

WHAT YOU SAY IF ONLY YOU COULD

by

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ABSTRACT

This collection of poetry can best be described as a textual triptych with each “panel” bearing a tonal quality that marks it from the others. Because so many of these poems throughout the collection share phrasal qualities and a common lexicon, the division between sections warrants merely a blank page—a visual rest or moment of silence.

The first one-third (or panel) of the collection is front-loaded with *Partial History*, which introduces the reader to rapid shifts of form, voice, and perspective. It also gives the reader a sense of the thematic concerns of the collection: the disenfranchised, the language of the social (work) world versus and including the language of art. The following poems move into the particular world of visual art as it rests against the natural world—in this case, a natural world that is often extreme.

The center panel of his textual triptych is more concerned with the ways in which intimate connections are made (or missed) and the position of the woman (as actor/speaker rather than—or perhaps in addition to—subject) becomes a central concern. These poems, as a unit, feel most like they are willing to *look* directly at the reader and engage language as one form of intimate connection.

Finally, panel three becomes the “dark night of the soul” of this collection. This segment is aware of the heavy-handedness of its despair and the self-consciousness of the post-modern sufferer, but the crux of the section lies in psychic suffering. The poem, *Wind Up World*, revisits the language of social work/psychiatry/psychology and the disconnect between that lens and the eye of visual art.

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OYSTERS ON THE HALF SHELL

everything is known to that cruel season
the city windows aren't streaked in rain
the arches of her feet live on the tough
petals of the arches in front of summer
exposed

PARTIAL HISTORY

circa 2000. this appears to be an amateur photograph entitled Rachel and Mandy? Under shade... this is what is important: under shade. You are. Your gangly child body like loose strings, your mouth—mum, and that's all we know from you. What's to be learned from your bird nose? Your friend's legs and hand are on the screen, but that's incidental. I don't even know you. I don't even know you. I've hardly known.

It is suggested that this child, once she is born, be removed from her mother's custody.

*Rarely or none
of the time. A little
of the time. Some
of the time. A good
part of the time. Most
or all of
the time.*

**Appearance: Neat or dirty? Unkempt? Appropriate or bizarre attire?
Extraocular activity?**

7-11 midnight a back-aching silver patterns lick eye-lights baby, oh, *my own baby!*
A little or none of the rarely part of the most often barely rarely none of the best of the hot time
I wait for them to come home, for lies, for candy lips, for ascent into brisk air, for
splitting bodies

I feel that a jealous soft sock. I feel that when jealous, I soft talk.

I feel powerless to do anything about my life. 1 2 3 4 5

Client Q, a tall blonde girl, aged 16. Chief complaint: "I want to live with my family and I'm not allowed to because of something my dad did 12 years ago. It's very unfair." Presenting

problem: Client is agitated, reports feelings of sadness and anger. Also reports disturbed sleep, “I dream that birds keep flying into the glass of my window. They never stop and I hear their bodies slamming against it over and over”. Extensive Hx of childhood sexual abuse by father of sisters. Q denies any abuse by father. No signs of psychosis.

It flickered through the snow screen, blindly it forsook her at the doorway

For once, the sun is directly overhead.

Whoever called this *Sex Work* saw peripherally

the tiny woman named The Virgin Sex Therapist who called

out: (no, screamed) don'tstopdon'tstopdon'tstop until

he finally had to. For once the sun is directly

overhead; desire must be framework, slips of shadows

escaping from the edges of our bodies. Rachel, dear

one, I am all your mother-cliches, all your bishops, and fairy godmothers—

half pleasure-concerned, half erasure. Your lost body

mimicking Don't Stop, your lost lipstick, melted now—

Finally the sun, finally you direct yourself into traffic,

Rachel. Whoever calls you is a liar. You blur over macadam,

transparencies of you sliding rapid-fire along

until you disappear. In a keyless vault

you might find—but why talk about locked things?

Pleasure, child: neighbor of fear, a partner of sorrow,

the long wicked touch at your naked side—a touch so precarious

you scream to make it stay. But you have already left into midday.

I haven't told you yet: your baby will fracture,
blow you out into. Everything.

4

An uncertain restfulness, the
walls of her thicken
around the idea of her clever
pocket. She feels him
and does not.
They lie nose to nose, tip
of feet to tip, hamstrings tight
on top of one another,
the heater groans.
The faithless have slipped
out the window. The edge of evening sighs
over the gnarled sofa; it is snowing. His whispers
burden,
lockbox, burden, sick crescent, no burden
sail to the ceiling,
dissolve

Urgency.
Sleeping away the
answer, settled by a cairn,
wind-protected in scrub; the world refuses
to accommodate relief. As she's sleeping--
through New Hampshire bonfires,
licking pickle juice
in petunia beds,
a minefield of surprise parties during which
she sees his footprints
leaving through
the woods, her own heavy throat
in the dream, in the dream she
knows she is
in a dream. Nothing could ever prepare
her for waking on this plateau,
under her
a jigsaw of hungry mesas.
Wishing this snow
was the first she'd ever seen.
When his body, blue, olive, sandy,
emerges whole from the canyon
the fact of it overwhelms,
though she knew it would happen
all along. May you

find satisfaction that does not hurt. Love, as we know it, a night with sleeping and snuffling beside us. Surgery, as we know it, our cold blue blood. Faith, we know it, the animals which are certain to meet us at the door, or eat seed from our feeders. Waking to vote in the era of contentment in our lives. Rolling over and finding desire's nubby fangs, a loss, an aching nipple, a dead infant. A state of emergency and bliss-- your incompatible teeth. You would be wise to make your home well; hanging 9 times 9 times 9 of anything might protect yours. In police photographs she pretended to examine the cloud-like bruises; she saw a fleck of her own face. In what is revolting, compelling, the patternless ruddy purple of ritual cruelty, she can find herself. With slitted eyes, tangled hairs, the other reasons we come together.

I feel that the future looks bright for me. 1 2 3 4 5

A raccoon: the dog
calls us *under siege*. What is this
warm rain?

In the whiteness
of doorway; tiny women with
fetuses tucked under their ribcages,
trip over long pants.
Madam's home for teenage whores.
Rustlings like softened tambourines
and the smell of rotting cantaloupes.
Babies urinate. Then the mother
in a t-shirt with a sparkly unicorn turns
to watch Wile E. Coyote almost
get the roadrunner. On her side,
the globe of fetus juts and hardens;
she inhales. Wee valentines, these
little women, bones impossible to cover with the fabric
of their trailing pants; they pour Rice Chex.
Cover with cream.

untitled circa 1930's or 1940's gelatin silver 5670 when one sentimentality is traded for another. an accidental. though their thighs, calves, shoulders. deliberate, racing static. even his knee pokes into her soft side, even her left leg sleeps, even their toes

It is apparent that Mr. And Mrs. X are reluctant to take responsibility for their daughter's behaviors. Not only do they adamantly deny sexual misconduct, they do not acknowledge that their lack of boundaries, empathy, structure, and social skills have contributed to their daughter's delinquent behavior.

Meth. the spire of the Cathedral of the Madeleine in August lightning's light.
 Heart-heat under their t-shirts, the sticky Mustang seat. Coke.
 Speed. Detention's bristly required underpants. Crack,
 white eyeliner, white lipstick, white eye shadow. And acid. *I dream every
 night that he is
 born dead. Seven sisters laughing*

At what age were you first sexually molested?

*"And you maintain the illusion that you're an honest woman."
 "Absolutely."*

*"You're trembling. Are you ill?"
 "I'm excited."*

*"Do I look horrible?"
 "We'll pour some whiskey down you."*

1/23/00 9:35am (individual counseling) R's mother refused to allow her to see her father. Mother stated that R. must abort the baby or move to Texas. Mother seemed agitated. This counselor recommended a meeting with DCFS caseworker, R, and residential counselors. Psych evaluation required as per CYS 2/3/00.

-----SH, counselor

untitled circa 1950 gelatin silver 45041 in case you couldn't see, my 2 fingers are in her pussy. do you see the close-up in the upper left-hand corner? you will not notice the cloth below her dressing gown, its curlicues are like vines with suction grabbers. you won't see my garden boots, the mud, the expressionless face, the uncomfortable tilt, the open paper shade. her pussy is magical; I say it is. That I can reach it from here.

Smiles are free so don't save them!

Ecstatic smells, thrilled
 wet night; no stomach
 should pain no body.

I didn't know what I'd actually do once
 I was in the bathroom with the test. Mandy
 watched all doors and I just peed right on the thing.
 I lost the directions when I stole it.
 We didn't even know what meant positive.
 When I saw two crossed lines, I didn't even know.
 When she said she thought
 It meant YES, I think I just cried.
 And then I told Angel's parents.

July's fish in a glass globe
 Fourteen poplars whining to the sky
 A partial opening of the earth

I'm not shitting you. I was a virgin when I got pregnant.

When she found out I had been raped
 and was going to have a baby, she gave me 2 dollars
 and a ticket to Moab. She said that I was now
his problem.

*untitled circa 1900 gelatin silver 2843 la lone a l
 metre (sic) what is the nature of our memories of
 love (gilded frames, stained blankets wrapped
 around a series of us click click click) a revisionist
 history of splay & cock jetting toward the what?
 my sweet, my own Angel, my Leese, my series of
 numbers scripted so. lower right corner, shuttered
 arabesques. numbers are as beautiful as the
 genitals displayed.*

Have you ever committed a crime? Violence? Drugs? When did you first use Meth? How long? How much?

She points to St. Mark's: when my skull was fractured
 I was there. When my twins were born, I was there.
 She points to a dogwood tree.

I feel that others have more fun than I do. 1 2 3 4 5

Blond hair acts like streamers when she walks down the street
Anybody could be shocked at a sight like that

I feel that rabbits.

This was evident during a parent night at which Mrs. X began sharing detailed information about her personal history of abuse in addition to a detailed account of Q's history of sexual abuse. Evident during these times, Mrs. X displayed not only a lack of boundaries but also a lack of empathy for her daughter's victimizations. Thus it appears that Mrs. X. invalidates the seriousness of Q's trauma and how it has affected her.

I feel that close to a lightbulb when violets an extra burnt feather.

Oh, look a—
I feel my naked eyes.

Their building bends under fog noises
(other buildings around them do too), below quiet veils
blowing in from the lake. She's missed the throbbing
of trains lately, missed it
entirely (though others have heard)—an echo
of what was summers before.

Sleeves of kimonos collect, flap,
and then another something flies under her eyelids:
crackling steam or small explosions of fiberglass—everything of her spills
over with these flashes before sleep, parachuting
right over his shoulders, neck, head...
—*A forest shudders in your hair*—
Of course! His pointy horns, hairs gone cleverly suspended
under stars. Under her window, under air
framed in whitish space, not serene;
his defiant form.

When color seeped, first through snowy
film, into their photographs, he was Enchanted. Not by the blond
light over her nipples, or the newly shaved pricks of hair like morning frost
between her legs; but he was all shudder
at the *movement*.

