

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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This collection of poems spans a range of content. They pose many questions that consider issues surrounding identity, perception, and the relationship between the self and other. The collection consists of four parts. Parts I and IV explore the self and other by using personal experience and persona. Part II focuses on a single subject to explore what happens to perception under emotional duress, and Part III includes poems about Korea that explore the individual and social forces that are responsible for forming one's identity.

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Mirage

by

Melissa G. Houghton

A THESIS

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APPROVED:

Major Professor, representing Creative Writing

Chair of the Department of English

Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Melissa G. Houghton, Author

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I.

Tulpa

I pined for him, alone in my room,
wondering who he was and where
he came from.
His mother's womb?
Objects of inquiry
dangle like bloated, silver bulbs
of a Christmas tree.
For the moment, he's broken
through several bubbles
of thought before drifting down
the river of our sleeping, he is
both mine and yours, the collective...
This is how he appeared to me: slowly at first,
hangs the shawl on the
shoulders of his young wife, later
he kisses her ring finger gracefully, essentially a sparkling
place, while she keeps her shoulders
stiff, later still, though shielded by her laugh—
her head flops back like a bent tulip, he
shakes her in surprise,
cries out to his maker,
begging me to turn over,
to go back to sleep.

Already A Blurry Lens

Even though the world
calls its love affair with you
quits for the night, I regale
you with a child's tale
about bears and their paranoia.
You roll over on your side,
mumbling something about
doing this more often.

I'm too cold and you're too
warm, so we've spread the sheet
under you and over me. We're
swaddled in blue lilac blossoms.
For a moment, I am but a nose,
transported back to washers and
dryers, spinning strangers' clothing.

The spinning makes me drowsy, or
maybe I am already. My lids resist
closing, but then I picture the burly
owner, arms crossed as she eyes
the bucking coin-ops, like she expects
them to make quick and bumble
out the door. This time they do
in a disgusted knock and clunk.

As I awaken, you roll over again.
This time you're facing me. I'm
studying you now, learning the curve
of your nose, what you look like
when you're relaxed, wondering
which lines will have to do with me.

Calendar

When skin changes color
it's not so black and white
as the picture for November.
How perfect!
A fluffy kitten sleeping with
mat and pillow, clean.
Next to him,
a guinea pig, nervous
about the in-and-out
breathing—*Oh, where is this
relationship going?* he thinks as
he braces himself. *Some eat
guineas like me: people in Guinea.*

So close to the kitten's
fine paw hairs and
retracted claws.
I hear the guinea squeal:
Just take the picture, already.
My eyes wander down
to the 23rd day.
There, in the square,
you've marked
your arrival. Must
have been when
I wasn't looking.

Uncertainty

Is it doubtful
I have seen your face
before? Do I not know
it upon first sight?
To notice the moon,
staring blankly back
is to remember its
purpose. *What is its purpose?*
To think of your broken face,
your hands, their strange
relationship, is to stumble
upon laughter and enter
into time—see how it trudges
through doorways?
Is it a glimpse? Is it miraculous?
Is it intentional? Is it cloaked
in a muddy river?
Certainly not. Do
answers lie in questions?
My how one spins riddles.

Unhinged

Who knew the screen was flawed?
Exposed, an incandescent home,
while skirts and belts fling fast
behind this panel's fleeting shadow,
shadow sick of clinging
 too tightly to generate a rattle.

If my design I'd make
the screen pitch black,
 Pitch *back*, I say
and you would sing pitch green,
We'd breed and channel charge
from our machine. And you,
my dear would grow
 like blackened greens.

We'd curse the worn out
stars with shards of screams, dents
puncturing rusted car doors
opening for mademoiselles...
on nights like these I want
to call loves old and new,
tell them I'll hear what they
don't have to say no more, like

which way blinds turn
to keep eyes out,
which way they'll coil
to avoid the crowd.

It quakes me when I tell you
the reason I call on you:
my headache is a halo,
my heart is a crow.

