

## COFFEE

It used to be  
we'd find refuge in the ritual,  
find calm in drinking darkness,  
linger over smoky steam  
until the snow let up.  
Warm our hands against  
a cup of brewed bitterness,  
you in your fingerless gloves  
and me in my sweater  
from the lost and found.  
There was no need for words  
on those mornings;  
just time in the same space.

Now it's been light years,  
maybe more, since we've seen  
the same stars,  
found the same moon.  
There's so little of everything  
these days.  
But I keep fresh ground  
stored in my freezer  
and wait for that morning  
I can pour you a reason  
to stay and watch the sun  
burn off the fog  
that came in the night.

Maybe this winter  
if we're around  
the same center of the world,  
on no particular morning,  
I'll see you standing  
under a rising sun,  
empty mug in hand.  
But until then  
I drink the darkness  
alone.

## CIGARETTE

There it was  
just lying on the sidewalk.  
I was walking along  
the Iowa River  
while drizzle fell  
from a metal-gray sky.  
I watched the river roll on,  
like people who walk in  
and out of your life,  
taking parts with them  
and leaving some behind.  
And there it was.  
At my feet,  
below the hem of my  
billowing dress,  
whole and unsmoked,  
only slightly flattened,  
a Camel cigarette.  
Perhaps you dropped it  
the night before  
when we walked back  
from the bar.  
I picked it up  
and continued home,  
rolling it between my fingers,  
stroking it from end to end.  
I even smelled it to see  
how old the tobacco was.  
I saw my reflection  
as I approached the glass door  
to my building.  
The sleeves of my dress  
flapped in the wind,  
my hair that you made fun of  
the night before, was held back  
from my face by a blue bandana.  
How would that look  
with a lit cigarette?  
What is the word  
you would use?  
When in the quiet  
lonesome of my room  
I sat and fondled  
this unlit cigarette,

imagined the smoke  
filling my lungs,  
then rising out  
from between my lips.  
I held it gracefully,  
knowing you would be glad  
if I indulged,  
then left it  
on my windowsill  
for I had no one  
to smoke it with  
or you here  
to offer me  
a light.

## **DIVORCE PAPERS**

They came in the mail.  
An official decree from the State,  
stamped with the hefty weight  
of finality.

I see your name, the Petitioner,  
then mine the Respondent, read the box  
marked: DISSOLUTION OF MARRIAGE.  
I take up a pen, and stare at the line  
that waits for my signature.

How did it come to this?  
What seemed so long to create  
can so easily be dissolved with the stroke of my pen?  
As if I could rewrite almost twenty years;  
just cross out those months in the Mojave,  
or erase our favorite bakery in Bishop.  
When did we forget the joy of sharing  
a well-toasted marshmallow, and instead  
decide to let it burn?

DISSOLUTION OF MARRIAGE. The line calls  
for my mark, like checking off a list;  
contempt built amidst the dirty dishes,  
trust lost over an unfixed latch,  
indifference amassed. Our names undone,  
un-committed, un-joined.

I know that so much more would have to happen  
to see destiny in each other again.  
Certain words can't be unsaid, missteps retraced.  
I know there's no veil or bouquet this time,  
no begging for absolution.

But facing these papers, these pages of finality,  
I think of you, of us, and the weight  
of so many years  
and I put down my pen.

## HIS HANDS

What I remember most, are his hands;  
knuckles like walnuts, rough but steady.

I've watched those hands  
stitch the wounds of my brothers,  
and heard them shuffle and click  
the mahjong pieces together.

His firm, wide palm  
slapped my cheeks for drinking,  
and felt my head for fever,  
cupped my chin to remind me  
I was a tenuous child.

The one I wed  
will never shake those hands,  
or feel them slap his back.  
Those hands are gone,  
or perhaps at rest,  
waiting to reappear  
in the bloodlines.

His hands don't wipe my tears when I cry,  
or stroke my hair when I sleep.  
But sometimes I feel  
their weight on my shoulders,  
or hear those mahjong pieces click.

## THE MINE

I wonder if you can still hear  
the breathing of men  
working in the mountain.  
Sometimes at night maybe,  
listen for the sound of them  
digging and hauling,  
granite through granite,  
hope in their chests,  
winded with grit  
through their arms and legs.  
Tested resolve.  
And what did they find  
in the dark mouth  
of the mine?  
Can you smell it in the air?  
Not just the burning  
of salt and silver,  
but their own ore-bearing sense  
of purpose, like the rock  
or roots in the earth.  
The mine is gone,  
no longer a pit or a tunnel;  
just a place outside town  
at the canyon's end,  
where kids smoke  
and lovers hide  
testing their own resolve.