Across the Polaroid square—first in her hands
then in his (over his left shoulder
the Winter Circle, through the glass) weak pinks
and grays ascend to the surface
of the square.
Her nakedness, and the circle of stars:

available, lensed, secretive, a mass of clicks, a prostitute trying on rhinestones.

tidal waves, a picnic, a fire. Footprints, a wet
bloody

sheet, a spire. Their Polaroids. A doorway with a body crumpling
inside of it. The little girls form a ring,
make a web of their hands
on her belly. Their breasts, new and swollen,
bellies a bit slack for their ages, sarcasm and border
gone now for tragedy, their hands
undulate over me; strange tongues
march through the open windows, unedited symphonies
blowing in on warm salty breezes

The park beyond, five ducks

desperately swimming upstream in the fiercest
fastest water. His blanket, half shade, half
sun because one needs warmth this time
of year. It is also possible to think of what has gone—
while still (and even more) celebrating the creases at the edges of his eyes,
a belly which quivers under her fingers, the non-sequitur
of every gesture. Still (lost)

(I hover over these words.

They are missile missives. Do not touch roughly;
Do not explore their insides. While you
are telling me a thing, touching the fringes of my hair
and the crook of my elbow I might see
them, a migrainous sparkle,
this insatiable, abominable desire)

NEST

An open eye, an open eye with a spot in it for comfort. Something which never hears orange footsteps or a paisley pattern. There are many weathers. There is more weather there than here. Weather has a ghost inside of it. It never means that good people are always so. Meaning and weather are not the same thing. Most things should be smaller and so are toes and books and pills. It is most eye-catching to notice the spikes which stop the pigeons from roosting in so sacred places.

AFTER THE LIGHT STOPPED BEING TRANSPARENT

and coagulated into something represented here: blank space blank space blank space. Unless there is light, color isn't. Is only hue. In representation we are more precise and more vague than any painting we have seen before stoppable, reduced to stock, stoppable reduced to a teacup making contact with a hand, stoppable, no, stopped. Click, swipe, daub, stopped. Package of paper squares on the shelf of Grant Square Market. Found them accidentally. Sure is the woman who squatted, leaning back on her hands on the asphalt and pissing for hours. Our headlights turn themselves on her forever. When we returned to the lot, represented: blank space, piss trail, blank space blank space. Packages of squares in my hand.

Claude paints Camille on their bed dying. Camille is dying. Camille is stop action: Claude ceases breathing to watch Camille revolve through the sunlight and rain. Claude watches Camille. Claude gathers his brushes (breath held now for months,) gathers eyeglasses and eases himself into the chair before Camille. Camille is on their bed. Camille is dying. Still dying. Claude hates the garden, Claude hates the subject. He is advanced enough to never see blank space, he has advanced to know only color capital. Their bed is jungled and brilliant with Camille. Camille vibrates. When she dies, he breathes and notices her body shattering into darkness which, impossibly, is only color.

You wish for death nearly as much as you wish for me. Death held in frames, the drug store frames, etchings as normal as any others, the woman's pussy dangling over asphalt, a hair of mine dropping into your giant bowl of broth and scallions, you wish for me to come back as if I were transparent, able to refract--

Spaces: you will die in the street while I am gone. This is sure. This you say sure and certain. You are like no thing I've before Ever seen. This means you are represented. You vibrate, but one movement at a time, swollen and then not, [swelled STOP taut]. Claude tried to stop the inevitable by making those paintings. Stupid Claude.

ATLAS AND GAZETEER

Rise clouds unraveling. Constant
one equals: this. Another rock oxidation in the dead.
Lake, an impotent heart, sweltering. Wind shudders; it's nice.
As cantaloupe—the flesh approaches! The rind from
rock, a whiter Cessna stringing itself. Bad sky wish.
Castanets, were you here. The ceiling's metallic;
have they gone where you go? Green blisters follow.
I wish I was not more. The truth boats rubbing
the seam. Between blue and blue are static corroding irrelevant

LACUNA

With you, you said. I want to sleep on the steps of museums with you. We'd crash in a circle of gurgling pigeons, yards of concrete, one hundred stairs away from Duchamp's "Large Glass".

The Oaxacan sun slices the horizon. You shift your body into a comma of light and back out again. No barricades any way—highway— from our museum. "The 'Large Glass' is a lot better with the breaks, a hundred times better. It's the destiny of things" On the way to exhibition, "The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even" was jarred, shattered, became simply, "The Large Glass." The distance between the sheets of glass is imperceptible and unimportant to most of its visitors.

It's physics of the stripped bride; circles and circles, elegant cracks splaying toward the edge of the glass. Remember the motion of your hand to my mouth? Three fingers, slowly. When I ask, you answer always *you are in the east. I am South.* Your sleeping hand holds a dying beetle and well vodka seeps from your skin.

"I called 'The Bride' a delay in glass." You never wrote it down and maybe I don't remember: *I want to sleep on the steps of museums with you. Fill your arms with yellow flowers.* Dear K, This separation is unbearable. Last night I dreamed about the paper boats *in the park* *Forgetful bones, radio zones*— What rain. Remember? Listen! The symphony has begun *Summer*—

A NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SPECIAL

is happening in a flower pot. The subject hasn't shown itself, is a moving bundle under the soil. The ficus doesn't seem to mind. This might go on for hours. Or maybe it isn't happening at all. Stare long enough at the spectacle and it isn't a spectacle. Yes. The subject has moved a millimeter to the pot's perimeter. This chopstick makes a fine pointer/poker. Scraping away a few particles of soil at a time aids in unearthing the subject. Still, the ficus, stoic.

maybe,

slowly, the summer rains abate, and the desert comes alive again. In shallow puddles, butterflies begin the mating ritual... if they are lucky, these burrowing caterpillars will soon begin their own metamorphosis.

or,

the desert is host to several species of snake which in late autumn begin their short season of dormancy. This young King Snake has found a home in an abandoned tarantula den.

or else,

This is the den of an unidentified dweller. It lives on a porch. Once a skin surface appeared above the soil and it was green. And partly purple. It mostly digs and bobs below the dirt. It keeps its watchers happy. It possibly has entrails, or a heart. Or ribs, or a blue horn on its head. Or maybe no head, and eyes on its back. Without conviction we think: *everything is knowable.*

MAN WITH A HORSE'S HEAD

-Odd Nerdrum oil on canvas, 1993-94

locked up in a can would you like it would you like
looking at it at 10 or under a bath what is it you
like to see a picture or paper when will you like it
to see me at 10 or when a bath prints feet when
would you oh it's severed the head is part of
something which isn't anymore the horse's head

MOTHS IN MONSOON

18 moths ago, the largest one. It flopped in the yard like a bird. It was nearly a bird. Grey stippling on its wings and its wings unfolded halfway. There have been pieces of birds on the ground for a month and a half now. Sometimes near the car, half of a wing. In the flowers, a hummingbird head. The moth was whole and might have been alive, but the dog ran around it and it never flew. The wind should have ruffled its wings; our urgency doesn't make it a bird. The wind shows no rain.

A BEDROOM NEAR THE SKY

hasty salt, no? a bowl or shallow
serving dish, assertion that we live in
evaporation time. logic never proven.
a spoon revealing the leftover spots.
cancerous monkeys, biohazard, why
should we wear rubber gloves. we
know the answer

THE RELATIVE ABSENCE OF HEAT

A delicate bring, you sucrose thing.

A thought to ornament this indoor.

And more—in the park—what snow—

A hotel has a hundred lights;

outdoor lights, delicate and hollow round,

a sweet roll.

One hole,

one hundred lights.

Outdoor, an

ornament wet

when covered in snow.

There're bugs in this joint—

this licked joint, a stripper joint. You like their legs.

Delicate no, delicate under
snow.

The red covers like leg blush, like a reach into a word bag,

candy bag.

Ply the ornament free from its little O,

the attacher piece,

what holds the ornament

to the hook to

the thing.

O, saccharine thing, a tree or a mirrored hotel.

Its eaves cluttered with snow angels done
floated up,

all stuck on their way to heaven,
all gone and all
singing, sinking.

ARE YOU GODDESS MATERIAL?

1. When entering a room of Avon Sales Representatives, you:
 - a. Hack up your leg with a hatchet. Go to the emergency room.
 - b. Call your mother and ask her if she will stop insisting _____, start acting more _____, call your children by their names, not their cousins'.
 - c. Order more lipstick #435 *Sunset Memories*, #456 *Desert Longing*, #462 *Can I Have Just One More Chance*. Order holiday lip balms at discount.

A score of 75-100: Congratulations! You are a motorcar to the heavens. Gather your skirts, girl; you can make pumpkins sprout beneath your feet. Kudos to you and your sense of the enduring need for Hints From Heloise, tapas, and the disposable douche. Use your immortality wisely, lest you descend to running a bake sale and making lengthy complicated speeches to loved ones.

2. If you could pick one phrase that your best friend might use to describe you it would be:
 - a. Pickled, a little aggravated, grousy, and colicky. Has nice tits.
 - b. A beneficiary of a large sum of money.
 - c. A little like pickled eggs in a jar, or a pickle in a bag, a bag with some good salty juice.

A score of 50-75: Half woman/ half royalty. I suspect that you have a lovely face but mangle the back of your head with excessive product. You can feel good for knowing at least 3 shades of MAC lipstick, but should feel awful for calling him last night and sharing your feelings. Advice for you, my friend? Read something glossy with big words.

3. If you were royalty you would wear:
 - a. Cloud skirts, Christmas light bras, mossy shoes, a purse of fruit leather.
 - b. A to-do list with singing Jesus trim topped with gauzy vacuum filter residue. And a hat called "Royal".
 - c. What's in fashion. You can live happily with that. Cerebral? No.

A score of 25-50: Mortal with egg on her face. I'd tell you what to do, but you have a casserole baking and should get back to that.

4. What name sounds prettiest?
 - a. Persephony
 - b. Isisitis Fandango Psoriasis
 - c. Aphrodite

A score of 0-25: Ah, you evil one. Famous historical associates of yours: Betty Ford, Leta (of ...And the Swan), that bitch neighbor who spied on you making out with your boyfriend and told your mom, Ingrid from the Origins counter, Betty Crocker and all her children and grandchildren, Ma Rainey, Lady Godiva, anyone who's ever eaten more than one deviled egg in a sitting, the candidates' wives. Things that you're probably pretty into: ignoring, dissolving, pacifying, and diluting. Why the world could do without you: unnecessary cellulite, we could have things like our collection of cut glass back, my therapist is exhausted, it's time to get some cleaning done around this house.

5. When confronted by your boss with an unreachable deadline, you:
 - a. What? Did I hear you say "retarded"? I have a son who's differently-abled!
 - b. Love is the answer.
 - c. Call your mother and tell her once and for all that you will not put up with _____, will only tolerate attitudes of _____, and expect her to remember your birthday.

