

## Tang

Maybe I paint my nails the color of Tang  
to bring out the astronaut in you? How very John Glenn  
to take my hand and waltz me away from the nearest black hole—  
and maybe you will speak to me of origins,  
from the Greek, star sailor, and I will joke about vacuums,  
how nature abhors them and how Steinbeck  
called them sweeping machines, even unplugged  
but grazing across a rug in *Tortilla Flat*.  
You do not have to be an astronaut for me  
to clean up after you. My mother gave me Tang  
each morning as if feeding me the promise  
of a celestial future fueled by Vitamin C.  
In the 70's heaven seemed easier to reach  
with all of us so pretty, with Archie  
so disgruntled in his whiteness on TV,  
with you so unknown it would take an astronaut  
a mini-series to drive his Corvette between our homes.  
What did your father do while my father in his uniform  
each morning traded one war zone for another  
while my body pulled the nutrition from glass after glass  
of the sour stuff years before our teenage selves  
rocketed down back roads like astronauts in cars  
with backseats soft as a mother's lap?  
What I would give to have been a kid with you.  
One Friday night. One football game I pretended  
to watch, touchdowns memorized from the radio  
so I could sneak away with my Jean Nate  
and my Supertramp. Remember on the cover,  
the waitress who could be anybody's mother  
with her real orange juice, of course fresh squeezed,  
the missed elixir I am trying to get back to  
as my middle-aged nails become ten polished  
orange beacons guiding you past a new Kármán Line  
to the center of a very unexpected place.

## Hard Frost

Past my dying garden your image follows.  
This hard frost stands in the way  
of green being green. Such a dolor,  
pink forgetting itself when, not long ago,  
it carried a summer melody better than Sinatra.  
(And when I say too cool I only mean the weather.)

I leave lavender to dry on the bush, that dumb  
kiss of summer crushed between thumb and finger  
now nothing but cold lips, a buss blown  
from my gloved hand just missing your cheek.  
This winter we will neglect words like touch, stroke,  
contemplate, both of us fortress'd in such a lonely place.

But when you think of me, just once in the snow,  
my body will be the red of summer, the petal of a garden rose  
that smells like warmth when you get close, my hair  
no longer hair but the rope in stories men long to climb.  
Go ahead, take cuts to the front of the line.

I will be waiting at the top of a tower built  
more from sadness than from stone. Look  
at all the colors hidden there. See the slow movement  
of cream spilled along the floor. The drop of honey.  
The oranges waiting to bloom in the spring. The way  
I care nothing for the cliché of milk and oranges and honey  
but place this remembrance of past banquets before you.

The cold will not always ruin us. Someday your tongue  
will again long to taste. Then we will speak in words  
like shoulder, glisten, appetite and pretend what we lost  
in this hard frost can be found. Of course we will  
both be wrong, that lightning in a bottle nothing  
but a static shock, a faint blue buzz, but wasn't  
it all, while it lasted, even more than glorious?

## Big Nose

My first serenade, you who tied girls  
to bedposts afterschool while I factored  
my quadratic equations across town.  
Such post-coital univariates, my coefficients  
twisting in on themselves while you tossed  
another cheerleader's panties on the floor.

Our mothers warned Oregon girls  
about California boys the year we tilted  
our noses away from the magazine smell  
of Corey Haim in *Tiger Beat* to the Technicolor glow,  
such yellows and golds, almost the smell of lemons,  
of real-life Sun-In. All those blonde bangs  
we longed to tangle our mall-bangs in.

California boys could tune in  
the one station that played *Shake the Disease*  
on Friday night repeat while we waited  
for our Top 40 call sign to lose its static,  
while I waited for you to look up from your guitar  
long enough to notice I could be more  
than your girlfriend's best friend.

She, the natural blonde who went through life  
sucking down free milkshakes, her button nose  
sewn to the exact middle of her face  
while my bumped Roman nose bullied its way into every room.

A nose like the nose of a man on the cover of *Time*  
during the Gulf War, and didn't you laugh  
as you Show-and-Told your way through the day  
comparing my photo to his,  
central Oregon's only sand nigger, you said,  
and didn't she laugh, too, knowing, in 1991,  
I was cast in our play as the ugly one.

In the bathroom after last period I let my tears intoxicate me.

Finally, something to cry over,  
a small town, small school, small-halled injustice  
while your band practiced Smiths' songs in the music room.  
While a friend of a friend passed me a note to ride  
the afternoon bus one stop past my house to you,

with your mom who worked downtown,  
with your California father who for Christmas  
brought guns and CDs from L.A.  
Black and white checkered Vans.  
Laser discs big as dinner plates.

I ignored your request and sewed black ribbon roses  
on Goodwill sweaters, my big nose alive  
in the air of late spring, Junior year,  
when it almost didn't matter  
that I was the before picture for rhinoplasty.

The Friday before Prom I came over. She asked  
for advice on dresses as we waited in your room,  
on boutonnieres, on how many muscle relaxants  
would pour her body out of the dance and into your arms.

She offered to go for pizza if I paid,  
girls with big noses trained to always carry cash,  
so I waited for you as her blondness impressed  
itself down your driveway and you returned  
from wherever handsome boys spent their afternoons.

In your room I arranged my hair on your pillow  
in a fairytale braid almost strong enough for you  
to climb and counted your Swatch watches  
in the twilight heat, pretending to sleep  
as the song you sang entered my daydreams,

you strumming at the edge of your bed,  
the taut-stringed tendons of your arms,  
legs folded under when one eye peeked  
like a painting called The American Dream,  
a Southern radio song all the college stations played.

