

5

five years, sitting in a bathtub on folsom  
street and she's standing over  
me with eyes gleaming like a set of cutlery.

just got off the phone with your  
son of a bitch uncle  
what a.

she turns away from me and begins to  
scrub furiously  
hands under sulfur tap water.

they are too rough when she grabs me  
out of the tub and sets me on the bottom bunk  
like they were sitting in the sun too long  
but i know they weren't even close.

she looks at me, pebbles against the pale  
half moon of her face.  
lips without color.  
we are so faint.

you've got it in you too  
god help you we've all  
got jack running in our veins.

East River

Let the light  
bounce. Last night I got high  
and took the 1 train to the East  
Village where you were asleep.

A white pigeon on  
burned bricks the morning after  
you said goodbye. The only word  
I've ever heard. My lips wet  
with red wine.

I suck in sweat, plant  
my forehead on the mat  
like the man at 23rd street  
who prays to Allah.

I think of you at 2am: so  
soft it's hard to breathe  
the way that moonlight  
can cut deep.

I thought breaking would feel  
like reverb turned up too high  
but my eardrums are a corpse  
of hollow.

Sun collides with river and I'm  
behind the wheel of a Chevy  
Express.

A splash somewhere and still  
we're somewhere.

### The Immortal Number Two

Andres Escobar spent years praying to that ball,  
lived with it between his legs  
like a horny teenager, sometimes he imagined  
it was his father's red face  
he was kicking across the field

but inside an orb of 50,000  
it only took fifteen seconds  
not enough time to be born  
barely enough to die  
one fumble fuck up and  
an entire stadium chanting

*own goal*  
*you are not Colombia*

when he got back to Medellín they shot him  
outside his car  
a month before the wedding.

Sometimes I imagine that I am his fiancé  
as I ride the subway cars at night  
stoned on someone's xanax.

Sometimes I wish somebody would shoot you  
in the head outside a bar  
brains all over your new jeans  
your eyes scared confused and dark  
as always.

## Thanksgiving

Mom was the first in her family to go to college  
grandpa didn't even make it to high school  
eighth grade dropout laying bricks  
in the Bronx back when you couldn't say  
Irish. Now, in yellow apartment windows she chews  
artichoke hearts and doesn't feel like number eight.

Number one has a smoking habit  
and blond hair cut too short like cape cod  
sadness in the summertime when the kids  
try harder drugs and the women in the clam bar  
bathrooms have tired eyes.

Number two tried to change her name at 55  
so we drove up to New Hampshire to get her back  
on her meds and she dates all these tough guys  
who are always setting the house on fire  
and my cousin has hard hands and only half  
a smile.

Number three's been sober for 24 years  
but still has it in him like a swimmer in the desert,  
the same boy who dove into corn fields  
at four a.m after homecoming. The cops came looking  
and maybe my grandma was a little proud  
knowing she'd made something that could shine  
that bright even for a little while.

Four just lost a third husband. This time he stayed,  
though, until the end and driving towards boston  
a few weeks ago she heard his name on the radio  
thanking him for twenty bucks he gave to a local station  
and for a minute she wanted to die right there  
in that old volkswagen that my sister was almost born in.

Five punched out cop car headlights  
not for the thrill but on the off chance he'd get locked up  
and never have to lie or hide again. The pretty boys in the clubs  
stuff themselves into straight jackets for work,  
drop their voices an octave, keep a gun in their pockets  
but they carve names into their desks with jack knives  
all their once-lovers tied to tubes because it's

1983 and nobody is safe.

Six has three dogs, three kids, a paint company and a bad colon. He chews nicotine gum and doesn't think of bloody fists or shooting up that one time behind the 7/11 in the icy air where his little sisters sat and watched and didn't say a word as he became another state a California of relief, the flood of the rio grande all those itches in his fingers gone.

Seven lost a spark somewhere, she stopped screaming and started dying at only 17 and her chair was always empty she never visited or called and now she has cancer and her oldest is in college and I wonder if the little one has my sister's deep brown eyes.

west wind

in north carolina my sister cries  
sweaty and broken in the hot sun.  
we eat waffles  
and sit by the lake  
and try to think of answers.

georgia is every shade  
of green but under the grass  
is dark red earth  
cracked and bright like  
the desert.

last night a man entered a church  
sat through an hour of the service  
and then opened fire.

we eat eggs on biscuits  
and don't say anything.

we hit mississippi on a sunday  
and the pool tastes like being little  
and missing home.

new orleans is a rabbit hole  
of sorts – thick air coating my pale skin  
purple houses next to uprooted trees.

the curtains are thick tapestries  
and we lean into the humid air  
to try to spot a tiger  
in the nearby zoo.

we drink moscato in new mexico  
and see the way the caves  
were carved  
the earth made soft and sweet  
and pliant.

but it is in california that we allow ourselves  
forgetfulness

after cresting santa monica hills  
on the side of the road

the pacific laid out before us  
oceans unowned and unknown  
a rush of wonder  
and then the blues  
like a kiss.