Homage

You shoved your books
in my lap, luring me in
like you would a reader.

*You should read Seamus Heaney, he's
great, you said, but I heard: you should
read me as I shuffled through his pages.*

Dark words on dry-colored paper.
Material proof
of the depth of your thought:
I caught the metaphor, your breath.

Your bicep showed what
I'd missed in the dark:
hastily scribbled initials
within an aging blue squiggle,
a shape that looked like a heart
inked on your skin with a pen,
but permanent. *What's the 'J' for?*
I asked, knowing full well
it was a past declaration, proof
you had once believed in love
and its promise of eternity.

*Cripes, you said, how did that get there?
Later, I can't slow this down.
you wormed your way in, hey? All we can
do is hold each other. Isn't that a great line?*

How much could I read before reaching the edge
of your pages, feeling the cut and sting a bit?—
Oh, how it nicked
the meat of my heart.

I see how easy it is for old men
to show up in your poems, weeping
too softly for anyone to hear.
Dogs too, their sad eyes, and endings
that mock themselves.

I mocked your long walk home
and its mawkishness when your poems' kind
childish thoughts turned
ashamed and formed an unusual
progression: Fish on a string,
a boy on one knee, and then,
the sprinkler's ministrations, lips pressed
to your heart--still there was darkness, a poem
disappeared, hair in a cavern, an ear pressed
up to the phone, mysterious
places, an unexplained hole.

If I knew you would read this, I'd give you
something to beat out of my poem: a cicada
perhaps, or maybe something to cherish: once
we heard a chirp ring outside your bedroom.
You said,
My cricket, shut up.

You loved what you could not silence.

The Moon an Illusion

Like the moon,
the closer
to the horizon
I sink,
the larger
I seem.

Your observations,
like the phases
of the moon,
spin their
own analogies.

Which I used
against you
in a fake
conversation
turned real
when I wondered,
can I ever
be little?

Not buggish
or wispy...
simply a slight
impression
like the high
day moon,
embedded in orange
skies hovering
just at the tips
of our fingers.

Reflecting On Pierre Bonnard's Bathtub Woman

I put down the earphone,
 Sit on the bench, lean back,
 Make my own caption:
Is she sleeping or dead?

A toe goes first, rippling
 A disturbance in the water,
 A disturbance in this piece
 Despite the pointed toe, the
 Elegant extension.

The thick shades of blue
 Overlap the woman in the tub.
 Too bashful to be delirious,
 She waits for the painter who
 Waits, in his own way, too,
 For the painter.

Bonnard arrives,
 Memories brush aside.
 Candles or citrus soaps
 Make me question if she's relishing
 The effect of the water
 Floating on her body.

Her cool, blue hue extends
 Into the room,
 Awakening his memory
 When he sits down solitary

To paint her in the porcelain tub.

When he sits down solitary,
 Awakening his memory
 Into the room,
 Her cool, blue hue extends,

Floats on her body.
 The effect of the water
 Makes me question if she's relishing
 Candles or citrus soaps.
 Memories brushes aside.
 Bonnard arrives

For the painter
Who, in his own way, too
Waits for him who,
Too bashful to be delirious,
Overlaps the woman in the tub with
The thick shades of blue,

An elegant extension
Despite the pointed toe,
A disturbance in this piece.
A disturbance in the water.
A toe goes first, rippling.

Is she sleeping or dead?
I make my own caption,
Sit on the bench, lean back
As I put down the earphones

II.

What You Try To Do for Yoda

do not try.
do not get distracted.
do not look at the flowers on the path, the tulips that ruminate to themselves.
do not get sick from the blood swallow.
get into it, whether it's devoid
does not belong to your cause.
rugged individual you are.
do not stop, signs outlined in white
are optional.
do not get handcuffed by a cop,
 a feeling, a caress.
even a breeze sparks bereavement.
even an anvil will tickle.
just ask the coyote,
just ask my mother,
just ask yourself,
and just move on
to something else.
we are something
else we are nothing.
 we are in this together
this is a test
this is a good test
life is a test
life is a testament to your goodness.
for goodness sake,
push off with the toe,
don't mosey,
for goodness sake,
you are watching
your life
sashay
away.

