

# *AFTERTHOUGHT*

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*To my mother, father, sister, and everyone else who has ever influenced me.  
If you see yourself in these poems, you are there.  
Embrace it.*

## Table of Contents

For Zitkala-Sa	1
Peeling calluses	2
To my mother's ex-lover	3
Little hurts	4
Caesura	6
Carolina	7
Known	8
Goldfish metaphor for relationships	9
Secrets	10
Short answer	11
Episodes	12
Like Calls to Like	13
Crystallization	14
Tell Me	15
Delineation	16
Sorry	18
Slough	19
Victimhooded	20
Super-ego	21
A Moral	22
Apostrophe for the Angel of Mercy	23
Consider this:	24

Reflection (Variation 2)	25
Bed down	26
Slang	27
Taken	28
Consider	29
A Drink to Nature's Course	30
Manifestation	31
In memorium	32
Levee-breaking	33
Prediction	34
Overture	35
And you tell me I'm petty	36
_____	37
Remedy	38
Impermanence	39
Taking Care	40
To Sleep	42
Chasing El Dorado	43
Strung out	46
Legacy	47
Derived	48
Reflection (Variation 1)	49



*For Zitkala-Sa*

Redbird, your mother reaches for wind as  
my mother reaches for her late lover's hand  
yet we both know there is no use in grasping  
the untouchable; as your shadow stretches  
far behind, is chained to your ankles, but  
can't be held, no matter how fast you chase,  
as my almost step-father lies beneath red clay,  
forever enclosed in that chilled embrace, no  
matter how the memory of him lingers  
in the hallways of our quiet home.

You went with them because you wanted more  
than wind and shadows; you wanted something  
you could hand your mother, something more  
than what the prairie offers. But the ones who  
took you cut your long hair in the name of  
knowledge; took your soft-soled moccasins.  
They tried to take parts of you that weren't theirs.  
To make over, they tried to destroy the only home  
you ever knew. And I know how it feels to have part  
of you scorned by those you trusted. We are our father's

daughters, no matter how it pains our mothers.  
Knowledge leaves you with an emptiness,  
speaking verses and platitudes so there is no  
language, for you, left. Redbird, I know it's hard  
to hold back the seething mass behind your  
black eyes when freedom is no choice. When  
there is nowhere because you made your choice  
before you ever knew the consequences. Mothers  
can forgive but they never forget. I know. Now  
I ask you, woman warrior, she who bleeds ink

and prairie dust over the pages of her stories, will you  
forgo the fall from faith in yourself? Is it enough to know

you may never catch your shadow as it stretches on forever?

*Peeling calluses*

She learned how to knit in high school  
when she needed something to do  
with her hands, when she needed to avoid  
digging scabs into scars and dripping  
across the pages of her textbooks.  
She needed something more physical  
than scratching pen across paper  
and she hated sports. But, on her skin,  
yarn was soft the way words never were,  
the way she thought they should be,  
inspiring her to wrap them around  
smooth sticks of needles and twist  
and pull in and out and around, until  
they were reborn. A scarf, later a hat.  
Later, a white blanket for the child  
her cousin didn't have. She couldn't  
make or wear turtlenecks, but the hold  
of her first creation around her neck  
was a comfort, even if someday  
she was reminded of a noose.

*To my mother's ex-lover*

You never tried taming her  
because you understood that  
changing her is sin. You saw  
she is more than a mother,  
also woman and bitter coffee  
and little girl wonder, ever stubborn  
and you let her always be right  
the way my father couldn't.

I never had the chance to  
thank you, strange man who  
entered my mother's life to leave her  
loved better than before. And I know  
you never intended to go, that,  
so understanding of how she felt  
that social sting of a failed marriage,  
you waited for her to be ready, but  
it was already too late. When she said  
you were proud of me, we cried.

*Little hurts*

My mother said later  
she thought I was  
*being murdered*  
I screamed so loud.

Fear-wrinkles deforming  
before my watery eyes,  
she learned that I had  
merely been stung by a

yellow jacket. Its stinger  
plunged, relatively shallow,  
into the delicate-thin skin  
of my ankle only once;

my subsequent howling  
a hindrance to her chores,  
she helped me inside  
and stationed me on

a kitchen chair to watch  
over as she continued  
to clean the counter she  
thought was cluttered.

