

Three Portraits

## **Diet Coke**

*For Ruth*

She wakes,  
too early each morning.  
Drinks a cloud of cigarette  
smoke,  
a silver-lined  
can of Coke.  
No sugar,  
just Aspartame,  
the chemical name  
of withdrawal,  
headache,  
craving.

Her once-blonde hair  
is spiked gunmetal,  
An ex-Marine-  
turned-schoolteacher  
with solder in her voice,  
her mani-pedi,  
her Oklahoma manners,  
cursing  
battery-acid blue  
over imperfect  
pancakes.

I'm awake,  
too early  
on a Saturday  
hungover,  
headache,  
craving.  
She's lost one  
breast to cancer,  
an Amazon,  
my best friend's mother  
is the sunrise  
at the end of the world.

Honey, she says,

when life hands you lemons,  
you paint that shit gold.

## **We Used To Be Friends**

*For Lenore*

I don't need your malicious charity,  
a vile and multipurpose contraption  
like the holographic portrait of Jesus Christ  
for sale at a kiosk in the mall.

It's hard to forget your face,  
Sloppy, bland,  
violent and slick,  
a banshee screaming  
inside a torn and faded midnight.

How could I forget our years spent living in the language ghetto?  
Or the empty bottle of Bombay Sapphire, with  
your fake fingernails endlessly flashing like the  
witch-lights in the desert.

I've forgotten about lunch at the Wildflower Cafe,  
salmon caesar salad with capers and a lavender-peach smoothie,  
while outside it was snowing and you offered me a cigarette  
from a crumpled pack of 27's. I inhaled,  
and thought about the rhythm and blues of malfunctioning lungs.

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## **Moonlighting**

*For Maez*

When I was very small  
you took me outside, at night,  
to photograph the moon.

I wore duct-tape shoes,  
you carried a tripod.

I have never told you this,  
but with your lens pointed to the sky,  
I thought you were taking a self-portrait.

I still believe that.