Rose Garden

Garnered 'Reason Rags' drone on—

 endear a drear-E end gadense:

earned grades sag

O-ere green roads soar;

a rare saro arose and rang eas-E,

so Son, dare or rage,

rade or rend,

a red dragen's

seareng ear—

dare arnd NE serene

rose gardens near,

darn.

Beetle

You strive, like Achilles when he stripped, to slip serendip-
 itously past a grimy bowl of disease, systematically
 flexing for attention;

my utmost concentration
 produces a suspension, your wonder
 stacked on mine.

The stickiness is swell,
 opens up an odd swarm, the bugs
 assemble before us, trek up chiseled granite stones
 stuck straight into the ground.

We read the journey like Braille, sillily rotate your hip before
 grandma trips looking for you
 bumps up the hill while her hollow knees sink into

the capabilities of the dirt.

Each synchronous cacophony settles
 the gossamer net, a superlative score,

chlorophyll strands ascend airwards, estuaries spring forth. The poem takes off.
 The young keep watch. Over the dull glow of the lanterns,

we hear our feet, would tether their direction to your DNA,
 whisper for the vesper, the moon, and
 your orange rummaging.

Hand-Crafted Blue Cat

It seems you already came and went, but there's a cat statue on my TV.

 Though set precariously on the top left corner,
 pink and yellow stripes and flowers
embellish a smooth, glazed composure,
while below, silver-painted Mardi Gras beads break
from one another on a string strung round you on the set
 serving as a dais.

 My halogen light makes you shine. I am focusing
on you because diamond rings shine too brightly on this truly dull screen.

 You don't believe,
but let me convince in the way I convince myself:

I stole glasses from my old self, a former prescription. We were both sick of seeing.

 The cat is blurry now but clear to some. It has a disease

 I broke into, contracted, and spread. It's hollow now
but not a puppet. This must be your cat statue
 you placed in my hands at the beach.

If a Mouse Gargantuan

It isn't any wonder I'm here now,

when Albuquerque's hand made soaps

adjusted their twisted schedule

for me.

Likely,

the Old Town

took one look at itself

shook its dusty trousers

while whistling a tune

similar to the one

I whisper here.

This is a joke,

and by telling,

no longer funny

So far removed.

How removed was it?

Depends on the eye.

Eye of the storm, tiger, pig, potato.

When one falls shut, another compensates.

Albuquerque looks smaller

in my eye.

Imagination

I dream of a better zoo where I *see* the peacock's pretty blue and green feathers. Maria cuts them off and gives them to me for safe keeping. Maria is a ghost that lives in the attic. When I am sad she tosses Momma's sheet over her head with holes torn open for eyes. I took the blame when Momma got mad for ruining her nice, silk sheets. She is my friend with no eyes who likes to pretend, and sees more than I do. *Your Mommy and Daddy say 'scissors are in the cupboard—Elsa, can't get at them there.'* They're right. I can't get at them. I live in a zoo. There are cages and voices. Voices when I'm trying to get to sleep. My father is the lion and Momma is the bird. They can't get at each other. The bird cannot understand the lion and the lion doesn't speak the bird's language, so their voices get louder and mix up together, but still, dreaming doesn't help me sleep.

Ballerina in a Box

The gold-eyed girl
trembles every now and then;
body wired like a spring
door stop.
Her limbs and torso
wobble rhythmically
together, delicate as ever.
In darkness, she hears the shadows
cast from hands
ticking on the face
of a clock.