\*

Summer sun glittered off  
soap bubbles on the lawn  
as my sister and I hung  
laundry out to dry.  
We wandered barefoot,  
grass stalks bending  
beneath us, clover  
cushions; only  
the ant mounds

to fear. But yellow  
jackets nest below  
the surface. And soap  
is sweet. And skin thin.

\*

And all my mother could do  
was wrap my ankle in ice.

## *Caesura*

You hear the doorbell ring on a Thursday in the middle of May or June; one long note that breaks the silence you've been in since he left and the door is so far away but you still watch it, ice clinking in your glass as you sway and, if it were him, he would've come in— he has the key or does he? Did he leave it like he left that shirt in the dirty laundry, the one you found because you were looking for the smallest excuse he could use to come back? But he hasn't come back or he would've come back in through that door and it's ringing again, maybe, you're still not sure if it rang the first time— and who would be at your door? Don't they know you're not ready for company and you really can't come to the door right now but it's stopped. You listen. The house echoes with emptiness again. You slump back into the cushions of the couch you had bought together and wait.

*Carolina*

“The vine bears three kinds of grapes: the first of pleasure, the second of intoxication,  
the third of disgust. -Diogenes”

The sharp tang of muscadines  
combined with the sweat of my  
brow as I pounded those dark  
grapes down onto a tarp. There  
on the ground, I found myself

reminiscing about those  
thirty days spent in a field  
ablaze, Indian summer  
haze, as my grandmother would  
say, when I was younger than

my sons now. And how could I  
ever forget the sound of  
grapes hitting ground like buckshot  
rounds fired into the thick of  
it all. We were so small then,

too little for nothing good  
to come of getting lost in  
grape-vine forests until we  
were harnessed to test the strength  
of the brew. I could never

get used to the sting of the  
fruit, juicy-tart, blackberry-  
stain-dark, and the whistle of  
switch-skin-blood. Or how the scars  
dug into my skin like plugs.

It was too much. But now, I  
am all grown. Now, I am not  
alone. How could I ever  
call that home, now that I know

what I was always missing?

*Known*

My father calls me  
*angry*, my sister  
*anxious*, my mother  
*sensitive*.

I had a friend's mother  
call me her favorite.  
That friend told me  
so: "You are my  
mother's favorite."  
*Child* was understood.

And, yes, I have been  
called that too. That and  
*girl, woman*, and  
*bitch*.

Yet none of these  
are my name.

### *Goldfish metaphor for relationships*

you get your first one when you're young and your parents ask if you are ready are you responsible enough and then you discover that goldfish are harder to keep alive than you thought and you still remember the way its body looked when you flushed it down the toilet drain and you are twenty two fresh out of college and you know enough now to Google how to properly take care of them how to give them space and a clean environment with nothing clouding the water how to feed it just enough that it doesn't starve or burst and it lasts more than two days then two weeks then it's still fucking alive two months later when you just get busy (that's what you tell yourself and the others when they ask) but the truth is it dies a couple days later than you thought it would and you don't think about that until years later and you're at his house and he has goldfish and you wake up with him one day and one of them is dead and now you know no matter how many you get they will never be the way you thought they would

*Secrets*

She's the best thing that's ever happened to him  
and we know it. He's said it. And we've heard it  
more than we've ever cared to. I'd try to tell her

to run but I don't think she'd listen. He tried  
to tie her down the only way he knew how,  
tried to trap her but he didn't even have a ring

to hold her with, just a meaningless proposition  
made with haste and not nearly enough benefits  
to sweeten the pot. And it's no secret that he wouldn't

be able to afford gold this time but he keeps  
landing on his feet, face pointed up towards the sun  
like a bad penny. I taste the copper in my blood.

*Short answer*

I haven't gone home in three weeks, almost four, and, at this point, I'm not even sure which house I would go to. The one where I grew up hasn't been gutted yet somehow still feels empty. It has that same china cabinet in the corner of the living room, even if the couch it's hidden behind is different.

Some things haven't stayed the same, but they're close enough that they aren't missed. Half the family is gone so maybe that's it. Only Mom and the cat stayed and, I guess, it's a little obvious. Now it's quieter. There's a new house down the road a-ways that my sister has fled to. Dad gave her a new

bedroom to fill with plants, books, and clothes she can leave across the floor. He got a new girlfriend and she came with two cats and a dog. That house is full of pets and people, but this is harder than I thought it would be. I've had this question on my mind for almost four weeks and I still haven't come up with an answer.

