

## When I Was

When I was young, I gave a tangerine  
to a baby to see what would happen.

At first, his mouth an unwound flower  
of thin lips and throbbing gums, he gnawed  
its curves for hours, savoring the chill

smoothness of the skin, the give of the flesh,  
God's walls bursting inside. Each day

I gave him another fruit to teeth on,  
to slather, to happily press the stigma  
of his tongue against until he knew

the scent, shape, color of a tangerine  
across a room, and would leap lovingly

from my hip whenever we passed  
the produce aisle. One morning, rolling  
a beautiful mandarin in his mouth,

a barely broken tooth tore the rind

to the bitter white, an invisible sliver

of glass waiting for a foot to remind  
the world it was something else once.

He cried, his mouth shocked wide, learned

to distrust his heart at an early age.

I thought that might be good for the boy.

## Medicine

*for Sylvia and her mother*

For a nosebleed: drop  
something cold, a coin or key,  
the length of your back.

Wicked lumbago  
needs brown paper ironed hot,  
pressed into the small.

To improve eyesight,  
pierce your ears and get some gold.  
Silver does nothing.

Rheumatism: carry  
a young spud in your pocket.  
Or soak in Epsom.

Sore throat: tie a wool  
stocking round your neck; Father's  
sweaty sock will do.

Linseed, lime for burns.

Boiled onion poultice for ears.

Bread poultice for boils.

Bluebag for bee stings.

Warm cow dung for carbuncle,

or draw the devil

out with a hot glass.

Rub butter on a bumped head,

fig leaf on a bruise.

In case of a cut,

a little whiskey leeches rust.

It's good to let dogs

lick an open wound,

but only those you know well,

not some thin-boned stray.

Next, to clot the cut,

use cobwebs, fresh cigar ash,

in a pinch, sugar.

Egg water causes warts,

and touching toads. Spin horsehair  
around your finger,

or daub with sow thistle.

If that cure fails, steal a piece  
of meat. Rub the wart

into the cold chop.

Bury it in the garden.

Tell no one. The flesh

and the wart decay  
together. Some say you need  
a dead cat. Jabber—

any meat will do.

No, what we make we make in  
hiding, in burial.

## A Love Poem

*What did you see?* you asked later, drowsy,  
your mermaid hair floating past my pillow.  
I saw the way we leaned to kiss, how we  
made cairns of our cold feet, spun up shivers  
from still places in our bodies, then fell asleep.  
Queen of noses, Vitruvian wife, worried  
nursemaid to the world's most delicate dog,  
remembrist of first things, spontaneous  
cupcake baker, teacher of small children,  
teacher of just one unforgotten child—  
I thought, what a mother you'll make, Jenny.

I saw too how your fear would ache into  
panic, beebuzzed by unchecked burners, un-  
pulled doors, always waiting for a beltfall,  
some fate you might, you should have seen coming:  
scuffed heels, uncoastered cups, germs or burglars.  
So many days you sat in the driveway,  
eyes shaking, willing yourself: Turn the key.

And yet, somehow, you loved enough to risk  
the inevitable earthquakes of my grief.

Somehow, hours ago, weeks pregnant, you leapt  
into the shower again, fully clothed,  
shoes soaked, mascara bruising the porcelain,  
to catch me, collapsed by a memory.

I saw you, the mother you'd always been,  
the family I never thought would have me.

## Kin

Remember this, then.

There is a girl at the edge  
of town, window jimmied, slipping  
lumps of scrambled egg and hard toast  
out onto the damp side of the sill.

Morning fog's bitten off all  
but the nearest branches of the family  
sycamore, and the family of crows  
living there, chittering, churning  
the clouds with their wings.

There's a line of objects laid neatly  
along the dry side of the windowsill:  
a pebble, a paper clip, can tabs, beachglass,  
earrings, buttons, a cat's broken femur,  
the silver half of a heart.

She waits with her nosetip cold  
to the pane, quietly breathing herself  
into the swirl of an old man's beard,  
until one by one, dewhooded



and coin-eyed, the crows come

clutching gifts, offering trade.

## Dropped Tanka

We all learn one day:  
something dropped is something lost.  
'Out of reach' means 'gone  
forever', bits of childhood locked  
in a mirror of pond water.

He watches my mouth, *lost*,  
*lost*, thrusts against the railing  
reaching for the spot  
of the splash where the tiger  
was thrown, dove, and disappeared.

Once below, all sound  
stops. The plastic tiger sinks,  
watching a boy cry  
by skyfuls this cold, wet world,  
this eternal inch of silt.