A negative score: this means a sort of nirvana, an unexpected break. You have deconstructed, bought the farm, and beat the system. As if. A negative score offends and requires spanking and stilettos. Take my advice, you unholy bitch, keep your mouth shut.

ADVANCED PROFICIENCY EXAMINATION

When you speak you are a _____.
Your voice is a radio between stations: _____ & _____.
Unfortunately, your arm falls by 2 am.
The object is a symbol of itself.
“Large” because you contain _____.
When in fact, summer is indescribable.

Many make the mistake of thinking the drunken beauty
is Ghandi because he is *gently* lecherous. And they suppose
that his generosity, his openness of sighing, will collect
in sweet rain puddles around them until morning.

Last night I dreamed _____ twice.
I was involuntarily committed.
_____ in Russian means six years.
Some people are only funny to children and to _____s.
If you had meant that, I wouldn't find your face So Descriptive.

The tone *six a six a Yukon* you would have
already guessed. And so would *you!* Every
pretty boy I know can follow music like paradise.
The people who know many beautiful
boys eventually become expatriates.

The word “_____” is not used to mean “asylum” anymore.
Even when I know better I still say, “_____”.

ALL NIGHT ARCHITECTURE

My second death: when the last person who knows me dies. Can I remind you & place a peach in too warm a place?

A whisker of bourbon, your indentation. The marionette flowered and crackling; suddenly unclothed, *no it has been left behind—a rushed cantina, a purple thread*, a nameless wants to be a rocket-ship. You are real enough—shot algorithmically into everywhere.

A static storm; hairs up. A pitcher of green glass and a tin can rolls the street down. By the wheels of the city-cars: *hallelujah my savior is here!*

What is like a second pillow & hears in the dark? I am never there or *there*—sitting on the earth's spine being pricked by light.

A squirrel nut, a button, a blender, a faucet. A butter mug, a wrinkle, a swollen vein, a pug. A castle, a *yes*, a bi-plane, a thumbtack. A cantankerous cat.

A magician is careful and bird's necks well with fruit; you put your hands through the architecture. Thunder is gentle and ribboned. A safe place hums around your skin.

As long as we're here, gentle hymns hover all night. A well of blood rummaging in our hearts. Paste crayon drawings on a kitchen wall.

I have hands & feet & a nose that has freckles. I've got an album & a camera & 3 pairs of glasses. I have my own sink & emergency potato chips. I've a possum & a fire extinguisher & twigs from a dream. I have a blanket I use to cover myself from embarrassment.

We try not to drive past the all night drugstore. Yellow lights leave no halo on parked cars. A bliss of paper cranes flutter from the sky. No, it's snow. At this time of night, nobody knows.

BLUE SONNET

you said I couldn't quite possibly
keep up (my red bike pedals so slow
anyhow) and then, "stop everything, row
to the store, buy this/that/theother brie
for our toast"

sans blue bike, sans all of you
with my skeletal basket (dahlias in bloom
pick pick) it is not so very far, room
yet for soppy cheese and even giant blue-
berries for your cake.

I've said this before
(many boats yellow sails float by the window)
"I'll tag along as far as the lip of the shore"
if I'm able that is. always in question.

oh,
lovely boy on bicycle, groceries tend to hover
in my basket. I and all are right behind—further.

WEDDING

except the cracking drying tub why telephone
my hotel toilet enjoys who all cold
every offers bathroom is on the other line
waiting to speak my name who minutiae
me a surrogate moment this is day
yes a languorous telephone lax silent silver
a skirt beside lingers a rotating gold with
drain morning is it now?

GABRIEL LIKE IT'S 1999

In the evenings,
Steph tells me:
Gabriel likes to be stupid.
After cocktails
at Hotel Congress
she turns her silent
movie head, opens
her pores and
sprinkles herself with
something French.

In the (brief, dirty, tequila-
stink) era of big stars
and fishnets, we like
to pleasure others

manually. Excuse me,
I meant *injure* others
vocally. With our digits.
And on the phone
when the monsoons
finally please us the right way,

I sing to Gabriel
and he sings back. We sit
on top of my car and he
lies like a sexy fish, all slippery
and secretive and we tell no
one that when it storms like this
he can't hang up until
I give in.

Gabe and I think we're
the only ones doing it
electrically. We're all
in agreement about the way

to wear this year and
unless we're hot in a dust storm,

he and I are the most
irritating ones—fucking
crazy and he is
the moron. The weed,
the hot hood;
I never get real high
when he blows.

We reach into holes
with our eyes closed;
someone is always overheating.
He is largely not that
stupid. Steph tells him: *Kate*
is a glass of lunatic.
But only in the wee hours.

If we could, we'd pull
the solar system out
of the sky, dip it
in bitters. Eat it, drink it
or smoke it. No one here
cares how to pray;
we're thirsty and
partly cruel
like weather.

In the mornings,
Gabriel tells me that
in our middle age,
we'll have The
Great Affair.
We had no right
to say those
kinds of things.

TIM ROTH IN *RESERVOIR DOGS*

And yet everything contains this body in a blue shirt—
not California, not breezed or sun-crikkled—
why does peachy hair swift across a forehead?

One life is without you, segmented in such a way, bi-polar
as Orange, either bleeding, having bled, or about to bleed

or in a t-shirt, a coffee shop with Ben, reciting the story
you told, have told, are always telling (*me your name*). Against the wall
in sun, his jeans weeping at the knees, my desire thinks

about you: slendered, your voice in 4-track (sing departure—)—
lined with continuous asexual movie reel. Dry around the edges,
your landscape of skin. And he dresses with

the leather jacket in such a fine way I get pimples—the ridges
along his blind belly, I feel them... (silence, uttering silences, the End, is held)
When he is held in the end,
all sweat and stink and everything blood, and his face rises,
is raised, he is about to kiss—

In your halved life: the bleeding, the confession, torture, *tell*
me your name. Too, as Orange, you have a leather coat
and you move from one shirt into another. I am a depraved
creature like all of you; he, Tim Roth, Mr. Orange, you, come

in and out of my all-night veins like poisoning. Retching
followed by a sweet promise. Where the movie
reel ends and I am upright with my mouth open for all of you

the orange Judas, held in southern California sunlight, salt flaking on
every hair *naming*, burning each cracked wave, your soft bellies held
open for gut-shot and tongues. Promise me something that ends

on a beach with your fine hands running—run them
into the sand—or his hair leaning into his eyes correcting the glint

that spills wherever it can, the secret that bounces like
a lightbulb into blood on concrete.

IT IS MY PLEASURE TO WATCH

Between the woman with the blond fringed T and the man with an uncertain moustache: barely the fabric of their jeans, whiskers in clusters, the broad red way to remember his fingers in me, bones sniffed by the boxer, the striations of muscle along the finger lines, because he smelled like clovers in that place, a wonderful carved animal with red and white, a story missing friend Larry and needing him, coils of garden hose cooling under an elm, an in-between kind of weather, his whisperings ragged as etchings and remembered, another silver ring appropriated, underneath a tilted luck-bearing planet, naked grapes, positioned to make moaning, an answer scripted, with a slotted spoon, giving me form of love because I need it, evenings smoking away and dissolving into morning thunderstorms, in 4 months, a plane descends like a petal, you whisper *turn to the man on your right* and I see him cupping a white cockatiel to his throat.

MODERN WARFARE

There are two cars abandoned in a field. One is on fire. Our veins are on fire; the northern lights set our veins on fire; our veins are burning; lit bits of clothing, hems of jackets, the tips of your collar, until the car is slathered in flames; my hair is the way you've always wanted: cinnabar, with sparks all in it; your profile is inclement weather. Silent bombs. A sky decorated with flags so we've washed up in a sandstorm. There are two cars abandoned in a snow squall; in one, the engine is still cooling. The other car is ours. Silent bombs, the brief absence of air crushes our eardrums. Our car hasn't been driven since the late 1960's. We're too young. We were never even born; we've stayed in vivo. Our mothers are free from naming us, from knowing what makes us cry. This is no longer a field in Wisconsin. The tiniest drill bit shaves a hole into an egg, the shimmering uterus of desire, the unapologetic light of December, somewhere the city sidewalks slither; I am a flickering photo, mouthing *the digital age, a psychotropic rage, turn the goddamn page*, my hair, the way you always liked it then, being lifted by pigeons off my shoulders, layers of burnt tulle picked up by the wind. Two planes cross each other, white X. From the movies, planes eject bombs like eggs from the bowel. Someone must have turned the sound off just then.

A COOKING THEME WITH VARIATION

They discuss their displaced discourse.

I've lost my modus operandi! She, declaring, inquires.

Try under the suitcase where I left my last lint collection, he helps, fruitfully.

This is the variation: on the television screen behind them

Pedro urgently invents a stew from cockles and coconut.

The host: Holy cow! Imagine that!

She knows what cockles are;

but you never really knew a thing about Russian film.

Here, let me make love to you.

He pulls at her thigh so hard that dried oranges spring from the table.

Over her head, Pedro slams a butcher knife against the coconut,
creates an invisible breaking point.

The host: Lovely serving bowls!

Sincerity? Or irony? I'm not sure what is wrong with me, he cries.

She springs from fetal to erect, pulls a soft pretzel from her belly and offers.

There is no question as to the kindness of her offers: thigh, baked goods.

Woman, engage! He is henceforth enraged—all her prone positioning.

Friction (furry coconut) to resistance (thigh joint and gristle)

and back again:

The host: I simply love the way the stew nestles in the cute bowl—
what do you think, audience? (cheers!)

As backdrop, Pedro is hammering steaks to penultimate tenderness.

Bits of pink fly into the leftover space.

Having learned something, she tries that approach.

WICHITA BLACKOUT

*How to Make a Wichita
Blackout: Stoli Vanil with a
splash of ginger ale on ice*

Eventually the fields will light on fire;
the people who love will close up--

little flowers.
I will not.

Kansas wilts and scorches. Make you say
that saved a wretch like me.

When you are in
my mouth

I think you are a
lightbulb. I think
about you.

I will not.
My palm across your body
burning or

is it finger prints making
X X X?

The window has six panes.
There are six rectangles across
your body. They

will not.
One round, red barn. We oughtn't
have corners in which demons can hide.

I want this afternoon
like this: *amazing grace.*

the sound how sweet—
tends to go this way:

perfect, white. A square light
against the granary wall.

Prairies are mottled with tree
clumps, pre-fab houses.

Oh profile, your Midwestern
longevity. Your strong teeth,

your hands—flock
and flutter. You sweet and

cream fling. Of last the Kansas
before twilight. It goes like you.

