Contours

We have spoken of our fathers—

their ills becoming ours-

traced the outline of our childhoods

in spilled sugar on late night diner tables-

oh, the sweetness

we parted with shaky fingers then

and now.

We think that to know each other's darkness,

to chalk the outlines of lover's shadow on pavement

then lie down-that

must be love. Or will become.

But when I wake in early morning

turn my head to the silhouette

of shoulder, curved back, jut of hip beneath cover,

the contours are strange: I am a hotel guest, drawing curtains to landscape,

anew. If I reach out my hand to you

will it be stopped by a pane of glass?

We have spoken of differences and indifferences,

vowed to spill wine into every chasm and rift,

to toddle or stagger our way back to this bed,

these sheets, the long nights we spend jerking them back and forth

stretched out like deserts-

their long shadows

our hands sifting through sand.

Daughter Atom

Grief, we think, a delicacy: origami the many folds across memory, shame, love lost. Make it a crane—anything solitary, endangered, tall at the edge of a roaring current. Fold a thousand and maybe she'll come back, maybe you'll forget, maybe fragility could silence the throb in your throat, no way to speak it.

It's like this: when protons are taken from their nucleus a daughter atom is born, spiraling away with enough force that the original recoils. A rifle bucked back after firing. I am

daughter atom, once a fleck in the ovary that—radiated, bombed—is killing my mother. Think of my tiny body fattening inside her: embryo, fetus, repellent. How could I have saved her, protected? Or should she have protected me, knowing fragility, how easy paper wings crease and tear?

Nuclear fission: energy lost in separation, then energy supposed to be spent protecting; the men—brother, father—drunk on gin and anger, war and rage downstairs.

From across the country I folded one thousand paper cranes. They cover my mother's bedroom like bodies after the bomb--dead, anonymous. Here is my anonymous grief, Mother, here are my creases, arrived at your doorstep like drones.

Youth

Another regrettable thing about beginnings is the smell of wild onion curved into being, bulb to green, another stench both acrid and sweet. There go the college girls in their summer gauze, dresses that plead the wind to blow through them, girls who plead the wind to usher rain, for no one desires freedom that persists from morning to nightfall, burning the carefully paled skin.

There was once a woman who gathered every wild leek from a valley—brought them home for boiling. The story goes she cried to death, collapsed there on her kitchen floor, splayed like a dead animal, road-kill those young things in spring pawing across pavement. Many mornings passed before they found her, covered her in plastic. It was a terrible smell. They opened every window. In her sills, daffodil stems. Soon, flowers.

There go the college girls, shedding gauze, shoulders and cheeks blushing, burning. How easy they cry these nights by moonlight, the sun having branded them hers her young, pale things.

How the stars trembled above us

our slick blue bodies curving, chaotic minnows in the palm of God's hand, the tin moon reeling up the sky like a gear.

Was it a wave uncurling? Or your wet lips unsealing?

Oh, return to this dusty road —my home. My heart is water.

Grief

Some mornings I wake and a century has passed. Some mornings I wake younger than before. If you stay up 'til dawn the moon sings a hymn backwards for all histories, waiting, like the Big Bang, to collapse. Each dream is a pill with someone else's anxiety inside. It is sometimes too much to takethe gut stuffed with grief in languages you can't comprehend. I wake with the weight of death, death, death; a sun's beam across bedding does not mean hello, begin, commence the chorus of duty. Instead, questions: Where are your shovels. Where is the earth you will split and plant this litany of bodies. Don't crytragedy arrives in the dull haul of afternoon. Best to stay in bed, grow young, bury the bodies one by one in the pockets of time's morning jacket. Still I worry about the world outside. Some mornings branches finger the window pane. What if they break. What if the branches break