A former possession,
she feels half-formed, chiseled
from lachrymose icicles
clinging to roof gutters.
Now frozen, she waits to melt inside.
This is the mantra of a doll:
*Polly Pocket, so hospitable,
has it easy. Polly Pocket,
easily the most hospitable, is
pocketed by easy people.*
It's been years since
Margot's heard the music
twinkle in her ears.

When You're Not

I opened the drawer, slowly, carefully, as if made of crepe paper...
the drawers, my hands, ordinary things inside I knew I'd find, beads

perhaps, bullets too, their shells, but no—I thought—I knew
what came before, before anyone had time to put such things in drawers,

or was it after? In the space of time, I couldn't define what made
before past and after that which mastered us now, here, the present,

where two ordinary drawers, not underwear, drawers within drawers,
tiny cubicles for things, things like beads, flew past a train, my gown,

the one I'd worn to his funeral, only it was a wedding, only I wasn't getting
married...I was swooping down to catch the train, the bouquet, a veil of sorts,

beads...glass...shut...drawers...I couldn't see his eyes. His eyes were
closed not natural, "Un" in fact, the very essence of "Un-ness." He was

birdlike, shriveled, in the casket, not singing...singing if this is a song,
but it's not, or a poem either: why oh why do songs like these have words?

III.

No Innocent Experience

I. Before the West

-Does she have a name?

-Of course.

-Does she know what it is?

-No, not yet.

-I think you should consider it carefully, maybe take her to the oracle.

-No, her name should sound beautiful, and Kim Sunseongnim has no ear.

II. Skip-Rope

My mother's Chinese

My father's Japanese

Look what they

Did to me.

Eyelids lined in

Pen will fix them.

Now stitch up your

Sagging skirt hem.

Take your mother tongue

And bite it.

Now you're one of us,

Don't fight it.

Hey, you Chinese?

Hey, you Japanese?

Betcha 10 dollars

I'll guess what you are.

Chopsticks, Kungfu

Do you do Voodoo?

Did you know we

Dropped a bomb?

I like rice too, you're real nice

My grandpa fought in Vietnam.

I ain't scared, no

You're the one who's

Yellow-bellied.

III. Forever Present

Christmas time, it rolls around, like a long kiss manipulated by mistletoe—soon we'll look for next Christmas straight after New Year's. Bells chink the door as I enter the store and pace up and down the aisles. Santa's chair is over there but no Santa. Next to the chair, a tree! I search the presents under it, one for each employee. This one's for Michael, this Sydney, for Bob from Ericka and Chantel., this gift has no name, it must be mine, or the pickle gift. Be the first to find the pickle; it's hidden in the tree, and you can claim the prize, but this is no meritocracy, I notice warmth like fire. I am back at my home now. There's my stocking, roasting away. It's for me, but what is it? That couldn't be anything but a book. I, like the others, search for the ones with my name.

Body, Let Go

1.

She grabbed my hand with hers,
hoarding me away from my father who I watched watching me.

While waiting, I'd counted the patches of quilt on the wall.
A splotchy kid handprint here, a smiling stick figure there.

The wall spoke of reunification. I tried to hide my feelings
in my story: I'd meet them at the agency. They'd be arriving soon.

Then what would I say and how would I say it? I'd have a translator,
Miss Park, a gentle young lady. I waited for them for what is it again?

Some say an eternity. Some say for less than a nanosecond.
I could say I waited all my life for this, but I didn't know better.

2.

I think of the ones sitting
on the bench, telling us we've scored,
so we know to scream out
the name of our team.

My belly sinks,
not like my mother's
after she squeezed
me out into a poem from
inside this melon-colored building,

not like it did when
the announcer called
my name before the
hometown football game,

and I leapt out,
my legs scissored, struck
a pose in air, and
hit the resilient track.

My first split second fight
with gravity.

I've anchored myself
to this scene:

Back where no one
ever calls me
Kim Mi Ra rather
Muh-Lih-Suh:
this split self
fits me like
the red skirt
with black panels
I loathed to wear.
It rings low
in my ear now.
It requires
a cheer.