COLLABORATIVE GOODBYE LETTER

plunge plunging plunged YES! the double leash
candy corn: I see the space around you
entering the cluster fuck the shock of the new lucid blonde
beer
crosses, memorials, and travel books
PVC pipe, the golden egg in my throat
I'll trade my ivory
tower for a bite of your Klondike
bar hell on high wheels
I'd like to see your balls against the air:
thin wood pieces of wood with reflectors on them
cattle crossing signs Ingrid Katherine Heim
the fetish is luminous the fetish has a secret
use sail to mean ship
LIQUOUR STORE ICE? MAKE O.J. give a language to grief
silent spring
1068 3rd Ave.
diseased fingers
the kid with bananas who
died, make it all tinier; frosted sausage flossing
light = time, 2nd south 2nd west
ruby the elephant painted with her
trunk. her
paintings sold for thousands. 2nd south 2nd west crumbled in
your tea
A jack-o-lantern with human teeth
Lacan is the devil
still life—
cuttlebone, readymade, 2nd south 2nd west
hijacking, response:
50 shrinks for 50 states
scarlet letters online (online) girl porn online :Japan of departure
that's like a Warner Brothers'
cartoon
vaginal dexterity cloister fuck
Bingo! they're going higher wind is whistling on the barbs, your head's a hammer.
freeze dried sewage
Duchamp is sexy. Oh my god. His nose. your head's a hammer.

RESPONSE

Thus suddenly an object has appeared
A solo, a tangent, a solo, a hand against a man's geometric waist
Infinite triangles made inside of a square, shattered in a plastic cup
which has stolen the world
Of tequila, agave lips split into jest and near-recognition

Feeling like a father's lips, the rather-not of an experience: rescuing plums
From shiver and heat, they
Fall scentless through rest and past toxicity

from me. Everything still exists
In circles, interlocking and containing miniature stars on their rims
Like wineglasses crackled on the edges
for me; but everything is traversed

--Mildly dangerous, but not quite so
If recycled and shown a landscape outside the mouth
Across crackled cheeks, a bareness and a frosty
Lip. Watermelon is "water candy" to certain ape

by an invisible flight and congealed in the direction

Even my hair is sweet and falls to pieces
Over the prone; even sweet is shellacked.

of a new object. The appearance of the other
Oh, he is now a body and has become so full, being
Creates and guarantees light and is the impetus for
Fight, why rained on, why shedding tiny hairs
In unimportant places
in the world corresponds therefore to a congealed sliding
Of the beaches, curdled in the nubbed end of a shell
of the whole universe.

Cuttlebone is in curvature, an
Embarrassed sigh is heard everywhere, we are blissed and—hungry?

WHEN CRISIS BECOMES COMMONPLACE

Here is a space between two glass sleeves filled with water and here is the ballerina angling pink toes across its surface and here is the endless

underneath where occasional sulphurous smoke glides by.

And in between, which is somebody's lucky life, the water rusts, laps against the lips, slides over the mouth.

Who ever said life would be easy?

They are deafeningly silent, those hydrangeas rioting against the chicken wire fence—

Baby, they are.

And again, another chipmunk rolled under a car's tires. Hardly less than.

The infant Isaac feels warm in the arms until he evaporates.

A woman disguised as the paisley liquid under closed eyelids doesn't have to scream *this life is MINE; a blackbird could fall into my cereal and I would STILL surrender. With each doorway I pass through, each newspaper I flip over, each dog's head I scratch, each experience piling unevenly around me, I am still...* she hesitates at the mouth of the mainline and then is swallowed.

Here is the sliver from the thick of the thinnest sliver. Inside that sliver is somebody too.

Isaac of the celluloid is easier to imagine this way. Faceless.

Cozy in mother's arms, bootied feet waving at the camera while an angry farmer with a hungry hound stomps the golden grass toward the cabin.

The ticker posts your options on the skin of the glass:

Tory Donors Advertisements Your O'Neill's Becomes Sick Circus Iced Circumcised

Both choice or no choice might make the world angry.

The Union Pacific's blue line is empty; you are either of the world, or you are wedged inside of it

POSTPARTUM

day: take it apart: not day. Pull the vein of midmorning,
softly, with tweezers: coil on a stainless steel tray.

Glass on your bureau
slices the light, spackling it onto clock face

the day is not long nor scheduled nor marked by light show
what is said about days is not so

any longer had it ever been so
not day, a haunch of animal:
raw, dead, injected.

When not injected or recently pricked: shivering.
You wonder is this the way I can count the time?
Sets between fits,
seismographically insignificant fits, accounting sweat drops,
tick off crumpling fingers.

You feel certainly that you should benefit. Would benefit
from a pill or some: make day=one thing+next thing. Next thing+next
thing+happens+

inject?+traction makes it go+so so so: Day.

Midmorning, you find the sideways sun accommodating, polite. Conversational: you
are prodded, pleasantly, a maybe open orange,
being in a something that feels like a mitten or the sound of *soft palate*
but not the actual, you get a coiled, threaded softly around the fingers like a
reminder, but gentler and lest this turn out to be not so and it is always not
what you want, so yes

Midmorning lies. Like that terrified limb do we know if
its pain is phantom or if it is, what if it is
phantom and ghosts like that of bodies like that
are what you feel and when you

say: this hurts and this hurts and this and this and that. The blanket hurts too,
day-touched, mood-swung, fibrous and receptacled: the sun rising to apex means to

kill. Should you be able to lie naked under this sun, you would be healed is
what you say if only you could

HOW TO MAKE IT VERY TRAGIC

Make everything become enormous in my hands. A thimble will turn into a clay pitcher filled with stones. You must hold it for days while I catch fireflies, no, *crack in half*, no, wash each shell and pebble in the sand-filled sink. From the pitcher you are required to pour my medicines—thin streams, flurries, shades of white—*oyster, butter, peony*—the tiny letters and numbers blurring. Our walls and ceiling will feel welted and raw; we will notice the spilt pot of glue, the blinds shocked shut. We will cry and cry.

DISORDER CLUB

Daily rhetoric: 64 tile total, click on, off, first yellow toothbrush then green. Click on, off, on. Off. The *Café Paraiso* girl won't sleep with anyone

she doesn't love. In search of a new life (anew. in a/new form or manner to) join OUR little club! Some people use frac-

tured syntax to pick their traffic in noses to attract just the right intellectual who will upon

henceforth and so on compose 18 sonatas, homage to the pain of a beautiful sentence stutterer. My friend

Deborah gets a hard-on when dyslexia showers and shaves. *Paraiso* is just nuts. Unfortunately people always make

funny ha-ha at our members when they are YOWL CUNT FUCK Touretting down the street.

Each one of my personalities is a man in a different uniform. A firefighter can come in handy.

A thrice-divorced marriage counselor makes of love a million new (into every life a little alimony must fall) clichés.

And then it is impossible (insert the word *truly*, or *really it is so*) to un/complicate/un/fracture enough to join another club

for field trip. Says some signage: *Join the Not-Afraid-To-Leave-Your-House Club for ice cream social!* Says another public service announcement:

play with neuroses, get burned.

We are a non-profit, non-denominational,

(no shirt no shoes no) optional entrance exam. Luckily, one of them is a traffic cop.

THE POST-POST-ADOLESCENT IN THERAPY: A WORKBOOK

There is an ocean sobbing and when it looks into her yard it sees one static leaf.
When you do anything, I feel Frustrated.

When you make me feel _____, I also feel Thoughtful.
When they hit each other like a purposeful windstorm. A symphony of little sticks against larger sticks, even limbs falling, even trees tipping. She might have hoped the crusty mutt was spared. But never knew the truth. Gutters will fill, spill over, and fill, spill a lake over sun, reckless, floating, weightless. She thinks loss loss loss. He applies salve to his endlessly replenishing skin.

When you _____, I feel Happy.
A maple leaf stopped in mid-air. Do you know how it got that way? He asks her.

I am Confused.
She trips once a day, every day. And a car full of air that has prickles in it. Even her couch has begun to scare her. From the screen door, she can see the corn silk rupturing from the husk. Calling the doctor, call the doctor: chorus. Each note sounding like any other; baseball games on a radio as small as her hand. Researchers say that each day a patient spends in the bathtub makes recovery less likely. Even as she vomits sorrow as thousands of chestnut husks from her gut to her mouth, shimmering movie screens, fluttering sheets, falling squares of tin. Even then. Even when it is typical.

Oh, (Are you safe at home?) he is more beautiful to her than any black storm blowing open the door, wrenching its springs free (it is the filament of spider thread that suspends the leaf). In another life, he threw her to the ground. She _____s him now more than ever.

When you _____, I am Afraid.
It's not three months, two weeks, and four days ago: it's always now. It's two or one tongues, one to ten digits, jaws, ankle joints (four), quadriceps on top of other quadriceps, a water bottle, swirls of hair, two hearts, two spleens, one and a half livers, two palms, four sets of optic nerves. It's when she dreams about his amicable departure as she pushes him out of the window.

I feel _____ when you _____. Your behavior is _____. You are _____.

Disappointed?
Perplexed.
Ecstatic. Curious.

It's when she's decided once and for all; it's when she hasn't decided at all:
being able to _____ is most important to me.

ENVELOPE

Especially guarded and tucked behind an ear. Where the joints fold in, where are the joints which fold in, there is some kind of I don't know a sort of slippery sac covering the brain. This hurts when headaches. What is it hurts. Hurts when what that is sac is stretching and if there is extra wet inside it. A light bulb would always glitter. Glitter would be migraine. Glossy is extraneous. The only thing to fold around a light bulb is another light bulb with cotton inside. Hurts, what. What hurts with cotton inside.

GIRL WITH THE RED ASTERISK

Before pallid cliff faces overlap into the slate wound,
the cave punctures mountain cleft.

There is the ruddy, the brushed, the red-ashed
plateau; she opens

her shirt. Before LOVE KITS in a service station restroom,
before all of the pages flew backwards and a thousand fingertip cuts later,
prior to each bead strung on wire with a note stabbed
in between.

You're beating old time in a rust-hole car; you make
delicate posies with seed beads. You drive until white

and the sound has lost
its heat. In tents, in camps,
when the thunder argues up the sky again,
she opens, her shirt shifts up her cooling
back; at the divet there

between her back's lowest panel and the curled
divide of her ass you can see right through to mountains keening.
Before the sheer faces and sliding through them--
the grey projects -15° and lowering. She tells you

about the star that birthed her. The wounded pucker
that continually tugs through her back. She turns around
in a dressing room off the highway, shows how sad,
a scabbiness that comes and goes.

Before the inflammation, the wound, the threads running
from her belly to the base of her skull, her knuckles,
her shins and toenails. You wish to have been there

with her where she was wound in a beaded cocoon
the most lovely rope tying her through
wet and to desire's cliffs. She murmurs,
Katja. You have no name to give her.

THE STORY OF YOUR LIFE IN THREE MINUTES

We're all making sense of the kingdom.

This is what you're doing now: mute

Shopping for olives and engines,

This is what you're doing now: rocking to sleep in a tugboat
popsicles and planets. It is not night and neither is it

This is what you're doing now: hopeful. Escape hatch, PIZAZZ!
Friday. A screen star,

This is what you're doing now: a vagina desk job
her surprising map of hair; oh glorious

This is what you're doing now: "honey, your style does not become you"
temperature, concubine, mess.

