

What Counts

Let's get Everything

You like these? you ask
and toss them in the cart.
Then we stride down the aisle
kissing but with your ten million
arms whirling in more, like a fan
in motion so I barely notice.

Taxes

They take out a little each month
but because your job
is real, a little is a lot. *But isn't it
relative?* I say *if everyone has to pay?* I can tell
you're still thinking about it like a pie
chart and what's missing
which reminds you to surprise
me with some kind of next-
level dessert soon.

You Look Good

With your fresh cut and your aviators
and your Burt's Bees lips. No argument
here. I'm waiting for you
to come out of the dressing room
in your tangerine pants. You look
so happy. Like there's a monkey
on your shoulder. I can see you
in your swivel chair. *How do you pronounce
BVLGARI?* I ask, fingering
the glass over the glasses. *You don't.*

I Don't Get It

It's like we're a special effect.
I don't know why you took us here.
*We're on vacation. No
we're not.* Confusing
the waiter: *I'm great with a water!*
Which is horrifying you: *just get the drink.*
I don't get it but I do. On our walk home
I pick up lucky

pennies to embarrass
you. *Another one!*
One more. Every
second counts.

god and me

As you can guess I no longer
care about god. Whether he is watching
or not, logging on to some complicated
system to check on me, I don't care.
It's a free show. When I was younger,
when I was a teenager, I cared
deeply about god. It was
dangerous. I thought god could be
proud of me. That if I buried my face in his jacket
he would take me around the party and
I wouldn't have to introduce myself to
strangers. God and I were like lovers who became
jealous too easily. I asked people questions
like *Oh have you seen god?*
We were supposed to meet
for coffee at two. And then, pressing the issue
Has he ever done this to you? I obsessed
over him and knew we could never be together
ever again. Sometimes I would create tests,
seeing if he might come back, by jumping
off buildings or becoming far too dark
for anybody to bear. It was a very bad
time for me but now I don't care.
We've become like distant friends who still know
the same people. The other day
I casually asked my friend
how god was doing and she said *Great!*
God is great.
If I see a photo of god's
kids on facebook I will like it,
to further prove I have no lingering
feelings about god's love and god's authority.

The Family Christmas Party

It would be wrong to tell you it was a party
without explaining the rules of the games.
Because every party has a loser
and winners know the loser's name.

Life

Game one. Greetings to all.
Act like you're having a ball.
Kiss on one cheek
for merry, and the other
for Christmas. Now wave,
like a beauty queen, across the room
to no one in particular, but like Uncle X says:
staying busy keeps
you out of trouble.

Family Feud

Game two. Screw it.
Order a screwdriver.
Happy birthday to anyone!
Keep your hands by your side. Read like
you're the embodiment of fear. Exude pain
(un)straight from your posture. Find the little ones
and slur something about reindeers being metaphors
for the cycle of sickness. So near
that bearded flight-risk
and no one told the truth! Ruin the myth.
Lie in the bed everyone else lied in. The problem
with your transparency is that it's not
your problem. Round two is meant for someone
like you. So keep sipping and leaking and losing
and before you know it you'll be winning.

Final Jeopardy

Game three. Odd number, odd timing, odd
winter. It's that old memory game and it's
hard, now that you are all drenched in vinos veritas
and conscious as a camera.
What exactly do you remember? What exactly can you
forget. Suddenly you'd rather be sleepless, and alone
than sucking thumb on memory foam.

The Fight

Is that our apartment? you say
as I swing around to find you leaning
against the doorway.

Down in the shoebox
it is summer. The bonsai trees are arranged
at random, their stubs stuck with hot
glue. I've cut the cardboard windows open
with an exact-o knife to let the light in, a quick
spritz of febreze showering
down on us. At our corkscrew
table, you are dense like a bear, the chair
underneath you tilted and stained
a tinted pink from popsicles. I raise your
clay elbow and close your fist
around a Blue Moon, the foam I make
overflow with cotton. I leave my wiry
back to you, chopping bits of real orange
slices at the counter, the knife just an extension
of my actual arm twisted
down. *What's*

that? you ask, coming
closer. You kneel down next to me,
your eyes aligning with the jagged
slits of our bedroom
window. *It's not*
us I say, believing it.

Late-Night Pick-Up

1.

Mom wakes us up in the middle
of the night, says *hello my sleepyheads*
and *I know* when we tell her
we are so sleepy. She tugs coats
on over our PJ's, then buckles us
into the van. We wait chattering
our teeth, till the ice melts
on the windshield. James and I
stay awake, with Connor slumped
asleep in his car-seat. I poke at his veined
eyelids, watch them flutter up. I imagine
he is dreaming about bottles, coffee tables,
all the things you get to see, crawling
around on the carpet. When he starts to fuss
Mom catches eyes in the rearview.
I put my hands in my lap.

2.

It's so boring, to drive and
drive in the dark past
the CITGO sign. James and I
say *tell us a story*
tell us a story! and Mom asks
to be *specific* and I say *love story*
and James says *outer space*
at the same time. Mom tells us the story
about how she met Dad
when he cooked at Rocco's
but we already know how it goes
because we ask her to tell it to us
over and over. The parts I remember
most are how Dad wore suspenders
when nobody else did
crazy guy Mom says and we ask *how crazy*
and Mom says *messy-hair crazy*.
It was New Year's Eve and Dad walked straight
up to her table, then took her walking, late
at night and showed her Sam Adam's
statues in the city. There are only
a few cars on the road.
Mom turns up the heat.

3.

We wait for Dad in the back parking lot. It takes forever, even when we can hear his voice, like we're in a movie theater, from inside the car. The guys standing by the back door are smoking cigarettes. He says things like *Atta boy* and *See you Mike-ay!* then pats them real hard on the back, like he's saving them from a choke. When he heads towards us he floats, into the smoke from the exhaust. I watch him climb into the front seat. His shirt is always stained with red splotches. The door to the van slams. He leans his head back on the headrest. He lets out a short *argh*. Mom turns to look at him as she's pulling out. The car fills with his scent: soy sauce, onion, sweat. Now I pretend to sleep, with hair in my face like Cousin-It. This way I can listen. And when they get quiet I still smell him. A sizzle of steak in the close of his fists, or a giant pot opening in the mess of his hair, how the heat sticks up after he grips it back.

Only

You're five minutes late I snap
then hang up. In the car I sigh
an exaggerated breath: as if to tell
my mother, I am hungry
and itchy, and hot. *What did you do*
this morning she asks, driving the speed
limit, which sickens me. I checked
my bank account and felt foolish
in the mirror, but say *This is*
the morning, my mouth already
sore from speaking, then manage *your hair*
looks weird as she slows
at a light. She's taking
me dress shopping, and my abuse
my mother as I punch punch
punch the anxious
rage into her,
stuffing like the cheeks of a clown
as they bulge, deep
from the cold ache of baby
teeth growing crooked
in my stomach. *You understand?* I scream
as she expands the air
around us, going up slowly
old-ly, only, like a fish
as we rise from underneath.