The cheer, ringing
silently in my head, is
amplified by
this empty hospital room
where my mother would
have screamed,
pushing out
the life inside,
then waiting
for them to cut
the cord.

3.

The KTX,
reaching speeds
of 200-plus
kilometers
per hour,
carried me
from *Seoul*
to my mother's.

So I said green
mountains fled past.

So I splashed my hands
in the sacred water.
So I looked in the window
and saw my mother.

So what? Who cares?

On the train,
a gauzy rose-colored
skirt made my waist itch,
I sucked in rather
than sighed.

Then I missed my stop,
called my mother, though
she couldn't understand.

So what? Who cares?

A man beside me
bought me sugar donuts
from the cart, held my hand,
helped me get to my mother
in Gumi.

It wasn't until later,
when I relayed this story
to my father, I realized
he was some kind of pervert
who was pleased I'd moved the dough
around with my tongue, letting
the sugar dissolve, and washed
it down with orange juice.

4.

Seoul tower
revolved for the sake
of revolving.
My *omah* and *appah*
pointed to the dark
city's lights below.
They blinked

and twinkled.
Inside the tower,
we spoke over
our evening meal,
country fried
steak with cabbage.
The silverware
surprised me.
The gleam
of metal chopsticks
even more,
so slippery,
I couldn't hold
on to anything
with them.
I let my tears
slide out. It's
what they wanted;
driving to the
tower, my father
gave me 100
dollars and said
he was sorry.
My mother,
winding the
SUV around,
kept getting lost.
I couldn't help
them find their
way, but I could
sing Karaoke, eat
peanuts and drink
Hite, let my mother
feed me *bulgogi*,
buy me new clothes,
dab makeup on me,
and give me more
money still—
perhaps my love
for them was
incremental.

Sightseer

1.

The river washes the coin. The river cleans the earth.
We contaminate the river with our ideas of wishes.

Strolling through the temple, I listen to My Korean co-teacher
insist there's no contradiction between Christ and Buddha.

With him, I bow 50 times. Like Pilates, it's rolling through positions:
on my knees, I lift my head and mimic the others' expressions.

My shoulders and neck ache the next day. Still I give *insa*
to the principal. I bend at the waist and say good morning.

I would blush if someone bowed to me, but both Jesus
and Buddha would approve of the ritual. It is too late for this,

I think, and fall asleep easily on pillows I am used to. Some nights,
before I'm asleep, I see my birth father smoking Marlboros like my

American father used to before he was hypnotized. I thought
hypnotism was too strange, too out-there, for someone like him to try.

He professes himself a hick from the sticks to ease the tension
when I talk about art, and only smokes in his dreams.

2.

Why do I like art like this? Each vision creates a splash
in my imagination; I am like the koi swimming up in search of food.

My friends ask me: did you have a good time at the temple stay?
I didn't. The dry, tired drum only seemed to emphasize my ordinary

appearance. Fifteen minutes of directed meditation in Korean, still
a foreign language. Who can sit and meditate during unfamiliar words?

Then, through my co-teacher's translation, the monk evaded my question
when I asked him the one taboo: why did you become a monk?

I was nearly the only American there and puzzled over random
words from conversation that wouldn't let me forget: *migook saram, creoo?*

We are all one. Very Zen. Very Buddha, Very *Tao-te-Ching*. I see a tree:
spiky blossoms of white paper. I see each person write down a wish

on a strip of white paper and tie it to a branch.

Heat To Cooler Places

1.

Tong or *jigye*? Am I mild
or spicy? Encumbered by
mushrooms or strained and diluted?
Medicinal by nature, I pray, brewing
steadily, hangover soup for your head,
to cool the heat you didn't see
last night from the hint of *Hite* and
Cass oozing from your pores, open
from the night before.

2.