This is what you're doing now: vomiting up the smell of salt air
Do you love our zeitgeist? Wicked orbiting

This is what you're doing now: oh break this, oh break it, break, break, break
wine, mutts?—have we any say? It is neither Friday

This is what you're doing now: please let us out, find quick form, 1040EZ, apart
nor a likeness of the beautiful son.

This is what you're doing now: silenced
Placards saying everything line the freezing fog—

This is what you're doing now: This is what you're doing now
smearred freeways. Perhaps we've found the

Hello, where are you

WIND UP WORLD OF THE NERVOUS TICK

Part 1. Asylum is a City in France

Name: Me

Age: 28

Chief Complaint: "one can be in love with one's best friend.
Right?"

Initial Formulation/Diagnostic Impression

AXIS I: alcohol abuse, social phobia

AXIS II: rule out histrionic personality disorder

AXIS III: n/a

AXIS IV: n/a

AXIS V: GAF 74; patient functioning well

Mason. Her, Mason. I'm camping out on the roof of my building with a bottle of 151, a Polaroid camera, and The Orvis Guide to Fly-fishing. Baltimore and October: chilled clean ; from this vantage point (on back on roof in the industrial area of the city) the rooftops sparkle and the sky is sterile. I run my fingers over the wet spine of my fly rod. My ears are cold. I look like shit in hats. If I'm to be wistful and in complete agony, I should think about something else. Mason has about ten hats I'd love to wear. And her nearly perfect body. I spread my arms and legs and do horizontal jumping jacks on the sleeping bag. I hold the camera up in the air. A picture of the sky. Flip it around, take one of my face.

What do real masons do? Cement-like substance. Maybe tiles. I am tiled? Mason. Made me a social worker. Made, constructed, unleashed. Before her, so many BCBG shoes. I pull the comforter over my head and the zipped-up sleeping bag. 151 isn't meant to be drunk by itself. Wanting is obliteration. Rooftop unrequited-love-drama! Drink 151 with pineapple juice, maybe, or some Kool-Aid. Too tired. Too drunk? Another picture: this time I lift my shirt up and hold the camera overhead. I also take one of the cover of the Orvis book. I climb out of the cocoon and attach the face picture to a hook and cast over the side of the building.

&&&

*Old fir young fir
afternoon indiscriminate*

The weather is usually not so Octoberish in October in Arizona, the square of this large room usually doesn't smell and feel so charcoal. On a large round cushion that used to be for a rattan chair, a woman lies, fetal, both thumbs in her mouth. A screen in the loft above her taps taps taps taps. Beside her, a small puddle of vomit. Around her head is a halo of wet; tears, snot, and more tears. Above her on all the walls, stacked to the 12-foot high ceiling are Sam's paintings in which a very small Sam with a large red and orange swirly head is chasing a tiny black dog which is chasing his mother. Hoarse moans escaping Mason. She presses both fists to her chest and, tilting her head back, finds the painting on the wall. She sees herself when she was a buck-toothed eight chasing her father. They go around and around in a circle over the image of Sam and the dog and his mother. She leans over and vomits on the concrete again. Sam cleans up. Sam answers the phone. Who is dying? Has died. Or floating? Where is her father?

[Once, from a long way away, before they loved each other, before they said it all to each other, Mason asked Sam to send her some art. She liked little squares of canvas with his paint, squares with circles and triangles and images of her hair floating over oceans. But, and, he sent her Polaroids of his large canvases with captions on the white rectangle: "The time Sally and I found a dead pigeon in a shopping cart". Under her pillow, a cache of squares and folded slips

*Mason, I am so full
A heavy and a,
xcvkj.../gtp[, you can see that
I am hum hum... I am working
on a piece with your hair and a hammer
and sparrows lifting a building.
We'll see where it goes... I love you
Desperately. You can stop asking
me why]*

Sam is without decorum. Sam does not know what is expected of him at a time like this. Walking in figure eights, walking on a concrete field, exhales silence. He manages to clean up Mason, but he can't call her mother

or any of her friends. Drops two of her Xanax onto his tongue. Already dropped two Ambien. She will be gone that way for a while. He held her up in the bed so she could pass out without throwing up. He works now and walks now. An expanse of concrete floor under a hovering fan. He works horizontally; as close to the ground as...

Works on the painting which has been spread on tarps for weeks. Fan shadows flash over his pictures; the smell of rare rain floats over the chemicals and heavy odor of the afternoon's suffering. On his hands and knees, Sam places his collection of Greek coins over ovals of black-purple paint. He is tentative and voracious alternately; the next four hours will be a flurry of hastily tossing the coins and picking them up again. Over and over he does this. Finally, he pours yellow paint over the whole canvas. When he leaves later that night he trips over a box addressed to Mason that has been propped against the front door.

11 tiny plastic flies, a poster of Britney Spears, a red t-shirt that reads "I got crabs at Mr. Bill's/ the Pier, Baltimore, MD", olive green sparkly nail polish. A card from Amanda: *M- I miss you, sweet jelly jar. How has it been being an artist's model? Are you famous? Are you naked on all the gallery walls in town? When will you segue into porn? When will you nestle into my belly button and ride around town with me? Nothing to tell from here. Hope all's well. Love you. -A*

Mason, Mason, pick up the phone.

Mason pinches X's into the backs of the plastic flies. Her thumbnail is slipping off the flies and running into her forefinger which is now bleeding big drops onto the gray fuzzy of the bed. A power surge in her abdomen and shooting up her spine. She thinks of how quickly she left her father before she came to live with Sam. He let her go gently while her mother yammered: *foolishness* until she was a mile down the road. Her father, in his ratty University of Virginia t-shirt waving to her from the end of the lane. She crawls off of the cushion and across the canvas still wet and streaked olive, purple, and yellow. Paint and coins stick to her knees. She pounds her fists on the painting until they ache. She lifts herself off the floor and in doing so grabs the tube of purple. She flings it against the wall. She hobbles over to the tool chest in the corner, coins falling from her legs, to dig for a screwdriver. When she has one in hand, she tears into each canvas low enough for her to reach.

Name: Mason Rene Motion

Age: 27

Chief Complaint: "what do you think? My father's fucking dead!"

Initial Formulation/Diagnostic Impression

AXIS I: Bipolar II, atypical, mixed episodes; PTSD

AXIS II: n/a

AXIS III: migraine

AXIS IV: suicide attempt by father, witnessed bus accident at age 12

AXIS V: GAF 27; consistent suicidal ideation

16 Groover Street

A swirl of rainbow sprinkles stick to a spot on the window between the kitchen and living room. It's dim like... it's dim like... it's dim like.... It's dim like...

late afternoon. Unacceptable swirls unacceptable curls, muck-whirls. Missus Motion? Missus Motion? Mom? Mom? Mom? Mom? Renee! Renee! Renee! Pink frosting on a hairy elephant, frosting which rudely sticks to each hair and dries around the follicle. An amplified hatchet screams its way through the flowerbeds

reporting: Accurate
consistent

Arduous and deciduous, 16 Groover Street's trees filter 4:17pm sunlight splashing it over the white brick. If the house really looked like it was on fire, its occupants would appreciate the metaphor. Instead the house seems barely to vibrate, a lightly concealed desire to float just to the left, over the begonias.

Tuesday.

Miranda is certain that many find her beautiful. She has long, thick, *Roasted Chestnut #431* hair which most of her girlfriends envy. Frankly, she'd trade her hair in for a body she could rely on. Sometimes it's killer. Sometimes it just balloons up and she feels like the Michelin Man only less sexy. Today that's hardly the most pressing issue, though it's an issue all the same. She's already been online looking for car rentals to get her to Mason's parents' in Virginia, she's tried calling Mason 3 or 4 times, she's worked a little on her conference paper "*Friends or Enemies: Self-Image in Pre-Adolescent Females after Prolonged Exposure to Particular Television Comedies*" (she knows the title's not right, but it's still a month away), and she's showered off the lingering results of her romp last night with Peter, a professor of English at Johns Hopkins, where she is desperately seeking anything beyond adjunct work in the Department of Social Work. Her mind flip flops between worrying about Mason and worrying about Peter who she told,

"Listen, I want to always be completely honest—shit, was *that* a split infinitive?—I'm seeing other men and I just want to take this thing easy, let's have fun, no worries, right?"

To which he (a little too eagerly, she thought) replied, "of course, doll. I wouldn't want to rush into anything. Shit, am I glad you said that!"

As she thinks this over, she bites the ends of a threaded needle that she pokes through her pant leg's hem all while hunched over the edge of her bed. She fumes about Peter's unwillingness to protest her request. She fumes about her landlord's daughter banging away at the piano while she tries to write in the morning. She wonders how the sex is with Sam and Mason. She wonders how she can come up with "other men" to see. She wonders if Mason thinks about her as much as she thinks about Mason. She wonders if she should pack the black heels for the funeral or the black loafers. She wonders if the dress is too sexy, or the suit too frumpy. She thinks she might be crazy, but she thinks that at least today it's functional-crazy—just enough neurotic to be sweet and useful. She takes a Polaroid of her right hand pulling the needle through the pant leg. When she's done she looks out the window until a dog with an owner being towed behind it strolls by. She shouts out the window:

Helloooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo tiny tiny TINY little DOG!

You are sooooooooo TINY from so high up here!

And then she quickly pulls her head back so the owner can't see her. She's really not sure who she thinks she is.

An entirely unprofessional woman. An entirely unsuitable place. An outfit that is far too dowdy, but is managing to be sexier than anyone else's. She doesn't remember any names. She has taken medication. When he offers her a pink margarita, she accepts. When he offers a shot, she accepts. When his brother passes a pitcher, she pours beer on top of the pink-stained lime in the plastic cup. Very boring. She has her hand on his upper thigh.

Teacher, the note reads, *You better give me an A on my paper Monday. My birthday's Saturday. I'll be hurting Sunday. It's this thing where my friends try to kill me with shots. Ha ha. Hope you'll be kind. –Sparky.*

Jesus Christ, she thinks, I'm getting so old. I'm beyond even thinking this is annoying; I'm bored by it. I wonder why he is telling me this. Why do I give out my e-mail address? Unfortunately, e-mail seems to be allowing my students to confess to thin air their most inane problems.

Sparky—her computer screen says, *If you want me to meet you for a drink, why don't you just ask me?* She clicks Send. She thinks of his presence in class. The first day he came late; his frat boy cap covered blond-tipped black hair. His buff jock body was covered in unremarkable workout gear. She marked him in her mind as a problem. He might be a student who constantly interrupts to ask what he thinks are clever challenging questions but which are really just slowing her lecture down. *How does the signification idea help us to write a good essay?* She thought she was right about him when she caught him rolling his eyes during her lecture on sign, symbol, Roland Barthes, and myth. She doesn't really expect many sociology students to appreciate a little linguistics lesson, anyway. Despite his apparent irritation the first week of class, he settled in, becoming a target of her gentle teasing and wisecracks. He reciprocated; it turns out he was clever at that. But the real distraction in her class was Marshall. She hardly noticed him at first, but once she did, she couldn't stop noticing him. She dreamed about him. She dreamed night after night.

