

## The Sky is a Nursery Rhyme

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In my gold slip I remember  
trying to figure out why dirt was brown  
with a mug and a spoon

all of the statues

holding up books  
like the gift I wasn't allowed to touch  
the heavy fox I picked up to prove I could  
bringing my small blue veins to the surface

we took turns  
riding granddad's wheelchair  
and the saddle on the crate  
for the combined feeling of cowboy

I want to be a country  
girl again

10

A paperweight  
on grandmother's desk  
holds down my early post-its

me in her gold slip  
playing with a gold letter opener

watching cable by the week  
until all my teeth were new

that's a mental saddle  
I want to climb into  
with stirrups for my Pumas

a gold slip and clip-on earrings  
is something to hold onto  
when it's time to get back together  
with myself

20

not very different now  
from the mug and the spoon  
every finished book feels like  
adding a notch to a belt I know I'll lose

racking up dreams that fall out of  
the backpack of a motorcycle

my future's  
still on sight  
behind me

25

why are the best events  
rarer than Rosemary's steak

when I find the urgency  
will it be picket fence or line

I walk seven blocks to the pizza shop  
looking for my huckleberry friends

Altadena comes up as a birthday present  
the firefighters yell to get out of the way  
you'd think there'd be fewer blazes now  
with all of the vape pens

a hike on fire but blessed with shade  
you could fall asleep with your eyes open  
a man in the bar will say it's a good thing  
bartenders aren't ice skaters

I hate this kind of banter  
my sleight of hand  
Is staying on sight  
discreetly

## Country Manners

It was flooding at the airport in Texas.  
A group of German students stood outside;  
their healthy bodies, sweatpants and sneakers  
getting rained on.

Walk lifting your heavy wet sleeves,  
said the Zen master.

Coming back from Cancun, a teen in a  
ten-gallon hat lifts his shirt to run his fingers over his abs.  
My diary is poured over my head like Gatorade.

Invisible hands shake out every last drop  
'til I'm swimming inside of myself,  
and the boy returns to unremarkable.

I sit in a red brasserie, messing with my hoodie.  
More efficient travel girls nearby keep their Camelbacks on.  
They don't have time like mine to pick up a heavy glass of water.

My library book's wrapper—plastic and embarrassing—  
ripples off onto the floor and lands on the entertainment section  
of a used up newspaper. I sign the check as I pretend to sober up  
after pretending to be drunk.

The plane is delayed, an option to remain for money  
hangs in the air. I do crave Texas, that hat,  
cold water.

I wore a key tied around the strings of my hoodie.  
So time became a bump and slap against my chest while I walked.

What a feeling for your feet to leave the ground.

Cracks in the leather scratch my arms, but  
I would rather feel age than nothing.

## Purple Response

In Savannah I am fanned  
by dripping leaves, Christmas trees  
as I walk by slick ugly cars  
in clothes too big to fit in

each statue tries to make its case to me  
like clipboards outside the grocery store

Christmas is sort of nasty, a stale marshmallow  
upsets and attracts me

the nutcracker projection  
sliding across the department store wall  
is an italic exception

the wedding had more troops than booze  
but still I got drunk and whispered  
pacific secrets to my boo

out of nowhere a white beard starts telling us that  
Isis is occupying the border of Texas and Mexico

I picture the handkerchiefed figures of his mind, mine?  
I picture a Youtube video with subtitles, arrows, red underline  
his thumb on the edge of the mouse twitching  
his righteousness setting off the smoke alarm

I know the difference between a debate and play  
I walk away and the curtain drops behind me

later, looking through a chute  
at the bottom of a brick wall  
I imagine I'm a sailor pressed up against  
a round window to the sea  
dreaming about hard earth

I throw my heels down the chute leading  
from the street into the club  
they bounce off a disco ball  
break a dancer's glass and start a fight—  
I slip around a purple corner

## Shallow Hymn

I'm magnanimous  
the humidifier on all night  
dosed with rosemary oil

I can still taste the espresso like poison  
that I thought would pump me up  
cause they said this child was trouble

I hope my imagination isn't too anemic  
to find us something to do  
the kid gets a nosebleed ASAP

he starts a diorama,  
I'm not going to stop that

strands of tinsel stage directions and strings of light  
he holds auditions for the nativity characters  
Mary doesn't make it

I'm starting to feel the smell of the holiday  
in the back of my brain  
as the house explodes with energy, pizza, TV

sweet child  
I'm guilty that the whole house is a wet Christmas tree  
when your parents come home vacuum-sealed in stress

the ugly pillow says  
*It is Well with My Soul*  
in the trend of stitched in script

I looked it up

Bliss wrote it after his entire family died

a different man  
sang it acapella on an airplane  
unsolicited to a crying woman  
he tell us on his CD  
he thought she could use it

it's not boasting if it's a blessing

## The Limited

without a word she sweeps  
with a beanie worn low over her eyebrows  
it seems she's taken a vow of silence

my puffy coat makes the pew  
almost comfortable and I'm surprised  
when the monks walk out  
even though I know  
it's always otherworldly  
to see anyone in uniform  
to hear anyone chanting

I can barely hear them  
god must be eating this up  
heat would be rising with the dust  
if there was any

I feel as shallow as the pages of a magazine  
looking at my hands together for "prayer"  
feels like trying on a hat

they do this seven times a day  
this part of the church is called the nave  
they bend over, half-lift, at the chorus  
maybe a little wink at hell

one of them doesn't kneel  
Dad says, knees  
the brace under his robe  
probably creaks

city-style self-denial is a cleanse  
I'm pretty sure these men  
drink stone soup

I start imagining how I would look  
with a brown robe wrapped around my shiny pages

we buy icons—solemn weight for my style  
and soap for Mom's hands, I pray

make me grave like a monk's knee

and infinitely down to earth

take away my city vision  
the everlasting movie  
of everything I see  
of these monks specifically,  
a brown robe checking the mail  
with its hood up  
in the snow