I infuse my heat in the green
tea and ginseng, which your principal
insists is "more healthy." You've been
sick lately, but don't believe everything
you hear. After he pours you bow
to him before the daily lesson, point
at me outside, and say *hey!*, another name
for sun. Later, I glance down through
the windows at you. Your students'
mittened fingers fold tightly into each
other. You smell the gas heaters ask
your students how to turn them up.

Needling Around

Your mind's needle
rests
on a friend's guffaw,
his record is black,
souring and sapping

the amplification
of the room,
deadening, deadening, deadening

it skips,

Now back to your friend
with a laugh:

Cover her mouth in a photograph,
see if the eyes, like children's,
are smiling.

If her eyes are still somber,
send your vibes her way.

Before
free radicals get her.
Before
the record skips again.
Before

she muffles
her ears
with the paisley bandana.

Before
the potter offers you tea from a ceramic cup,
fired the night before.

See his
hands slide
up the smooth grooves
of the clay,
not precise, like the grooves of this record,
yet precise, in the way there are 40 ceramic
cups lined up
on his shelf, clamoring for glaze.

We'll all be cerulean blue.

His words rush out in a whimsy—

*What you accomplish in a night is more
than I ever could in a day.*

Here is the tea, like the soup,
that held your head up on mornings hung over.

Sad lover, you think, but don't say, for he's old,
a non-confrontational mentor.

The cube of ginger
dissolves, leaving the frosting petals
to float,
like the real lotus, alone
on the murky water below.

This is a note to end on.

You set your cups down and peer up

through the beams
and the thatch
at the tips of the stars,
their needles of light kick
dust in your eyes
when, naively, you ask them to play

old songs past

about smiling and meaning,
as if a needle,
could conduct the pour

of this steaming tea.

Yugwons

The apple red beds are made out of plastic,
vibrate low with a coin, and
higher with two. A key turns on the air
conditioner. A blast of sound
without circulation. Use the remote,
dammit. Or open a window-- that's better.
Complimentary used combs and brushes
scatter haphazardly on the dresser
and the wood smells like smoke.
Good thing I'm a wash and go type
of girl. I need a shower. The hair gel's lime
green crust drips from the pump and onto the sink.
You are not my lover, but I'm cheap
and we are students, so we'll sleep together.

By the hour, my thoughts
flip with the television, girls in hiked-up skirts
wearing polar bear masks taunt the real thing in glass.
The bear dives and thumps up against
the side of the glass. I change the channel
quickly. It's a bit static-y but the girl
on the screen doesn't notice. Her orgasm
transcends the language barrier. I feel weird
watching with you in the room, so I shut it off
and wait for the rain to pour, I feel so dirty.
I step into the shower, cleansing with soap
from the generic dispensers. Afterwards, I feel the heat
from the floor rising up through my flimsy cotton
slippers. I come back, hair wrapped up in a bumpy
towel, turban-style. Come, you say, let's check
out the movie rentals and the dildo display cases
down at the front desk. So we do in jest.

Red Day 2004 in Pohang, South Korea

I walk downtown where fireworks fizz
 and fume next to buzzing neon signs.
 This pink-light district agitates
 the driver; the taxi cab grumbles on.
 Vendors and flower pots creep
 up the street, bass notes thump
 asunder, float, d i s s i p a t e ,
 the commotion of throaty voices
 clash with bone china. A shipment
 of blossoms distend red in my eyes: roses
 for retail. The aroma of petals propels me
 skyward; lightning strikes so I must ground
 myself. What is red day? My valentine's?

I try to make sense of the day and its
 importance. Inside my mind, factory workers
 scamper to package the chocolate vessels.
 The festivities take shape, cigarette air mingles above
 their heads. *We've been long overdue for
 a holiday.* The haze of smoke subsides
 and they are choking for a new angle. Some can't
 wait for white day. Smokestacks resembling lean tin legs
 stretch to meet my view, clouding up my brain.

Then, on the street, a woman's dog
 whimpers from inside a purse, the woman snatches
 the plaid fabric and walks toward the coast. I follow her
 gaze and see my confusion in her furrowed brow.

