

I Want To Be The Dead Girl On A Detective Show

so that my pocket change will matter.
So that the coroner will examine
the contents of my stomach and wonder

about all the avocados, especially
in this economy, and is that deadly belladonna
or Everything But The Bagel?

So they will crop my husband out
of my Facebook profile picture
and post it at the local Trader Joe's

with a sign that says: "Who was she to you?"
So at least six women will call the hotline with tales
of a gold digger who wrecked a 20-year marriage.

So that my Google search history will become
a curio shop of scandals too thrilling
for the interns to catalog without supervision.

So men with badges will show up on the doorsteps
of old lovers and pot-bellied relatives:
she seemed like such a good girl, you know.

So the forensics team will puzzle over
the way I've organized my bookshelves,
and some gritty, hawk-eyed detective (a woman, of course)

will realize they are grouped according to
the heart-to-hearts I'm hoping the characters will have
in my absence: *Jane Eyre* and *Bad Feminist*, for example.

So that the citizens of my nightstand
will be preserved in their own private plastic:
Exhibit A, ear plugs and hand cream;

B, that untangleable mess of charging cords;
C, don't look in the black satin bag; and
D, a stack of Moleskines full of weird dreams

just itching for psychoanalysis, like the one
about the corn-husk woman waiting to be husked
and other telltales of guilty desire.

So all this will be connected on the wall
by a geodesic web of yellow yarn
whose map makes sense to someone.

So my life can be measured and thus made real,
tellable to posterity, critical to justice, even when
everyone has already lost interest in the killer.

I guess that's what writing is supposed to do,
but dying is easier than putting the truth on paper,
and anyway, what is more real:

the stories people tell about you
or the stories you tell yourself?
Everything else is just a body

whose namelessness
I've come to love
as if it were my own.

Diving with My Brother at Dawn, a Shark Attack, & the Perfect Lobster Omelet

If we didn't have something to prove, we would've missed it:
the faultless beach, the eggshell pinks of dawn, the electric promises
of a storm inscribing itself on the ocean a mile or two west.
We could've stayed in bed: you nested with your wife nursing your child,
me next-door nursing a hangover. We could have booked a resort,
the all-inclusive kind with swim-up bars and shark nets circling the perimeter.
We could've chosen a different father: one with a recovery chip
and birthday presents, kindly hands and an even temper.
We could've been strangers hauling boats to the break at coincident angles,
weirdly compelled to race. Fossil fuels might have remained fossils,
the temperature of the ocean might not have risen, resources unthinned,
aggression no longer necessary. I might've been the gentle arms of anemone
swaying unafraid in the tide. You might've been the lobster we hunted,
antennae still tasting the world. If there weren't so much space between us
filled with so much morning light, we might've missed its silver shiver
in the middle distance, eyes predatory and unevolving.
If vulnerability were not buoyant we might yet break beneath the weight
of all our failed adaptations in our rush from fins to feet.
Back at the rental house I will lose my nerve and you will kill the lobster for me,
tear the tail from its back with a rough twist of hand, protect me
from the violence I know I carry too. Your wife and I will break
the eggs together. I will tell her the story of the time we met the food chain,
and you will laugh as you tell her about my knack for storytelling,
the shark too small to have done lasting harm. It will be the best thing
we've eaten since childhood: earned by a hunger that means survival,
perfected by the memory of teeth, the taste of salt and time.

The Louisiana Maneuvers

The war games known as the Louisiana Maneuvers took place over thousands of miles of central Louisiana woodlands in order to prepare the American military for World War II. In 1941, General George C. Marshall declared Fort Polk's mission: "I want the mistakes made down in Louisiana and not over in Europe."