## *Episodes*

### ***Obligation***

I could not stand the shame  
of being saved. To owe a stranger,  
or worse, for something I never  
asked them to do. How  
could I ever be grateful? How  
ever could I not be? They loved me;  
they had to. Yet I am on the cusp  
of unforgiving.

### ***Recognition***

Then I stood in front of my sister  
and asked for forgiveness. I cannot  
take away the pain or undo what I  
have done but I can regret it.

Where was I when she needed me?

Days blurred and I find my reasoning  
cowardly but there are worse things  
I could do, even if I cannot  
think of any now.

### ***Supposition***

Why can't peace come easy  
like the trickle of snowmelt  
over smooth stones in  
a once-thrashing river  
or more likely unearthed  
from its tomb as  
a blooming vine, a sweet-  
scented, deep-rooted,  
thorned thicket that,  
lasts long enough  
to die, cuts as it clings?

*Like Calls to Like*

You have never been clean. You emerged  
ripping her cocoon-like, covered  
in viscera, the taste of pennies rolling  
down your scream-torn throat and hers.  
Don't preach to me of virtue. Don't speak  
to me at all; I have stopped listening  
for your apology. Let's go back to the beginning—  
you and her, you and the first woman you hurt,  
another woman who hoped you would be  
different. She didn't know that the only thought  
you had for her was of what use she would be  
for you. And you used her. Within her, you  
transformed, butterfly-esque. I hope you know  
the facts about butterflies. I hope you know that  
for every sweet thing you drink from, you'll never  
fill up. You'll always be ravenous for that  
rotten shit you've been rolling in since birth.

## *Crystallization*

I had a baby and named her  
Honey  
    because she was so sweet  
and fresh and raw My Honey loved  
sugar  
    the white kind  
I'd sprinkle on sliced strawberries  
    clinging in clumps to my  
hands  
stained red she'd stretch her  
tiny body across the kitchen counter  
    and across the cutting board  
into the flour                    sending it up  
into the air  
    like smoke I would beat  
the bread  
    in time with her heart I made  
her pies      strawberries  
and sugar  
sprinkled sweetly onto the crust My Honey loved  
the taste  
of things and            never crossed her face  
a sour look    and never crossed her face  
a sweeter smile      than the ones  
she had for me

My Honey  
left me in the spring of  
    strawberry blooms  
and late frost            clinging to her skin  
the chill like the white blanket  
I wrapped her in My Honey  
and my rolling pin both  
interred beneath the den

never to be seen again

*Tell Me*

Call me terrified. I am  
a known coward. We both  
know it's true. We both  
know how often I've failed  
to follow through with  
the simple things  
that all adults should know  
how to do; you know,  
those things I can't do.  
Well, call me yellow-bellied—  
though, if I showed you  
my stomach, you would  
see only stretch marks.  
It's not so easy to hide  
from; still, I've tried.  
So, you there, call me  
quitter and I'll say, *I know*.

*Delineation*

In the way that a precipice

promises a fall  
an end  
a beginning  
of an edge  
a choice of one or the other  
or neither, not both

But more the promise

of the way that a precipice  
is there for you

You are  
there at it

That precipice

waiting at the edge of your  
feet where you are  
toeing that line

That line

That precipice

in that way  
that you have made it

On sand  
it shifts itself Immovable  
on stone and which  
is your  
headspace made of

Depending on  
where  
that line  
is crossed

that precipice

## *Sorry*

I guess she knows better now  
than to trust my promises, how  
I never mean it to be as bad as  
it is, but I have such a hard time  
keeping my word. It's strange  
how I've always been good  
at quitting, but no one's ever  
said I was a good liar. But  
no one's ever known me the way  
I do. It's only a lie if you don't  
believe it and I believe everything.  
I'm gullible. And she told me  
it was written on the wall, but,  
when I looked, I saw only a mirror.

## *Slough*

The way a snake sheds its skin,  
she learned shame: in layers,  
instinctive and unavoidable.  
It was part of her always,  
taking many forms, yet  
never dead, dying, or  
gone. And she learned to  
crawl on her belly, writhing  
across wherever she is  
now that she is no longer  
here with me. And maybe  
she is better off, shedding  
her skin in a more hospitable  
environment. I could never  
begrudge her that. I will miss  
the days, though, when I  
could see her freshly scarred.

