

Boxes

Sister, here is your box, it has no stairs.
I will take you out when I need a slide
rule, a compass. Brother, your box

is tall, you will need to stand. If you grow
tired, ring the bell and someone will come
to turn you onto your side.

If you see our father
please tell him his supper
is getting cold.

1960 — Lanny

When I touched Lanny's arm, up where her white sleeve ended, there were bees humming beneath her warm skin.

When I smelled Lanny's hair, her straightened hair the dull black of asphalt, it was sweet, just on the edge of turning.

When I touched Lanny's hair, smoothed my hand over the rough surface so unlike my own black silk—

Lanny's skin the color of Sanka in the jar, a stone hot in the sun, flecks of glistening fool's gold.

We took off our clothes and lay giggling in her bed. We hid her brother's magazines under the covers

and marveled at the pale women, their enormous breasts, and marveled at each other's flat chests,

her little buttons a color I had no name for. I remember talking dirty, biting the pillows to keep

from screaming with laughter and something else. We had no idea what any of it meant, all I knew was that I wanted my arms

around her thin little body I wanted to lie on top of her with my face in the sweaty hollow between her neck and bony

shoulder, I wanted a world I would not learn how to name until Lanny disappeared.

After Dreams of the Dead All Night, My Father

I wake late, bones aching and stiff.
A busy night of dead sisters

and living sibyls, a mother
somewhere, stirring the pot.

My ignorant calendar tells me
to send my brother a birthday card.

He'd be 76 on Wednesday, catching up
with our sister, now both are ash. I bought

tiny cork-stoppered bottles, thinking to collect
everyone, line them up on the mantle,

now I'm not so sure, I have my father, maybe
he's all I need, my blood,

my horse, shambling through family
in a flail, a smolder. The parentheses around

my father and me raising the hair
on the back of my neck, I conjure him,

he strides hobble-gaited through all the watchkeepers,
they can't see him and if they did, he'd seem a fool.

Inside the pale gold glass, ash sticks
together, wanting to hold some form,

Catalina

for Gloria

How did we decide—you nodded right or left,
I followed. Did we tell our parents—how
did we get there neither of us

had a car or a license. In the photo we sit smoking
on a blanket on what must be a beach
although you can't see the ocean—maybe

it's a hotel swimming pool. Bikinis, my sly, shy
almond eyes. Your mouth prim, your body
already hatching your future. Seniors in high school,

college freshmen, I remember nothing
but being there, *Catalina, 26 miles across the sea,*
the Avalon Ballroom's graceful decay lording it over

daytrippers like us. We took a rickshaw,
night came with the usual terrors. You
went out on a boat with a stranger,

he had a yacht or was pretending to be
a man with a yacht. I don't remember where
I slept or how we got home. Just this photo,

smoke from my Lucky
a curtain drawn across my face.

On Funerals

Over the land bridge to Idaho,
when my father died we didn't

it's how the Eskimos got there
and the Portuguese, my aunt's

family, rows of Berriochoas
in Shoshone, animate as dust

swirling above ground, but when
my father died we just went home.

Africa, the Great Wall, we re-hung
the wallpaper in the corner cathedral,

we swept up the dust from Chernobyl
and fed each other with eyedroppers.

Now they come so fast, it's hard
to keep track, my brother my sister

eventual only eighty years ago, now ellipses
in my mother's autobiography. Oh yes,

she started it, my mother, with her June
snowfall, the monks gathering in their yellow,

her purple bruises, her flesh too yielding,
as if she were melting there in the salt flats

now each flies off after her, massive wing-beats,
we are already forgotten.