

## I'LL NEVER WRITE YOU A LOVE POEM

In the darkest coldest corner  
of our basement, my back is to you

wrestling with a sewing machine  
I can't remember how to use

to hem our son's ghoulish costume  
for Halloween tonight. You crouch

on the stairs, lean against concrete  
I painted yellow last year, as if

that would make it warmer. Images  
of Hurricane Sandy flash on our muted tv:

people waist high in water; half-darkened  
New York; a house off its foundation

face down in sand. The place  
I come from can't hold back the water

and I drown across the country.  
You can't stand the bickering

between the kids, from me,  
it makes you shrink into yourself, retreat.

The floor below our children,  
in shouts we cannot restrain,

we seethe.

*Should I leave this marriage?* I turn and ask.

*Should I?* you counter  
in a sadness I've never seen

in all our years, your head dipping  
into the basket of your hands.

I am too scared to reach out –  
a touch and we might pixellate

into colors that won't coalesce.  
We are red-eyed, white-faced

(I'll Never Write You a Love Poem, p. 2)

each on our own  
knee-deep in debris.

Then, you cough out how  
the kids and I define *family*

and I spurt that *I can't be me without you.*  
In a West Coast sympathy pang

the lights flicker and it is dark.  
The kids pull on costumes in candlelight.

Our daughter, the double-knifed ninja  
in black mask, our son, the ghoul.

I paint his face white with red eyes.  
Outside, we make our way through the dark.

Our flashlights reveal a small mudslide:  
a neighborhood maple heavy on the wire.

## GREAT AUNT RUTH

Sharpened by years, her tongue  
lashes out scythe-like. There's  
no way out of this body –  
the press of age on bones.  
Wrinkled heavy skin confounds  
truth, twists it into slippery  
injustices. She wants to  
unzip herself, pull down  
from neck through torso to littlest toe,  
walk unbound, muscles exposed,  
breathing in oxygen everywhere.

## WHY I DON'T KNOW HOME

It's at the golf club on a camellia-lined drive  
I recognize my classmate, a local pediatrician  
    After he reads my name tag, he hugs me  
        His breath thick with scotch  
We've come here tonight from many states  
    Looking softer and rounder  
    Everyone navigates decades-old cliques  
The women sport rounder hips and plunging necklines  
    The men tuck paunches into pants  
We wear our families, careers like badges  
    Proving to ourselves where we've gotten  
One set of high school sweethearts, married  
Married, too, one nerd cum pastor and one goth girl  
    Dissipated dreams  
    The evening folds  
    Dispersing us back to silo lives

I turned down  
the first boy who tried to kiss me at the movies  
my hand pulling his arm off my shoulder  
me walking away  
preferring basketball games with friends  
calling *padiddle* as we slapped the ceiling  
with Prince crooning about crying doves –  
at the Yankee Doodle Fair  
while riding the Round Up  
we scream out confidence  
dressed like grown-ups at sweet sixteens  
in tuxes and heels listening to the DJ  
dancing, we try not to step on toes  
real and imagined –  
some arrange a limousine home  
except for a handful of us who head to the diner.