*Victimhooded*

I offer up my throat the way a lamb  
shouldn't, in that same way a lamb  
would know not to if only a lamb  
were designated for something more  
than someone else's sacrifice. If only  
sacrifice didn't take so many forms.  
If only wolves were not men,  
who disguised themselves among  
lambs, who twisted their silver tongues  
red and left the red of lamb-tongue  
as a reminder of its history and future,  
as a marker of its pleas, spilt upon  
the fertile ground. I can be as violent as  
I want so long as it stays in the shadows  
of metaphorical mountains, guarded  
by shepherds, tended to as a lamb  
would be, if only it were not consumed.

*Super-ego*

I've been fighting for her  
to blur the lines or  
to remove them  
altogether for her  
personhood is not  
unknown to him  
except that it is  
he does not know  
her as she does  
I do not know her  
too I believe in  
believing in her  
ability to be  
which is different  
from believing  
in who she should  
be and who should  
she be unless herself  
not her self made  
by him or me

*A Moral*

I have never not loved you  
as an author would. The way  
you take my words, move them  
inside to drip about your ribcage  
like bleeding ink. Your finger trips  
over the motion of my mouth,  
a joint plea to stop the words  
from spilling out and rising to  
the edges of your ankles again.  
Your clavicle wounds me in its  
peek-a-boo play; each tip a ridge  
of braille obliquely spelling what  
I can't take credit for. I know envy  
and her sister would ruin what  
pleasure I find in knowing the lines  
of your face and thighs. But what  
does it mean to covet, when I cover  
your hands with mine, when language  
comes in mute signs? I am aching  
for you to know my desire for you  
to have more of me. For us to end  
without stopping, no page left untouched.

*Apostrophe for the Angel of Mercy*

O terrible beacon of light, I cannot forget her eyes,  
deepest brown I've ever seen like Alabama loam,  
or river-mud of Mississippi, never Carolina clay,  
her great and grasping eyes, which held in them  
such depths as the towering pine trees of the North  
or the vast stretch of the deserts of the West.  
Her eyes in their brown were the dark chocolate  
flanks of wild horses that roam the coastlines,  
were the cut and tumbled logs that built my great-  
grandfather's cabin. Sometimes I can't see it  
for the trees in her eyes. O the myriad of ways  
that her eyes lead me to places I've only ever  
seen with her. The places I will have only ever  
seen with her. I could not bear to see it. Do not  
take me there without her, O awful beacon of light,  
wherever you take me.

*Consider this:*

she doesn't say no. You don't  
wrap her in your arms for life. Her shaking body  
does not resemble a broken mirror;  
her edges, sharp though they are, do not claw  
at your fingertips. You, in turn, do not  
leave bloody marks on her surface. How does it feel  
to break again? You have missed  
this ache, the slow collusion of your parts to disappear,  
sliding away red down the drain. And you have  
missed her like an addict would, hopeful and hateful and  
she doesn't say no.  
Consider this.

*Reflection (Variation 2)*

I stand on a stretch of sand  
studded with shells, shattered,  
dotted with the droppings  
of seabirds. Like freckles  
flickering across downward  
sloping shoulders, the beach's  
shifting embrace is a delight  
to my heavy form. Tired as  
I am, it would be a privilege  
to rest on its soft curves.

I wish its tides would crash  
into my aching veins, inject  
me with the mercurial nature  
of the sea. It would be a kindness  
to answer to the wind only,  
to have the moon and sun  
enlighten me. I wish men would  
fear me.

*Bed down*

Our love is like water lay me  
down in the shallows let reeds  
braid into my hair let watercress  
build me a crown let the current  
drag me down river across rocks  
and through rip tides crawl me  
through the mud let minnows  
nibble bubbles on my skin  
the striders use my freckles  
as stepping stones and herons  
strike me with beaks pointed  
arcing down quicksilver  
flash the minnows flee but I will  
lay there for you for us eventually  
we all return to sea but you, I think—  
you'll have to make that journey by yourself

*Slang*

My body is an ocean  
you swallow one gulp  
at a time, that deep  
heave of your throat,  
the fraught gasp for  
air, straining, closing  
your eyes and it's  
done. Imagine it.  
Me and you, no longer;  
only you who has  
downed me. All  
of my muchness,  
gone. The vastness  
of me, imbibed.  
I knew it could  
happen at any time.  
I knew it could  
not happen  
soon enough—and you,  
are you still thirsty?