Marshall. Her voice slides down the front of her like a receding tide. He is silent. He slouches in his chair. The classroom slowly expands, becomes the solar system. She slides toward him, her feet moving as if she were walking through fresh snow. She stands in front of him, her fingers touch his upper arms, their cheeks brush, she is leaning over, her legs capture his, she sinks into him, she feels the hardness of his whole body, She spends every night replaying each word exchanged with Marshall. They've become secretive, though they've never touched. Marshall took her to the park one day and told her about his Mormon mission to Portugal. She can't quite accept that he has his religious beliefs; he voted for Ralph Nader, for Christ's sake. Marshall told her about faith and tradition. She decided that she was beginning to understand something profound. And she thought that after so many conversations Marshall would have no choice but to fuck her. Marshall had a body that was made to cover another. Being under Marshall, accepting his full weight, seemed to her like a critical pain.

It's not that she didn't take her job seriously. She did. Every class was painstakingly planned. If it was also designed to evoke a feeling in Marshall, that could have only added to the overall intensity of her teaching. She also knew that sleeping with one of her students was more than inappropriate. She was fairly certain that her game of Monopoly with Marshall last week (at her home) was inappropriate. At least she knew her limits, even if she decided to abandon them.

She was high already. Before she came to the bar she talked on the phone for hours, smoking pot and apologizing over and over for behavior that her friend neither cared about nor condemned. She packed a condom in her purse. She feels for it now. He kisses her neck, sloppily and with teeth. The bar is blurry, his friends a screen of fuzzy faces and muffled chatter. Her arm snakes around the back of his chair. She runs her finger behind his ear tracing the line of stubble to his chin. Her finger is in his mouth. He runs his tongue around it in circles. *You're my teacher.* And she doesn't care much except that she has the distinct impression that what is happening between them could be considered obscene and they should probably move.

Marshall is a weird breed of religious. He's a Midwestern Mormon who just moved east from a brief stint in Utah. He thinks Mormons here are snotty. He thinks his good virgin girlfriend is stupid. He thinks he's smarter than he is. Miranda likes him especially for that. It gives him an air of confidence that bolsters his already stifling appeal.

Sam didn't return to Mason last night. Mason woke in the morning knowing only this: she had 24 hours until she needed to be on a plane to Virginia. She heard Miranda's voice vaguely through the night. She supposed it was Miranda calling, Miranda worrying, and as much as that could quiet the blood rushing through her head, it did. Not much felt like anything. In Mason's head the script like this: MASON WASN'T CERTAIN WHAT TO DO. SHE KNEW SHE NEEDED SOMEONE TO HELP HER. SHE NEEDED

Resuscitation acrylic on particle board, 2000

**aren't you wondering how I am?*

Dermis prickly and stretched too tight

%I figured you'd eventually tell me.

across my bones makes being inside of my

**you don't have to be an asshole.*

Body hurt

%I'm not. How are you?

**I don't....*

maybe one two three four five
six seven eight nine ten eleven
twelve thirteen fourteen fifteen
sixteen seventeen eighteen nineteen
twenty twenty-one pills
twenty-two twenty-three pills

%Well?

Climb, please Climb inside of

**I don't...*

Help, help help help help what.

**I don't know. I don't feel very well.*

Underwater, about desert time.

%What's wrong?

Pixel! Pixel! Pixel! Pixel! Pixel!

**I'm not sure.*

Tagga wapplecky water wheel.

%Well, you have the dinner with your friends tonight. That should be fun.

!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

**it will not! I don't feel well! You KNOW what I'm talking about. I'm confused, I'm just really confused.*

Potluck dinner. Calling all razors.

%Look, I have to go pick Tammy up. I'll call you after practice..

Slammy. A heart curls up shrinky-dink.

**Please. Please, will you just talk to me for two minutes?*

pleasepleasepleasepleasepleasepleaseplease

%Sweetheart, I have to go. Can we talk tonight?

A never time. never times never times later.

**I just don't know if....*

Wide Wake. I will Under WAKE.

%*(sigh)* what?

**I'll make it until then.*

Part 2: Ask The Piano Man If He Takes Requests

Patient: Mason Rene Motion
Age: 27

Medication:

Lithobid 300mg 3X/daily
Effexor XR 150mg 3X/daily
Neurontin 800mg/am 1200mg/pm
Klonopin .5mg 2X/daily

She knows that even pharmacists have opinions about her chemicals. Some days she wants to pull their eyeballs out and fill the cavities with the contents of the little gelatin capsules. Instead she smiles like she has her shit more together than anyone else and hands over a check for \$586.34. Expensive humiliation.

Mason first really noticed Miranda the night she went to Cushing Street Bar and Grill with her boyfriend, Caleb, and Sam who, at the time, was just the guy who painted her. Even though Sam was “just” and Caleb was “not really”, Mason felt overwhelmed by her own sexuality. She knew she was crazy, even admitted it openly (especially at inappropriate small talk moments), but she felt like this drowning, gurgling sensation that was slowly turning her into an undulating octopus right in the bar was OK. Not just OK, but definitely desirable. It seemed secondary that her head felt fuzzed-out and her limbs seemed to be vibrating to music independent of any that she could hear. Caleb sat on one side of her, occasionally pressing his leg against hers like he was working out. Nevertheless, his impeccable muscles made the vaguely rhythmic motion seem sexy. And Sam, to her right (if she’d have noticed), was irritated and throwing sparks of artist arrogance anywhere he could catch an eye. If Mason would have noticed, she’d have seen that everyone at the long table of acquaintances was eyeballing her and noting the ridiculous display of neediness that bringing two men to this casual gathering implied. Well, some of those would call it neediness and said so to each other in the bathroom while applying lipstick. Others would nod and agree but secretly think it’s OK because Mason’s so weird and harmless. Miranda thought it was wicked sexy and ballsy because she, most accurately, thought that Mason was in over her head and didn’t know what the hell she was doing.

request was a legitimate request for cool, and when the lights were off, Caleb would roll over toward her and they'd have something perfunctory. It wasn't really like that at first—probably because Mason thought that Caleb was a potential boyfriend and probably because he didn't. One night they fucked in a car bathed in the red and blue lights of police cars making a drug bust on the corner. Another time he kept her up all night, doing it any way they could in his bathroom. Actually, it was still his and his ex-girlfriend's place; she'd moved out the week before. They also did it on top of the ex-girlfriend's un-built cardboard boxes. And then he started to understand Mason's intentions. And he said the usual things. And so did she. But he kept her cool some nights during that summer.

Sam looked the other way. A few times that summer he asked Mason to model for him in his huge cave-like studio and they'd talk about some things—quietly. The spaces of silence inflated hours of their afternoons together. Really they only said about ten paragraphs in the time they knew each other-- the time before she moved away-- but each little clause, each phrase, each dot or curl of punctuation became swollen and pressed against her body uncomfortably while she held still. Sam's paintings of her were big and blue. She saw the part of the painting that represented her; she looked like a pregnant paisley. She thought it was rude and self-absorbed to look directly at the finished paintings of her, so she snuck peeks when she was sitting. Her favorite was one in which the blue paisley appeared to be rocketing off the canvas while tiny silver wrenches circled around it. Sam always seemed nervous. He smoked and drank beer while he painted. Often, his bare chest would be smeared with paint, while his blonde hair stuck to his wet forehead. As the afternoons crawled on, they both waited anxiously for the monsoons to come in. Mason felt like an oddly naked and late traveler at a train station; Sam simply felt a boot pressing on his chest as he worked faster and faster. When the rain, thunder, and wind finally arrived, Mason would cry. Sam continued on.

Caleb always carries a basketball in his car. Caleb always tips 25%. Caleb always tells women he tips 25%. Caleb always keeps his teeth covered when he smiles. Caleb always tells Mason *you are the kind of woman I want to marry* Caleb always remembers to say “*the kind of*”. Caleb always covets women who are moody and smarter than he. Caleb always plays The Roots as loudly as he can in his tinted-out black Jetta. Caleb always wishes that his 6 year old Honda Accord was really a tinted-out black Jetta. Caleb is always and always and keeps going. Caleb is always pretty on the basketball court. Caleb is always. That’s it: Caleb is always.

It is used to get at the heart of something. Periphery makes a certain amount of sense, especially in matters of sadness. Or maybe those matters are only layer upon layer of the simplest affections. In any case, we have here tedious tangentials. But she cares.

Sam is never nice just to be nice. Sam never mixes the paint on the palette—only on the canvas. Sam never takes a break from being an angry artist. Sam never sees himself as ironic. Sam never eats peanut butter and jelly; he’s allergic. Sam never wants to see Caleb again. Sam never ceases from a language of non-sequiturs. Sam never misses a shower; Sam never lets his studio get too messy. Some men let passions leak out, delicious and sparkly, champagne. Sam never confuses art and life. Sam never means to love Mason. Sam will never tell Mason that he will walk away one day and that will be that. At some point we’ll be able to say: Sam will never see Mason again. Sam will never. He is certainly a disappointment.

16 Groover Street

It occurs to him only briefly that he is a father—and husband. It occurs to him that beyond the well-built house is a forest that is the most beautiful, blinding green he has ever seen. He cries at this. He can't cry at his daughter. She has, necessarily, receded in his mind so that she is standing on some horizon, tiny, waving-- a claymation creature. It is a sweet scene, but nothing that will seize him now. He is ridiculous in his suit. A vase on the table captures him; its cylindrical, heavy weight is the right thing for his eyes to rest upon.

Almost blue it's almost touching it will almost do

Name: Miranda Marie Suavage
Age: 28

Medication: none at this time

*

Accidental puddles. One on the countertop, shaped like an elephant with abnormally short legs. One on, or rather, in, the carpet next to Miranda's sleeping body. Streaks of old, dried rain stripe her walls like uneven icicles. Over her head, the ceiling fan swoops and swoops and swoops and swoops; one of the blades is warped, forcing the fan's trail into a noisy ellipse. Two windows in this room. And outside of the windows, around the frame of one, is a tarantula, her legs spread out like a human hand. And beyond her, the scratchy desert vegetation. And beyond that, the hazy, reticent foothills. Beyond that, a mountain which hasn't failed to astonish every resident of this town for as long as there have been residents of this town. This astonishment is not only an initial surprise and delight.

This astonishment happens daily, causing 877,664 sharp intakes of breath scattered across each 24 hour period. Miranda will not be exempt from this daily routine.

