

Heart-bone

two-hundred six  
bones in a  
human body  
add one more  
for heart because it breaks  
mends, takes a beating  
hurled words hurt

love's heady pulse  
runs cuts deep

how may we measure size  
not by lopsided  
circumference, girth, heft,  
but by wringing tight  
and giving what's left  
after pride holds us down  
still we rise up

is it the empathy we possess

I carved mine out,  
set it on the scale  
needed to know  
how much of me is empty.

strung it up  
with clothespins on a line  
let the sap drip out  
make clean its spongy grief

full of four decades  
of love and loss, I murmur  
skip, palpitate  
*whoosh whoosh whoosh*  
marks my existence  
me as heart  
whomping in chest,  
wearing on sleeve  
holding in jaw, ears  
evidence  
that there should be more to give

I err, repair, harden—

breaking,  
mending,  
loving and losing  
begin again

cyclical bodily system  
like respiration  
or sleep, wakes me in  
circadian revolution  
may I replace damage  
with steel  
chain mail and organ armor  
in the evolution  
of betrayal.

## Refugio

storm opened up one  
tie at a time  
we walked on tracks  
side by side you made nothing  
of slowing stride humid  
beach sky roiled  
one small hand in yours

clouds melted into thunder  
layered indigos upon  
whites implying menace  
of the heavens, signaling  
sadness and wrath,  
I'd once believed

the other dragging a stick,  
my machete-wielding heart  
poking wooden sleepers  
as if they threatened to come alive,  
smacking weeds and dirt  
I pretended to clear a path  
for us

pieces of gravel wedged  
in grooves  
of my shoe sole  
I looked up  
hidden sun let me see  
you taught me

the ballast will hold  
a man can mean honesty

what came to us  
wasn't rain but lightning  
from distant electricity  
exploding elsewhere

what came to me  
was a gratitude  
I didn't yet understand, tranquility  
soaking  
into me like courage

## What I Am Not

sacred untrodden revolving  
tradition pristine temple

Mexican girl offering profundity  
from *mi vida loca*  
(if you teach vowel  
pronunciation with patience  
anyone can say it right)

Indian girl from dirt  
memories of molestation  
in skin dark brown  
culture popping  
with ethnic pride

American girl next door, beauty  
personified in latent suicidal tendencies  
lipstick mirror kissing  
tear-soaked letter writing  
hesitant razorblade

validated  
I've been hounded and prodded  
trampled profaned childhood remembers  
ghost of your cigarette  
still burning in streets

hopeful  
a current banging from somewhere  
above or beside my apartment  
like hammering a nail  
or pounding headboard against wall

uncomplicated  
I'm hardly pitiable  
I've seen easy lies seep  
from shameless  
amoebic hearts

immune  
will men stop loving me  
and when they do, will I know  
who I am

## We Are Wolves

we, children lack  
violence  
possess multiple hungers  
do not make us ashamed

these other kids, these  
strangers,  
under burnt out street lights  
pack of wolves,  
ready to destroy or die

busted yard tires,  
tongue rubber hanging loose  
stuffing cascades from foaming  
couch mouth  
dry grass beneath thrift shop shoes  
moon so high we almost miss it

hot wind lingers like rotten firescent  
one of our summers as canine  
paws on asphalt  
searching eyes in unfamiliar forest

bent fence, broken gate,  
askew door  
rabid things creep  
barking, howling, growlsnarl  
around the bend  
at the border of the neighborhood

we are not threats to each other  
the someones who are no ones  
to us  
force us to sharpen our fangs  
children *can* belong to nobody  
*if we aren't careful*

you, digger of hole, bagger of bodies  
tell me how we got here  
where moon  
lowers itself like a shade  
over the eye of a god,

do we cease to exist

brother in next room  
here with growl in bellies  
skyface still out of reach  
too far to pluck  
make it ours  
like planetflower that it is  
rip a bite out of cratered, variegated sphere

but we wait for you to feed us  
hunger rapacious  
blooms too much  
we need  
like hole in head or  
drip enough of  
love to make us whole

## Let Him Go

1

I'm not responsible  
I unzip fear like a jacket  
let the heavy stuff fall out—  
meddle, heart, sweetness,  
ragged noose of insecurity

but hold on to the rope  
dangling at my knees  
umbilical cord of a thousand  
thunders tearing a wound in the sky  
of everything we built  
I will never have  
children

so I press a pillow  
over your face;

2

my goat, tied to the old oak  
with repurposed noose,  
restrains your savage body  
bell dangling from neck,  
takes form of fetus cold and hard

reminders ring a round of echoes  
I am responsible for him,  
because he is *mine*.  
*I brought him here.*

Even as he eats  
the clothes off my body,  
I owe him something  
gouging journey of bones ahead

untie him so I may keep  
my underwear,  
something to offer,  
my worn shoes, my threadbare dignity,  
my freedom  
though it may forever dig  
unapologetically into the straps  
of my regret.