*Taken*

I was young and in love with  
what I couldn't see. It held me  
there in thrall of all the endless

possibilities of our future together.  
And yet, it wasn't ready, or I wasn't,  
but, thinking I was, I whispered

soft nothings to the darkness and when  
nothing answered, it was beautiful  
and it was painful and it was love.

There, bleeding back into me, were  
memories of before it came and,  
looking back now, I see it was

always there, but I wasn't ready,  
but then I was, and it came and  
I whispered *hello* and the darkness

answered with nothing but love.  
And so I loved it as the dark  
must be loved, as all painful things

are loved. And, for all our endless  
futures together, it held me there  
with nothing.

*Consider*

In the dark, cuddled in blankets too soft for  
comfort, my dreams wander

from the bright practicality of day

to fade and let shine the stars of the extraordinary;

the sweetest sin and the most

shameful. How many have lost their minds, led  
to the end of everything they've ever known

and not come back. At dawn,

if all you have are stars, what becomes of you?

*A Drink to Nature's Course*

I am willow, brookside,  
bartering with daffodils and river elms  
for the way that their curves follow  
mine, but am I the curved thing  
which they bend to or otherwise?

I am houndstooth on your funeral suit.  
It should've been your birthday. I am  
not the way the Earth moved  
to make it your birthday. I am helpless  
to the way the Earth moved and it is  
no longer your birthday.

Black velvet shrouds the piano,  
a heavier veil than what  
glares through the window panes;  
am I blinding or blinded in the absence  
of darkened curtains?

I am by the river's edge. I am  
by the willow tree. I am in  
the daffodils, in the shallow reeds,  
I am the shadows of the eroded rocks  
and you, who loved me so deeply,  
have worn me down to nothing.

*Manifestation*

There is a way to feel the past  
too severely. It settles  
somewhere around my skin  
in waves of energy,  
convincing me to ask myself:

*have I ever seen a dead  
god cast a shadow  
and could I reply no?*  
It grips me in these  
old photographs which show

in their landscapes  
framed black and white figments,  
staring out of stained-  
sepia places, resonating  
with little pieces of me

that are theirs too—  
or are they? They hold  
my gaze with a pair  
of eyes that no longer see  
what I have seen,

can see. And what have I seen  
within their eyes? And  
had they seen it, too,  
in the eyes of a specter  
they had never known?

*In Memoriam*

She said everyone believes  
in ghosts because everyone  
has memories. And how could I  
argue? As if I were not  
obsessed with the past that  
haunts me, as though that  
is not a common phrase  
to use in this instance, in this  
language that is obsessed  
with the presence of history,  
as though memories were  
more or less tangible  
than the suffering of others,  
imagined as spirits trapped  
in-between time and as  
tethered to the present  
as we are. How could  
I tell her that I know  
ghosts better than my own  
memories? That the shiver  
of knowing is more vivid  
than any childhood  
I could have had, if only  
I could remember. It is  
haunting. I am haunted,  
I believe.

*Levee-breaking*

When it becomes more than not,  
I yearn to rip off my trappings,  
strip down to nothing and be  
nothing. Remove all semblance  
of person and revel in-  
distinctness. Who would demand  
bones to talk? Weirs of flesh  
to speak? Rushing blood reveals  
only babbles; there is no  
function to the form unless  
contained. I am more than tired  
of captivity. There is  
more in me that, too, is tired.  
Would un-becoming be more  
proper than being? I could  
withstand pain for greater than  
good. I have done more for less.

## *Prediction*

The fight unspoken hums with the strain  
of an oncoming storm. I feel it in the air  
where the words would fall if I let them,  
hair-raising, tight against my skin. My fists  
clench automatically; the effort it takes  
to unclench them is excruciating.

The absence of thunder rolls through me;  
I know what's coming as darkness seeps  
into the clouds above me, heavier than  
something so insubstantial should be.

It has claimed this aching space for itself,  
its presence filling the spaces where I am  
not waiting for the beginning of the end.