Part 3: On The Windup World of the Nervous Tick

There are three main kinds of psychiatric treatment: psychodynamic psychotherapy, cognitive/behavioral psychotherapy, and medication. In this section, descriptions are provided of each of these, including some information in how each was developed, what the theory and science behind each method is, and which conditions each type of treatment may help. Also explained are modalities that use each of the three main treatment types, like family therapy, group therapy, and hospitalization. It is important to remember that most patients will need aspects of more than one main type of treatment to get the most benefit from psychiatric care. It is very important, however, to understand what the different treatments are so that an individual patient and his or her family can determine if they are necessary and if they are being applied correctly. In the next section, on the illnesses themselves, detailed information about combining different kinds of treatments for specific problems is given. (*The Essential Guide to Mental*

Health, Jack M. Gorman, MD)

“Neil recognizes the terminology ladder that has been installed in his life/family. He, however, lacks the coordination, will, or energy to climb it”

I want to record my own definition of *brain* somewhere but I haven't been given a chance. I know as well as anybody who looks closely at me or at Mason, that the strange flutter of our hands, or our secret rooms with the lights out means that our brains are somehow—infested? Corroded? Tickled with enzymes that belong somewhere else. I succumbed long ago to the business of diagnosis. That's because when a father sees a small girl folded up under her bed who says *I am sad* and *what should I do?* (meaning In This Life, What is MY four-year-old Purpose?) he knows that the tangle of neurons that clustered and expanded in her head in the womb were frayed and cannot, just cannot allow her a life of chasing

balloons. Well, and I know that, I unwittingly provided the bits of DNA that made inevitable paths for her. When she was pregnant with

Sunday-Tuesday I am Neil Motion. Three days ago, I made a noose out of rope left over from tying up our old dog, Fence. I put the noose around my neck and walked around the house with the excess rope dragging behind me. Then I pulled the red velvet chair away from the wall in the living room and centered it

Mason, Renee bought a case of Ball jars, the blue ones. She

claimed that they were a craving, like her cravings for chalk and cheese doodles. She spent hours bent over the sink filled with hot soapy water washing each jar and setting it aside to dry. When she was done, she'd do them all over. I bought her a pair of bright yellow rubber

Under the plant hanger.
I know that this hanger is strong because I installed it myself in a stud seven years ago.

I wish I had known a better way to protect her. Maybe it's the best way I've ever done. Evenings at our tiny alley house, she'd sit on the porch drinking milk over ice cubes out of a jar.

I'm alive and I won't complain about where I am. If anybody deserves to be in this painfully bright room, it's me. Most people would think it's fucked up to say that my family would have it much easier if I had actually died. At least there's some kind of etiquette for talking to families of people who've killed themselves. At least nobody really has to consider the feelings of the guy who's killed himself. Not that I much care, anyway. Don't be fooled; this isn't the apathy of a profoundly depressed person. I just don't want Renee to have this thing stretched in front of her indefinitely—no closure. That's what they'd say--are probably *saying*. I can't get Elvis Costello singing "Shipbuilding" out of my head. Don't worry about teasing the metaphors out of the song. It turns out that there are less connections than one might think in the world. I've abandoned "six degrees of separation". Butterfly theory? Or chaos? Mason brought the album which begins with "Almost Blue" home on vinyl when she was in high school, that's all. My favorite Elvis Costello song is "Almost Blue". As in, not quite indigo, or not quite the inside of a swimming pool. I think we were both thrilled when we found out each's fondness for that song.

-Neil, you have a daughter about Shannon's age, right?

-Uh huh.

-Well, is there anything you want to say about Shannon's belief that her family would be better off without her?

-She may be right.

I'm not unaware that my answer is wrong. God knows I wouldn't want Mason to think this, herself. But pale, blank Shannon looks like she might not be offering anything to her family, anyway. Shannon snuffles, which leads me to believe that she wants very much to be told that her decision was wrong. Shannon wants rescue. Who can blame her? I did too, once. Shannon's luck is that her

family broke her—gave her drugs when she was eleven. Traded her in a heroin deal. I'm in no position to guess about who might want to save this ratty girl. The holes in her are so many that I can't imagine any affection staying in her long enough to make a difference.

-It sounds to me, Neil, like *you're* feeling that your family would be better off without you.

-They would. It doesn't do them a lot of good—me in here and people ogling their situation.

-No, it certainly doesn't. But I would guess that they love you and want you to live.

-Maybe they do. But how many times do we want things that are horrible for us? My family is in love with an idea of how it would be to have a shiny me sailing their sailboat around a peaceful bay. They are in love with a cheating, lying idea.

-That's an interesting image, Neil. Do you want to talk more about what it means to be seen as the captain of a ship?

-No. I have a song in my head. I meant to emphasize the sea—the floating and pleasure. Forget about captain.

My doctors want to make a plan with me. They want to “contract” with me. I am unwilling to play these ridiculous games. I never understood the verbal doctor/patient contract before. Everyone knows that suicidal people aren't to be trusted. But what can I do? I watch an IV drip interminably. I watch the shadows of leaves play over the golden blankets. I watch Renee's beautiful face, strands of her hair, phosphorescent, shivering over her head. It is more than I can bear to refuse Renee her requests to try, try, *try, please try*. Every time Renee arrives, I moan and cry; I feel possessed—crazy. Soon after, in a haze, the warmth of sedatives almost makes me give in. I want to promise to live in this world with its constant late afternoon light and smells. My chest is open and hums with a weird electricity, as if my organs have been wrapped in an electric blanket. But I have been here before; the womb of these moments pass. One is never allowed to remain on sedatives

forever. Now, I can only let Renee try to hold me—her fingers slip part of the way beneath the restraints and I want desperately to save her. And she wants *just, only, more than anything* to save me.

Sometimes I will turn my head and catch a shadow on the corner of a doorway and feel that I can't go one more day. What is it about that particular gray shape on that particular angle of wall and door? I am never answered. I am never answered and constantly harassed when I turn my head and see a group of businessmen signing contracts in a restaurant, a cat skittering into a dumpster, a slab of limestone leaning against a shed, a piece of fingernail on the carpet. For that instant, I see something—who knows what combinations of chemistry and physics align to cause this silent explosion—that is far too heavy for me to carry around. And a moment afterward, I can't remember what it was that made me feel this way. Sometimes I try—I blink, I turn my head, I close my eyes and search for the memory. Gone. And in its place, the unmistakable commandment to leave the world. Or rather, more than a commandment: an exhaustion based on the accumulation of suggestion. I need to get out before I turn my head and see my wife or daughter—a fray on their cuff, an eyelash on a cheek, the dry skin of elbows. It is terrifying to imagine that a bit of them could tell me Leave. Go. Now *this* is too much pain.

**within weeks they'll be
reopening the shipyards and
notifying the next of kin once
again it's all we're skilled in we
will be shipbuilding**

*** *Wednesday morning in Tucson*

(Rescue, 2000 oil and mixed medium on particle board)

Sam is mixing paint. Sam has gathered a collection of mixing spoons and the smaller measuring cups—1/4 C. to 3/4 C. Mason's wreckage is stacked against the far wall—the wall with tiny windows at its top. The pieces of particle board, their strange triangular fragments, a canvas, slashed and rolled up.

% Your father isn't dead.

My father IS dead. My father IS dead. My father hung himself. The plumber found my father.

% Right. And he lived. He was resuscitated. This your mother told you. She told you this.

The board has been colored a gold which makes Mason more edgy. It is almost metallic, but isn't. She has no idea how Sam does that, how Sam manages to color her irritated, how he does it while she's sitting there, her father dead, her father decaying and empty, and Mason, alone.

% Miranda called. She called to see how you are and she told me what happened. Sweetheart, you're not going to a funeral. If you want to go see your parents, fine. But there's no funeral.

There's a funeral. There has to be a funeral. He deserves some respect—he deserves something for what he's done.

And the conversations go this way for most of the afternoon. Yes, no. Yes! No, no, no. No, yes. Purple circles appear on the canvas, and then spackle and then the spoons and finally, at about

6:30, Sam attaches the first measuring cup. Just then, Mason steps out of the large sliding doors of their apartment for the first time in four days. Though the sun is below the lines of the buildings, warmth still rises from the asphalt. Mason passes the corner of the Shrine of Forgiveness. That's what Mason calls this Tucson oddity. It was explained to her that the small, haphazard shrine is meant for derelicts and those who have no hope. The rock bottom ones. There seems to be no official name for it, but the purpose is understood. Mason knows she should stop, but keeps walking. Today she has nothing to offer the small piles of trinkets and photographs. The robotic motions of her wrists catch the attention of only a few passers-by—the ones whose eyes don't linger on her wild curls or her jeans slathered with purple paint. Mason walks. She walks toward the desert—where she thinks the desert might start; though in the barrio, small patches of desert crop up in any un-tended square of ground.

Let's walk to the desert. Let's walk and count every tarantula that passes us by. Each fuzzy parcel hurrying home to its den. And when we pass into the reservation and the wild dogs run through the sage and the sound of the dry crashing rushes into the bodies of the moving, suspended, animate, lifeless. Now look at your feet; they are brown; dirt collects in the creases of your toes. Your flip-flops aren't enough.

almost blue it's almost touching it will almost do

I remember when Mason became officially sick—like me. There's no question that the eruption was imminent; her entire childhood was shadowed by a sort of frustration and sorrow. Not the sort that stopped her from ordinary childhood stuff. I taught her how to ballroom dance and she started a club at school. That made her happy. A lot made her happy. But sometimes she vibrated on the edge of a scary premise: the world is too big, and it hurts and I'll always run into walls of fear that pull my breath right out of me. I never taught her that. I swear forever and after—she had it inside

her. When she was 15 she stopped riding buses. The germs on the poles and handles could kill her.

And they, realistically, could—but the rest of the world takes those risks. Mason just couldn't.

Miranda: She is mine. And yet, I know can't think that way. Who says mine, these days? I believe that I understand her sadness and also her brilliant joy that nobody NOBODY else could ever have with her. I hold her hand and we run through the rain picking oranges from the trees of rich people. And we collect them in a giant black garbage bag that glimmers in the rain. And she is happy in those moments and so am I and when she and I speak, we leave out words, sentences, paragraphs, and I know what to fill in and when. We put whole oranges in the oven and leave it on low for a day and a half. Those beautiful, leathery heads. Light and rattling.

Mason has heard many stories of people dying by cactus. They're stunning stories. A cowboy is thrown by his horse and is impaled by thousands of heavy needles. By the time help arrives, he is dead. Someone has surely killed himself by throwing himself on one of the thicker spears. She imagines the needle, belly high, and what it must be like to fall into it. A convenient weapon for those without other means.

In the desert, one always has an audience. Mason has practiced standing still as a telephone pole and looking at motion. As if everything has been waiting for her eyes, everything suddenly buzzes. The desert shivers just for her.

Let's, for a moment, address selfishness and self-centeredness. Contemptable traits in someone whose job it is to care for other people. Mason has to hold the hand of a child who is being separated from her parents. The child has, on the one hand, visible signs that her mother has burned her back with the edges of a hot skillet. And on the other hand, the child is tucked into bed every night by a mother who truly wards off monsters and large millipedes. Mason takes the child, wailing, into her arms, while the mother screams and sobs. The mother cries for her own mother. There is nothing heroic in any of this. And Mason tells me the stories with a tone so even it might indicate indifference, but I know better. She's very strong for her job—stronger than most state social workers I know. All her reserves go to her work. In her off time, she's a shell.