From German wheat fields gone to seed, over an ocean
of poverty and their husbands' wars, my mothers are gathering
their skirts and spines, sea-legged on peasant thighs
bred for work, reeling westward toward Fort Polk, turning
the train's chuffing into kinderlieder for children who carry
themselves. The fug of summer makes it easier to pretend
sorrow into sweat, to translate old world failures into promises
only America and immigrant backs can break.
Watch us there in our clapboard houses, sweeping the dust
of anger into pride, losing our men to barracks and bars
and learning to take their place—the housewife gone madame, gone
Pentacostal preacher taming a rattlesnake god with soft arms and hips,
gone nursing home founder tending to the dying poor
and refusing loans from bankers who want more than interest—
our spite and our strength braiding like cat's claw in the shadowed eaves
of homes we can no longer deny are our own.
We ran from a lonesome bitterness that beat us there
to the pines between the military base and the muddy Red River
where the war was already raging in our stowaway hearts,
rising in the smoke from our Lucky Strikes
as we snap peas on the porch, hunched over daughters we are teaching
to hold their own, to preserve their truths, forgetful now
of the way truth maneuvers to accommodate mistakes,
the way we teach our spines to curve to compensate for pain.

Too Much Girl

Should I keep her buried, then? Should I forget
the Too Much girl and the lawless years she stumbled through

the Virgin Islands, a college dropout with something to prove
to a bottle of Cruzan rum and far too many men? Should I

distance myself from the decadent nights she shook down
everyone in pool, lips curled around a cigarette like beauty was hers

forever, or from the cocaine sunrises that always came too soon?
Should I donate the yellow dress she wore, the one that rippled

open like a supernova when she danced, barefoot and tangled
in herself? Youth was not her fault; it was her thirst

for a womanhood only her body had known—until she learned it
(look away now) strapped to a cot in rehab, turning and turning

inside her skin, and I have carried her in silence ever since. (Oh
what she didn't know of a woman's quiet carrying.) Where has

her abandon gone, her muchness? Turned suburban, turned neurosis,
calling for attention in the dark. In the end, all she really wanted

was to be seen. How do I resurrect her from the woman I've become
now that the funeral of shoulding is over? Would she shake the earth

from breasts and hips and take my hands if I asked her
to dance? Or would it hurt too much to remember how?

A Pure Enough Time

Time ends here: hip to hip
on the moon tower's ledge,
five stories high and legs slung
over the mouth of the night,
over the sign that says "Danger:
No Sitting on the Guardrails,"
laughing into nothing to see how far it goes,
the mushrooms we'd eaten hours ago
riding our minds full-tilt and we are flying
through the Pleiades—Nina telling the story
of the seven sisters in full dramatic theater,
Dill and Charlie howling at the condominiums
for blocking the light of the moon—when
the railing buckles beneath our weight
and gravity remembers us, goes slant,
the first flickers of fear: who will catch us if we fall,
wetlands below, the boardwalk maze,
fireflies purling through tall grasses
all too far for softness. We hold our breath
as the guardrail sways, the four of us waiting
to learn the path energy travels
from potential to kinetic, from before
to after, unlikely constellations
falling too fast in the dark.

Within two years Charlie will die
of a rare thymus cancer, and Dill
will lose himself to depression
in a dark room behind his parents' house.
Nina will give up her earthly possessions
to join the cult of Orgasmic Meditation,
and I will run off with their memories,
making effigies of their tender hearts
in poems to be written and thrown away.
In one of our annual, guilt-ridden phone calls,
Nina will tell me a parable, the one
where the devil bargains for a boy's soul:
he gives the boy a stopwatch
and tells him to choose a moment
in which he can live forever,
knowing the boy will never find
a time pure enough to press the stopper.
The moral is something about presence,
something about gratitude. I tell her

I believe the story is true, but
you don't get to choose the moment.
Forever chooses you.

From all the way up here on the tower,
the earth looks as lovely and lonely
as the moon. We take each other's hands.
One of us leans back from the darkness
and the rest of us follow, the short fall
to the platform hard but not final, the wind
knocked loose from the sails of our lungs,
the space where our bodies had been
now a sky full of stars.