She can barely make it out, the horizon:
 the sky,
 it presses the ocean so.
 She thinks she hears
 a splash,
 a ripple,
 a stone,
 skipping through
 the atmosphere.

Lesson Plan at Young-il High School

While mulling over what more
 I would teach them next since I knew
 nothing of politics, just
 that a government is not
 the same as its people, I passed by the *kymoshil*
 and saw a strange scene:

Supporting sturdy wooden chairs,
 boys, taking stage
 directions, held their breath
 in push-up position under the
 enormous, wooden weight,
 and gazed unsteady,
 aware of their bodies' failing
 contortions.

 For chewing gum in class?
 Yakking on their cell phone?
 I didn't know, but
 I walked quickly past.

 Later that very same day,
 from my computer, I learned
 of a gang rape, in a nearby town.

 60 boys to one girl, surprised
 my co-teacher didn't tell me.
 Instead, I read it in our
 American teacher's list serve,
 with an addendum: *Maybe you could
 talk about it in your class?*

I had just finished the lesson
 on how to give directions.

IV.

Bubbles

All at once, we float
on a moment's notice.

Think of us as blown
opportunities. Billow

out from the ring. The
ring she presses her lips.

Think of us as full
of air inside, navigating

out. Breathe in and eat us.
Breathe out and let

this iridescent bulb
whir, blur, and whir.

I see the air, Mom,
it moves!

His Fingers

were not fingers anymore
 but crooked limbs of limbs,
 shaking the Old Grand's black
 top, propped up so someone
 from the balcony curious enough
 to stop mid-stride could lean
 and see the felt-covered hammers
 swiftly striking their strings.

His impromptu solo's
 notes sparked so quickly
 the students' tired heads
 resting on the sofas
 nodded instinctively along
 to the beat *rapido*.
 No doubt, I would catch him.
 This is what we
 were meant to do. Waltz
 wasn't a dance but a type
 of drink that kept you up
 all night wondering if
 you should buy another
 animal to love.

A well-rehearsed piece without
 the usual startings and stoppings
 occurs when hands no longer try
 to mediate the close relationship
 between staff and note--there is
 no questioning, no *solfeggio*, no
 crescendo or decrescendo, no 3/4
 time, just music.

I knew I couldn't sleep like
 I used to, but here I find myself
 wondering if I had eaten something
 disagreeable. Or perhaps I had gotten
 a chance to contemplate the notes,
 invisible, yet fixing my gaze, so much
 so, that my very attention to detail
 was a kind of sleeping wakefulness.

Parts of a Horse

Wasn't broken in, but
anyway, she picked him,
chose him from the lot,
spoke to him in hushed
tones mimicking the swish
of his tail.

Held his face up close,
imitated his whinny,
braided the mane,
alternately, brushing it out,
and the sensitive spot
near his nose, so soft;
iridescent coat to boot.

This is all she needs
for now.

Pin the Tail on the Donkey

His blue rose is ruined: white
cream emerges from its center.
The children are laughing already.
He doesn't know where to pin it.
Someone knotted a weathered
bandana around his face and he
can't see through it. He's blind
since the game began, carrying
a cardboard tail with yarn for a
tuft. Lick your finger before
the birthday boy sees you swipe
ceremoniously, the frosting, from
the edge. The cake, it makes the
parting gifts croak in cellophane.

Dawn

I started getting strange calls.

A boy addressing me by a name

with an androgynous sound: *Daaaaouwn*,

the voice drawled. Who was Don (?)

and why was this boy calling *me*

to find him (*her?*).

Since I was female,

and the voice wasn't surprised

when I spoke, I figured

Dawn (*ah*) must be female too.

He begged me to come back home,

saying, 'We miss you and we love you.'

The voice seemed desperate and wouldn't

believe me when I told him he had the wrong

number. He asked me, "Where'd you take

the truck?" I hung up. It was no use.