Your voice the deep register singing  
about losing your religion to a face lost  
in its own asymmetry, never quite white enough,  
until you leaned to kiss the tip of my nose,  
your eyes closed, then danced your fingers  
across my forehead as if checking  
for a fever just ready to break.

## For Kurt, For Spring

Sylvia Plath was wrong about women.  
It's poets who adore a fascist,

but she was never wrong about Ted Hughes,  
sending a blade of grass to his lover,  
her blade soaked in Dior perfume until,

blade to blade,

the lovers made the kind of green promise  
that can never last past a wife left waiting.

The plate of butter and bread.  
The cups of milk.

The rigadon towards suicide, a poem  
for the anniversary of Kurt Cobain  
I find so hard to write.

I look up suicide online. Straight through  
I watch a tape of a senator shooting himself  
in the head. I hope Kurt didn't bleed  
that way as my dad, I remember,  
preacher curled to his weight bench  
yelled about a death on TV.

Some dirty blonde rock star, some freak  
surrounded by Easter lilies, a funeral  
everyone refused to see.

How you'd find interesting I got paid  
enough to buy a leather jacket in Seattle  
by picking away the anthers of orange pollen  
at a floral shop before a spring holiday.

To keep the petals white as a poem  
right before your first ink line  
on your first blank page.

No one wants to visit Seattle anymore.

What was happening in your life  
on July 1, 1992 as I wandered that city

searching for Kurt in each record store?  
His blonde presence the same  
as I imagine it feels in London  
courting the queen, so close to her palace,  
her pillbox hats, Charlotte Elizabeth,

his Fender Mustang played left hand,  
Ziggy Stardust style, Jimi style,  
always a flannel shirt away, the city,  
from something authentic.

Because I never found him that day,  
maybe Kurt is somehow  
still waiting to be found, Kurt,  
forever young, dead but not really broken,  
following us all through life the way  
music always follows me around the room.

And my poem about Kurt  
is still waiting to be written  
and the senator who shot himself  
is dying each day on the Internet  
and there's so much blood my heart breaks  
for all the strangers who had to watch someone  
who cheated unable to cheat  
the peace of death for eternity.

I'm sure you saw the photo of Kurt,  
his upturned black One Star converse,  
the immortal white shirt,  
*This note should be easy to understand.*

My note, to you, should be easy to understand.  
You, to me, me, to you, should be easy to understand,

Like how Kurt loved Courtney the only way  
misfits in the 90's could love each other.

Before Facebook and cell phones,  
before online dating, before  
the paradox of choice that comes  
from one too many profile paramours.

*"Sorry about the zit," she says.*  
*"Zits are beauty marks," he says.*

A thrift store sweated grunge trinity:  
bleach, Manic Panic and them  
on the cover of Sassy magazine.

And didn't we all want to be her  
loving him with her big red lips  
on a New York City sidewalk,  
his suicide years away?

I hope the way death chooses to meet you  
is so far from this poem  
I won't even remember writing about you  
when he arrives.

It is spring, if you've forgotten.

All the yellows and pinks.  
The fuzzy under bellies of soft new leaves.

We've come so far since those first blossoms.

It's makes a woman forget all this talk of suicide  
in favor of befriending the nearest bird  
on the nearest green expanse.

There are feathers here, miraculous  
in their patterns.

A whole world still hidden beneath the surface of things.

## Love and Other Monsters

Of course most go for the blondes.  
Not even monsters always understand  
where to look for love, and how no cheerleader  
will ever flash her panties or her pom-poms  
at someone with scales, or thirteen thumbs,  
or one-million eyes.

I have always seen love as a disguise.  
The mask that shows up to parties  
with wine and anecdotes.  
The mask that meets your mask on dates  
and thinks it is love to order the same entrée  
or read the same books.

Love is looking for, then losing itself,  
throughout our lives,  
even with three fingers or none, furry thighs,  
a tail that drags behind.

I don't mind that a monster has so many thumbs  
or maybe eats brains, sometimes, or cries  
at sad movies when no one is looking.

I was built to love the more dangerous kind.

My hips are sturdy enough to accept  
the things that go bump in the night.  
Without complaint I will clean up puddles  
swamp things leave behind, re-wrap frayed mummies.

I know all the tricks for dealing with blood.

It is easy to love the elegance of teen vampires,  
the brute musk of werewolves.  
Leave those for the blondes who are too ordinary  
to see the potential in loving something ugly, but kind.  
Something that will kiss you with his grateful lips,  
unless he has none.

There is something to be said for this loyalty,  
King Kong to Fay Wray,  
Frankenstein's monster to his mail-order bride,  
the Hunchback of Notre Dame, Phantom of the Opera...



each monster content to worship  
only one woman the rest of their lives.  
How is this devotion anything to be shunned  
because they cannot drive a car, because  
they have too many hands to dribble a ball,  
or none, because they transform with the moon,  
don't own any stock, can't really read  
or make you paper heart Valentines.

Your monster will barge through any boundaries,  
break down doors, crash through walls to get to you.

This will become the best kind of courtship,  
the messiest sort of love.

Whether this proclamation comes  
in screams or sighs or grunts  
and they are waiting to embrace you with all their arms,  
or none, and follow you on picnics and,  
for the ones who know how to sit up,  
take you out to dinner,

this means something more than any  
boring old Prince Charming, too blonde,  
smelling of Muscle Milk and old money,  
showing up some dull afternoon  
with someone else's missing glass shoe  
and thinking his offering will be enough  
to woo you towards the false safety  
of every Once Upon a Time.