Part 4: Open Wide

Wednesday. Pieces of the desert begin to sparkle as the lights in western cities click on. Night has already swallowed up the east coast and in many places it is windy.

A canvas piled-on with everything **Sam** finds important: glue, flaps of used canvases, accidental eyelashes or leg hairs, measuring cups and spoons, a phone bill, a pick-up truck, certainly paint, one jujube. The body of this Sam: lying on the concrete floor like a starfish drying. Except his human limbs; they could represent the most usual trait: Imperfection. Legs lacking sculptured curves. Arms--same. Red hair flying off of the head. In the dark, like meteor trails.

In an attempt to make the world lighter, the Oak Hill Psychiatric Hospital never turns off its lights. Consultation rooms with rich, amber air. Cafeteria—a long rectangle of cool ivory. **Neil** floats inside a small box lit by a tiny nightlight. Though he might be asleep, his eyes often open, dart frantically around the room, and close again. Each time this happens, Renee's chest seizes up and she holds her breath. For hours it goes this way until she finally slumps over in the chair, her breathing regular for the first time in nearly 6 days.

Miranda runs along the bay, runs through air thick with fish and salt smells, runs with mouth partially open, runs with cold teeth, runs

It always happens like this for **Mason**. An attempt to get somewhere in particular lands her in an un-place. The fringe of the desert. Far enough away from the city, but in a liminal land of car mufflers, scrub brush, and Jack-in-the-Box wrappers. Dusk is dangerous here.

like hell to get to Mason. She is tired of metaphors like this one. She can't get anywhere but to the next street or the street after. Her chest hurts, her mouth hurts. She already wants her life to be back to normal. She wants for her dear friend to be a dear friend. She wants to swallow, digest, expel any other Thing between them. Finally, she is ready to move about the world without wondering if Mason will be alive in ten minutes or the next day.

When she first moved to Tucson, Mason bought a book about do-it-yourself scorpion extermination. When she finished with that, she bought Snakes, Scorpions, and Other Creepy Desert Dwellers. Geared for 6th-7th graders, the book stayed in Mason's purse for 2 weeks. She wasn't exactly paranoid about venomous critters; she was thrilled by them. She stood over her sink for hours waiting for a scorpion to emerge from the drain. None ever did.

Miranda winds through the streets of Baltimore, going faster and faster until her feet aren't hitting the pavement at all. Across the street, a man walking a Boston terrier turns to watch Miranda run. He notices her strong, long body, her purple running shorts, creasing and releasing with each stride, her chocolatey hair dripping out of a loose bun. He doesn't even notice the three-inch gap between her feet and the sidewalk.

How would she see a scorpion or tarantula if it was in her path? Why didn't she put on shoes with toes? Flashlight?

She is running out of thought. She runs into silver, into pink.

Last light closes out.

Hello? Oh, honey, hi! Are you okay, sweetie? Sure, absolutely. Yes. Just book it and let me know when to pick you up. Uh huh. Okay. He's fine. The abrasions on his neck are healing. You really need to call him. He asks about you. Yes, he's okay. We can talk about it when you get here. It'll be okay. It'll all be okay. I love you.

Baby. Oh, honey. Are you okay? Yeah. Running. I haven't been out of the apartment that much. What are *you* doing? Oh. Are you sober? No, I mean drugs. You are? Is Sam with you? Is that going okay? Yeah, I know. Well, it's hard to... I know. You are? When? Well let me know, because I will drive up too—if you want. Or I could pick you up at BWI and we could drive—I miss you so much. I worry so much. I love you, little juice jar. Honey pot. (laughing) (more laughing) (sniffing) okay. I understand. Go talk to him. Call me later. I love you too.

(long pause) Hello? Honey? Is that you, Mason? Oh hi, sweetie. Oh, it's so good to hear your voice. I'm so sorry about what's going on. I know that right now there's nothing I can say. Are you okay? Tell me, tell me how you are. Have you talked to your doctor? You haven't? please promise me you will. Yes, of course I can listen...

Portrait of My Love Affair, Day One

oil and hair on canvas

Jar With Pickles and Waiting

e-mails and glass on hard drive

My Lover with Her Lover

acrylic heads, a man and a woman, my lover
and more hair, six lightning bolts, twine, a window
and me, on particle board

Gesture, Over and Over

her, her, her, her, her, her, her, her, her,
her, her, her, her, her, her, her, her, her,
her, her, her, her, her, her, her, her, her,
crying.

Hi. Hey, I need a favor. I'm moving. Tomorrow. It's not working out. I can't really explain. No. No, I would never cheat. Well, I didn't. Yeah, I guess. Anyway, She's leaving tomorrow to go visit her parents. Get this: her dad tried to hang himself. No, he's still alive, but he's in a hospital. Yeah, it's really creepy. Of course I feel bad for her, but I really can't deal with her anymore. She's just so hard to understand—she slashed up one of my paintings the other day. I have no idea why. I need a place to stay; that's why I'm calling. I'll put my supplies in storage when I get there. Look, I'll call you tomorrow night when I'm getting close. And hey—thank you so much. You're a life saver.

Mason:
 Dad. Hi. I'm okay. Really, dad, I'm alright. You're the one who's important right now. I know. I know. Yes. I KNOW. But how are you? They do? (laughs) Every morning? Does your piss really change that much from day to day? (laughs) what do they feed you? Oh, that's nasty. You like it? You're so weird. Does mom bring you stuff? She should've brought you turtles. I love those things. You'd probably get better faster if you had turtles. That's all I ate during that first manic episode. I guess that's not such a hot advertisement. (long pause) (the phone is

held away from mouth for a few seconds) Dad, what happened? No, but **this IS** about you. I know I asked for you to listen, but I also need to know what happened to you. I'm not that big a baby. Okay. Fine. I've known for a long time, dad. Just like you said I couldn't hide my sickness from you, you could always tell, I've known too. When I was five. When I was thirteen. **When I was seventeen. I'm not fucking stupid. I'm not fucking stupid. And I don't want to be**

alone I don't mfglnmskf jkla;;;:

Neil:
 Hi, Mason?
 Are you okay?
 No, sweetie, I'm your dad. I need to worry about you. It's not your job to worry about my well-being, it's mine and my doctors. I will worry about you. I'm not too bad. They take piss samples every single morning. Yup. At six am. Because god forbid you sleep through a full bladder (laughs) Oh, it's great, actually. We had Swedish meatballs last night with egg noodles and this really fantastic cranberry

bread. I love it. I think they bring in Amish folk to cook. (laughs) they're not afraid of the crazies – they wear hex signs around their necks. Your mom brought snickerdoodles -- I'm getting fat lying in bed eating all day. You know I don't want to explain that over the phone. If you're thinking it was something in particular, something you or your mom did, it wasn't ever. What goes on in my synapses has nothing to do with you. What I want to do is talk about you.

A Collection of Thursday Events.

& Mason reads 64 Ways to Beat the Blues (gift from office friend), and Archy and Mehitabel on Boeing 767 en route from PHX to BWI. Consumed: 4 Ghiardelli hazlenut truffles, 1 O.J., 1 Klonopin, 1 Ativan, 12 peanuts, 2 fingernails.

& Miranda reads a quote from Martin Luther King aloud, in front of her mirror, dressed in her prom gown (burgundy, lace, off-the-shoulder): "...And I say to you, I have also decided to stick to love. For I know that love is ultimately the only answer to mankind's problems. And I'm going to talk about it everywhere I go." And with a grand sweep of her arms, Miranda turns, picks up her suitcase, and leaves her apartment.

& 10:20am, Mountain Time: The tarantula that is often perched outside Mason's window is dying. A circle of light plays on the wall of its den. Silence bleeds through every fiber of the bristly body. Each strand is still. Each crisp skeletal plate cools.

& 57 miles outside of San Diego, Sam picks up the receiver of a pay phone. He dials the number, waits, and says a few things into the little holes. Hangs up. Faces the phone booth as if in a showdown. But most cowboys don't cry. Sam might not be crying. He wishes they hadn't had sex this morning. He knows that he never really could have said goodbye anyway.

& Hot turkey sandwich. Golden gravy, rich lumpy stuffing. Ahhhhhhhhhhh. Says Neil. He almost says, This is worth living for! But he doesn't want to give Renee false hope. But he means it when he says it to himself. The natural light in the room is, by degrees, harsher than the light Oak Hill gives him. Renee is happy to draw the blinds for him.

& YOU'RE FUCKING CRAZY, Mason screams as she rushes out of the terminal tube and throws herself on Miranda. The prom dress, the huge bouquet of orange Gerber daisies, the poster that says Calling All Nuggets!, and Miranda, gorgeous as hell. This saves me. This saves me. This Saves Me, she tells Miranda and bursts into tears.

& Ordinarily, Renee would never set foot in a store like this. The furniture is far too expensive, far too European, far too different from her family. And yet, she craves these low-slung designs that curve like reclining women and inhibit the sitter from rising. She wants one, and a swan-like matte silver floor lamp. She stands over a beautiful chair in blonde wood upholstered with winter-blue leather. She decides on this. And the lamp. Yesterday, she dragged the red velvet chair to the curb. Then she returned with Neil's hatchet. Today she can hardly move her shoulders. She'll be goddamned if she has to see Neil standing on that chair ever again.

(the trees in the Motion yard look like feather dusters on fire. An out-of-season thunderstorm swells up under the trees spraying lit leaves. a door at the rear of the house, a creaky, floppy, peeling door. the door shudders in the wind, the door shivers. Miranda braces herself against the door, feeling the storm work its way through the stiff, warped screen. the metal of the screen makes a tiny grid on her nose. what there is to see, she thinks. what to taste. Mason wanders the yard. holding a leaf larger than her head)

(against the screen, like a subjective mirror. Mason and Miranda hold their palms against the others. one's hair is streaming, the other's is dappled. M. leans her cheek against the screen. M. presses against the warmth of this beautiful face)

M: and when I finished that cocktail, I could barely see for the flowers on your dress

M: which swirled. Which were around. Your dresses in my closet?

M: under the bridges, at least imagined. Would you?

M: in storms I know much more than you can ever.

M: except I imagine the possibility when and for the dinner, a sweet

M: bowl of sugar peas, and several pillows for consistency.

M: have a

M: thank you I will

M: has it been as as you wished?

M: I am

M: I too, you

M: these to consider: from the window, parades of dogs. these sometimes solve what is. and to

Think, where should I find you?

M: I'm always. You'll know.

(in fits, the trees. the National Weather Service has acknowledged the anomaly. the faintest buzz of the weather radio.

Renee's light shimmers with uncertain electricity. a bowl of white rose heads. a hurricane of dog hair slides under the sofa.

time stretched taffy-like across the home and extending north toward Oak Hill. a taut suspension, a membrane.

PARTIAL PARALYSIS

open up savage immense hope here it is
going together then coming apart
showing everything which I am
surprised we had the guts for backing
down staircases closing eyes in traffic
split into shards