There are no more surprises left between us.  
I saw it coming from a mile away.

## *Overture*

Before that sweltering night,  
the door you slammed,  
the dog not barking,  
the fireflies dancing outside  
the apartment we shared,  
the streetlight flickering  
blue then orange,  
I could still eat oranges,  
cigarettes didn't  
smell like you and every  
dumbass in a backwards hat  
didn't laugh too loud.  
And, if this were a rom-com,  
you would have loved me  
enough. Instead, you passed  
through the front door,  
through the flickering  
field of fireflies and went  
with the hum of a car engine  
dimming.

*And you tell me I'm petty*

I never mention it but I haven't  
forgotten all those times you haven't  
been there when I needed you. How,  
each time, I've made excuses for you  
because you never offer them to me:

*you're busy,*

*you're just late,*

*you're having a bad day.*

How you're never the first to text,  
even though I pick up when you call,  
when you need me so desperately  
to ignore that I hate phone calls.  
I don't need to keep a running tally  
of every disappointment and it's not  
like I keep track, but I remember  
when you forgot my birthday. I remember  
when you didn't ask me how my interview  
went, even after an entire week of you  
telling me to just calm down about it.

I never said anything then,  
and I guess I should've since  
it was bothering me, so some  
of the blame is mine, but  
it doesn't feel like I'm the one  
not trying.

---

*(another name I've coined for this thing we did)*

I know it's one of those cultural things  
the not-naming-it-in-case-it-dies sort of thing  
and I know it's to avoid "developing attachments"  
so "you don't get used to it" but I've never  
liked that much

I get attached

I give names

But I guess you've never felt the same way

I guess that's why you never named

the tension

stretching between us

only waiting for it

to snap

and leave me with that short-lived stinging mark

because I tried to hold on

and what a shitty way for me to find out

we were rubber-banding

## *Remedy*

I am my own forever. And, though I don't need proof of that, sometimes I think about finding you in a still frame I've picked up. You, still striking enough, long-forgotten in a box in one of those little shops we used to visit that still like keeping memories the old-fashioned way, entombed on glossy paper that costs too much. I thought we'd have more than photographs, more than keepsakes I'd throw away once they turned to clutter. That we would share a forever together. I thought we would be more than spider webs and sunny days, sure in a way I'd never been on my own, but being with you was a dream and I don't know how it all could disappear with you and your suitcases and every part of me you took too. I know I can never get those back and I don't want them. I'm not going to rummage through those damn little shops you fantasized me to. I'm going to sell the Polaroid you forgot.

## *Impermanence*

I am black bough, stretched out  
from my anchorage in earnest inching  
of newness compiled, brimming  
expression of freshly-dying, disease  
of never-death endured. I am in genesis  
of end. Dendritic corruption of crimson un-  
breath and groundfall browning, descending  
to root, an umwelt of indecision embracing  
existence or otherwise. Letting myself be  
myself, of nothing forever unless undone.

## *Taking Care*

Last summer, she gave me  
a succulent  
    dressed modestly  
in light greys & greens,  
    little lances of lilac  
    flirting around the edges  
of its leaves.

I set it nearest to my bed,  
on the windowsill,  
    where the falling light  
gently filtered  
    through the blinds'  
    narrow slats.

Succulents:

drought-tolerant,  
low-light,  
    needing drainage  
to avoid all manners of decay;  
    too many web pages  
    on fertilizer

I didn't have

the time or cash  
to buy.

    I spent weeks  
searching for a small watering-can  
    that would fit  
    on the sill with it,  
but could only find

a plastic water-bottle.

I gave it  
    light and water  
    and dirt, but still

it didn't seem enough.  
How could anything  
survive on so little?

How could I ever know  
how much  
was enough?  
Or too much?

As I think back on it now,  
it doesn't take much.  
She was so impressed.

It was a difficult plant to kill yet  
I managed.  
But, it was only a plant.  
I could get another.

*To Sleep*

I know how this begins:  
I had a dream that I was  
falling and you weren't  
there to catch me because  
you were falling too.