But he kept calling me and I'd get texts

from the whole family reading things like

'We're doing this for your own good.'

Maybe it was for my own good,

even if I wasn't Dawn.

Just my Opinion

Drunk-dialing is a reaction to loneliness. Random dialing is a reaction to boredom. Change your number before you become victim to either. Unless you yourself are lonely or bored. Then you must be receptive to it. Turn down the TV. Wait for the sound of crickets. Let it ring a few times so you don't seem needy. Pick up the phone and say hi to that ex or prankster. Don't try to reason with them; rather, go right into that monologue you prepared in 6th grade about the Nina, Pinta, and Santa Maria. Or talk about the weather. Talk about how wonderful the other person is and how they've really made your night. What can it hurt? Aren't we all drunks and pranksters somewhere deep down inside? And if we're not, wouldn't it be more interesting if we were?

Speculation

At the counter,
 9 o' clock,
 a man orders a sandwich and starts
 to eat.
 He is good looking.
 You notice him because
 he's good-looking.
 No you don't.
 You notice him because you're hungry,
 and it is the sandwich
 that draws your gaze:
 the juicy, succulent skin of the tomato
 dripping down the man's chin.
 It's a world where mayo
 is crucial in filling the pores
 of the bread while adhering
 to the innards of the sandwich.
 As you ponder the perceived value of tomatoes,
 you see straight ahead,
 your own reflection in the mirror.
Oh, hi Alice. Good morning.
Shall we order a sandwich?
I think we could use one.

You call the waitress, Debra,
 politely.
 Ma'am,
 I'm ready to take my order.
 She ignores you.
 The waitress is thinking about the man.
 You hate her for this.
 She should be
 thinking about sandwiches.
 Actually, she is not thinking
 about anything.
 She is sick, this waitress.
 Sick of hearing the world's going
 to end. Let it end, she thinks,
 I am in love.

Where I Confuse Spam for the Real Thing

I sent him an email with no subject.
I changed my name to Evelyn Jane.
A code name, to startle him anonymously.

I wanted a real letter with a rose for a stamp
of our love. He sent the email first; I only replied.
His address: narcissus@gmail.com. I scoffed.

This is easy, he said in the body. We exchange
each other for lumber. Lumber? I said. That's crazy.
I don't have the resources. Do you think

I'm made of money? I said. Resources? he said.
I'm talking about a relationship here. You are?
I'm talking about a relationship here, I said.

Where is my letter? You keep your lumber, my
echo of his offer: a million dollars—claim it today.
So you *are*, he said, and then, what are we doing?

Who are you?

The Flower Function

To search for what is not missing.
 You, astute at beauty, first fancied this task, then abandoned it.
 Just like the women in storybooks pouring from pitchers,
 milk into a bowl, water into a vase, you dispense gelatinous goo
 into a whirl of worry
 to see what may grow. You breathe in to breathe out, and see your breath,
 flower or flow from your center, revealing your nature.

A bird in the sky,
 chased by the silk of your blossoms,
 could not flap as high as the man Marquez fashioned,
 the one with ENORMOUS
 wings; even
 though enormous,
 Marquez himself was not a ball of fat testing
 the awful effects of gravity and time.

When you were little, you wished you were big. Then
 when big, wishing you were little,
 grew to the size of Kentucky, then
 you didn't know what to think,
 so they left you so quietly,
 your thoughts.

Like the subtle whimper of a breeze rushing up on a rock,
 you vibrated long in between eye-blinks,
 and found an empty, metal bucket
 to which you added clams for your protection.
 Meaty ridges clamped shut yet knew to flare up
 molten mother of pearl when pressed.

The necklace belonged to you but your mother gave it to your sister.

She envied the red gold already there at your neck, and mother knew, but sang,
 "not so!"
 resting her head in her hands.

This well known pose, sculpted by the nervous and inhabited,
 means she intended: not here, not here, and not there either...

please,
 just put those flowers in the vase on the shelf.

