Zachary Schomburg

we crash the pandas' party
in our panda suits

we don't want to scare them
too much //
don't want them to get used
to our humanness

or maybe //
we crash the whales' party
in our whale suits

either way //
we lumber around in caves
of fur and papier-mâché

Elliot is going to turn it up!
he chants into my mouth /
the only opening
in the whole suit

he turns it up
side down
music / us /
lawn flamingos /
patio chairs

what's up what's up /
he asks every other
minute /

tomorrow, I go to Sarajevo
/ I shout into his mouth /

his warning / go with a guy /
no, better / go with two guys.
two big guys //

pausepause

I'm going alone!

//

we bump / grind
easy to do
in our suits

I feel empty in mine //
scraping my hands
along the cardboard insides

we let the moon /
get the best of us

in the garden
trees covering /
I climb into Elliot's suit

of course //
we don't touch

according to Elliot //
he knows this emptiness /
this familiarity / this not-touching /
this promise / this closeness /
this narrowing space between us

Mirisa, Sri Lanka // The Laccadive Sea

Out comes my whale song across gray waves—
come back to me / let me come back to you

if you will come back, *if* I will come back, *if* I will even
stay in the first place—

Leah and Rebecca next to me, fling their songs too.

We're incredibly biblical, the first women—
nearly naked, letting our few clothes weigh us down.

The moon, of course—

We squint for their hunched backs on the horizon.
This is their last trip of the year—

I finally hear them, as I'm racing Shane to the largest rock
a castle at the beach's end—

we follow our roles, scripted

he lets me win but barely

I'm gasping—

in the spirit of the fight, he pushes me down, but
I'm the one who opens my knees first, butterflying
them, hooking my ankles under his—

he lowers himself, *chaturanga dandasana*, his heart
inches from mine

I spit warm *arrack* into the ocean
from unopened flowers of the coconut palm

Rebecca and Leah and I wait in the water
upturned palms, floating on our arched
backs, *setu bandha sarvangasana*

ready for the whales to slide beneath us

lifting us home

Sam says

We will move to Spain
live in a cave
forget about who we used to be
who we once knew

I don't ask
why Spain
why a cave

We're already
in the cave
setting up camp
unfolding
my prayer flags
leaving behind
our cigarettes
the work
the weight

Sam brings nothing
but stacks of books
of all the poetry
she's never
had time
to read

We muse
at the unfamiliar
ground, finger
the sand drifting in
so unlike our past
of pavement and metal

Sam, do you remember
stealing the Hollywood sign?
Can you believe we climbed
Machu Picchu? Got high at the top?
Us! them!
Molly!
Eli!

When the light gets low
which is always
we dance our animal dance
of victory
of escape
Sam in her leggings
me in my parachute
swinging each other
around in the darkness

Poem for the economy

I'm just occupying myself right now /
that's about all I can handle right now /
my heart nesting in my chest /
my hips in line with my shoulders

everything in its place
right now, shoulders down
down the back, feet rolling around my ankles
neck cracking like street's ice this morning

If there was a bigger word for worried
I would use it / winter's coming
hibernate? I'm working on building
up my body fat / and a nice hole in the ground / warmth!

//

Right now / to make money,
I set up 100 phones and 10 radios
in my apartment.
Automatically, like a great symphonic
choir, all the phones call all the radios
each day, trying to win cash prizes.

Right now / I lay inside white plastic tubes /
being blasted with radiation / anything to
advance medicine / advance cash-flow.

Right now / I read over 4,000 e-mails /
labels them as offensive for sex / swear /
my eyes fall out in exhaustion.

//

This is our time / our call to arms /
to legs / to feet / to stomping in prayer /
or better yet, change / like we used to say.
We will take back our bodies / our earth /
occupying all we can wrap our hands around—

My Chorus

The last train car /
the plastic window /
a hand that's not my own.

//

Come back to me /
let me come back to you!

If you will come back /
If I will come back /
If I will even stay
 long enough in the first place
 for it to be called staying.

//

Blank postcards /
scattered across your bed /
around your curled, familiar body.

Five year plan

After I sailed around the world—
twice—
and I settled into America's foreign
flatlands, wanting some stillness
after all sea's rocking.

Amber grain hand-waving / shining corn
The movement made me more
nauseous than the sea itself ever did—

So I gave up what I never had /
Scrambling towards the hills of Colorado,
where I never really wanted to go /
tricked myself into new likes / loves /
manufactured destinations / determinations.

Two fast days / I learned how to ski.
After three / I was cruising down black diamonds.
The most snow I ever saw /
I taught the elderly, the toddlers
how to careen down a mountain's face /
down the steepest part of its nose.

Five days / months / years
the white / the repetition of
people / lifts / days /
will make me run

I will find the nearest bicycle shop / buy them all /
pedal down the Pan-American highway.
I will be red/white/blue, hair whipping
out behind me. A stream of Tibetan prayer
flags / unfurls from my belt loops.

Pedal / pedal / pedal / will / will / will

Guiria, Venezuela / some kind of end /
South? Here, my legs will fall
off from the distance / effort.

Broken Spanish / the nearest vegetable stand /3

My pocket / needle / thread / resilience /
I can / will sew them back on, hop / skip / jump
everything is finefinefine.

On the go again / practicing homelessness /
busking in cities that'll have me /
heart open on the pavement / coins drop in /
my mouth stretched wide in my future song /
a tune we all know / children clap along /
I grab their parents' hands / make them dance
with me, against me / spinning against the clock /
the real world / I make up / different words /
every time / in all the languages I am picking up /
packing up / every time I do / I lose something /
by the end, I'll just have this thin dress / the years /
stretching long in front of me—

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קורסי, חורבות כנסייה ביזנטית לחוף ים כנרת.
Gergesa (Kursi) — Remains of ancient Byzantine Church on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Site of the healing of the possessed man, and of the stampede of swine who drowned in the sea.

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Notes

“Three versions of leaving”, “three maps of the west coast”, and “The trouble with desire and its siblings” are all after James Galvin’s “Three Sonnets.” The intention is to read the poem three ways—from right to left on each line, and then each column by itself.

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