But I don't dream  
of falling, or you.  
How it begins is  
this: in a dream,  
I am someone else,

anonymous yet  
still the same girl  
who began dreaming.  
But I am someone  
else in a hallway

of a house  
in a dream that is  
not mine.  
A dark wooded  
hallway shrouded

in red velvet  
drapes and brass  
highlights. The  
ceilings loom,  
I cannot see

them, high above  
this person  
I am. There is  
a door behind me,  
I know. It is locked,

but how do I know?  
And there is a man  
who is not you  
there with me.  
It is his house.

It is his hallway.  
I am his guest. For him,  
the stranger-me has  
found a statue  
of dark jade, carved

scales, a woman's face,  
her torso wrapped in coils.  
My mind wrapped in  
this single hallway  
of a maze. Sometimes

I see her blink. This  
is how it ends.

*Chasing El Dorado*

He's saying all the right things but his words fall flat like the cheap shine of the hotel lights on his Rolex

and I wonder how long it's been since I felt that tingle of possibility. I must be getting old because it's no longer any fun seducing these boys. Gone is the thrill

of taking them in, holding so deeply they could barely see, eyes swimming over me and, under me, they were helpless.

But is it time to settle down? Find a sucker who will treat me right as I treat myself to his money in exchange for a little sugar?

Find a man who wouldn't mind that my thighs aren't as lean, my breasts not as ripe as they once were?

His hand lands on mine and, glancing up at him through my eyelashes, I see my own reflection in his eyes. See my skin washed out in the glare. See my shape blur with every second he doesn't

blink. He's still talking but it's time to go. Gather my confidence around me and, alone, walk home through the city streets.

You're never truly alone in the city.  
It's all in your head.

Wet slides down the flank of your face and you should hail a cab if it's raining; your shoes aren't made for this weather, but no one else seems to notice. A little localized shower pouring down your face and

now is not the time for this. Just call a cab but you stumble and it's these damn heels and damn it you're too old for this.

You're never truly alone in this city but, in my apartment, I always am.

And I wonder where my friends have gone and when was the last time I had any friends but it doesn't matter

it's all in my head

I just need to stumble to bed and it'll all make sense in the morning everything will be fine in the morning at least the rain washed off my makeup and I kicked my heels off in the street my dress will be ruined but just get some sleep you just need sleep

the bed is cold now I remember that even a fake Rolex can be enough

*Strung out*

Hanging above my head are  
the stars we used to wish on  
and I can see them, even now  
as I draw curtains across  
the window sill, as I turn away  
the world that wants to gawk.  
That voyeuristic world that would  
watch, no thank you.

Goodnight, world.  
Goodnight, stars.  
You may go about your  
business now, there is nothing  
to see. There is only us here,  
us. No bodies, no more  
now that we've let them loose.  
They grew too heavy to hold,  
not that you would know.

## *Legacy*

She said language speaks us  
more than we speak it, uses us  
to say what it needs to be said  
through our mouths, its mouthpiece,  
point of origin in our bodies  
where it births itself again  
the way it has always stemmed  
from whatever we mean to say,  
whatever our intentions, and molds it  
after itself, twisting turns of phrases  
round into eternity until almost  
entirely something new, something  
that has been said before and meant  
to stay unsaid perhaps, forgotten  
except in its derivatives.

*Derived*

I share a nose with my sister, a perfect union  
of our parents. Our mother has a deep divot,  
our father none. We have a small dent  
right in the middle at the tip, as though someone  
had begun to cleft it in two then decided otherwise.

Our mother gave me her hair also, our father his eyes.  
My skin and bones from my ancestors and theirs  
and theirs, whoever they were before they were lost.  
I embody a past that will not let itself be forgotten.  
It speaks through my mouth that is not entirely mine.

It gestures through my hands, my fingers  
and the clubbed thumb my grandmother gave me,  
the history which survives.

*Reflection (Variation 1)*

She found it where waves thin into sand,  
on the cusp of ocean, stranded on the damp  
stretch like the shells she searched the coast for.  
It lay, tiny talons grasping a small branch, a twig  
really, little lungs no longer gasping in the waste,  
wings spread out in facsimile of flight.

In the shifting dawn, she glimpsed the soft lilac  
edging down, pale yellow shining from its open  
beak. Had it drowned here or on some other shore  
where the waves reached out and pulled it close  
to take the breath in from its lungs?

If this had happened in a poem, she would have raged  
against the ocean, cradled its lifeless body in her hands,  
screamed to the heavens about injustice, innocence lost...  
but she looked just once and walked on.