

*This thesis is dedicated to Mayakovsky Club, which kept me alive this year.*

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*Ведь всё равно — что говорят — не понимаю.  
Ведь всё равно — кто разберёт? — что говорю.*

Indeed it's all the same—what they say—I don't understand.  
Indeed it's all the same—who can make it out?—what I say.

-Marina Tsvetaeva

## **The Postcard I Didn't Write You From Moscow**

Last time we spent an evening together, you were pining over a gardener, blushed when I opened the botany book you stole from the library, hoping a working knowledge of perennials might win you a second date. Here, people point to trees and tell me their names, want me to name them too in my ugly English but I can't tell a linden from a lime, think Christmas trees are pines, couldn't sort barley from rye if my fairy tale life depended on it. My friend can sit in the woods and smell where mushrooms are like I can sit in a crowded room and still smell your hair. I told you that here they love dogs, but not that half of them look like your Elliot, shaggy and resurrected in the arms of women with cheetah print purses on the metro. There were too many. I had to stop asking to pet them, stop hoping that maybe I could come back and my hands would smell like home to you. Tell me: am I still in your dreams? The other day I found my dying place, wanted to write and ask if you remembered what it felt like to have a forest of fall leaves in your hair. In summer I can watch birds until almost midnight. The flowers were purple. I picked them for myself.

## Arrival

I say I don't eat fish  
but the fish is already made  
glass eye rolled up and guilty  
lips pursed above the pan.

Screaming in the night. Woman  
outside: must be dreaming

*помоги*

*помоги*

*помоги мне*

At breakfast we say nothing,  
chew our bread and words,  
must have been dreaming  
the voices that clattered  
outside the kitchen

*Милиция? Сумасшедшая*

*на улице*

Hearing even with the pillow pressed around my head

*помоги мне*

*помоги мне*

*помоги мне*

In the morning no one says anything  
about the eye in the toilet, me  
spilling up fish guts in the night,  
or how our six ears strained towards  
the sudden absence of cries against  
the windowpane

*помоги мне*

My cracked lips above the bowl,  
the leftover meat in the pan.



## Commute

*Осторожно! Двери закрываются.*

Everyone on  
the Moscow metro  
sleeps the same sleep,  
dreams the same  
deadeyed dream  
of plunging  
into water,  
sinking for days  
without air.  
There, blue-faced  
passengers wave  
to the platform,  
count fathoms  
below the earth.  
The wind whistles  
so loud down here.  
No one can hear  
their heart beat.  
Knows when  
it's safe to breathe.

## Cauchemar

*I'm starting to dream—of the Lord  
I've stopped dreaming of you.  
-Marina Tsvetaeva*

*Кошмар!  
-Russian saying*

You and my mother die on the same day.  
Her funeral is closed casket, gorgeous—  
but I miss it, scrabbling on my hands  
and knees among the headstones,

understand everything: these crises  
are common in life, and we must learn  
to face them like grown-ups, accept  
that your loving hurts those you love.

At the bonfire where we danced  
the summer before college you  
clutch my thumbs deer-eyed, smile.  
I am good at conversation again.  
We are almost cheek to cheek, and

I believe in the way our ears static  
each other's feedback, believe  
in the way your mouth leans in and  
you laugh like an echo in a mausoleum:

*once I loved this girl  
from high school  
for four whole years*

wake to your neck reared up,  
vertebrae like stacked china plates,  
shame leaking out from beneath  
my nailbeds. This isn't the movies.

At the end of this reel you don't  
turn and smile. A spine and a skull.  
Circle of bodies without faces.  
No reason to remember my name.

Your lips are tearing away.  
Tried to scrape you out

of me. Your smell draped over  
everything like dustcovers—

I am blind and still,  
afraid to touch. To say hello.

## **Raz lu blue**

You could have pushed me down the stairs.  
Coached me into stumbling off rooftops.  
You told me I'd fall out of love with you.  
It's been nine months. Did no one ever  
tell you wings tear off at the thorax?

You can't fill my veins with sugarwater  
and expect the moths to migrate  
to climates warmer than my ribs.

You can't say we'll fix it later  
and decide you meant never  
when I have the words to talk back.

These are our children.  
With legs like eyelashes.  
I'll have to pluck them off by hand.



## Near Misses

At the *продукты* down the street the woman knows  
what I get like I to know to count out sixty-seven rubles,  
no change. A water bottle, two apples, a soda. Ex-  
change of smiles. No need for so much speech

dust between me and those  
who call here home. Strip me down and strip  
the sheets. Lie still and the mothers  
will stop asking the same question—  
pink stains on the carpet? All your fault.

A sentence leaves the mouth lucid and disintegrates on impact.  
Fill your jaw with soup and spill it down your front again.

Here even thoughts fragment, what  
I can no longer *про-из-нош-у*

to the psych student who wants to know about my health: eyes, heart  
lungs                    *и московский воздух? и что они думают о нас*  
*Там, in america*                    *about ukraine*

It doesn't matter that I cough up black.  
They won't see me. Won't water me with words I know  
let my tongue swell bigger  
than ever before. Will lose me in the rug like the white pills spilling off  
the nightstand. Gulp them down:

no one knows my medical history.  
What to feed me. How to say my name.

## **Dream Zoology**

The elephant vanishes.

and the balloon flies up, deflating.  
A baby hippopotamus bites your whole  
arm off. They do it on the regular.  
The voice trapped in the helium  
exhale wants to know if Louise  
still remembers her. She thinks  
she's dying, spreading out in air.  
Gone before latex hits ground.

The lion tamer is mucking out the ice rink.

## Blue Line

*Уважаемые пассажиры, будьте взаимно вежливы...  
-recording on the Moscow metro*

The first time my father used facebook  
was to ask if I was dead in a subway crash  
five thousand miles away. When he called,  
I wanted to say: *Of course not, that was the blue line,  
I am oranzhevaya and koltsevaya,  
only go to the Arbat on Fridays, buy books  
for fifty rubles until my bag is too heavy to cart  
home. What's amazing is not the twenty-two  
dead, but that it's been a lifetime since the last  
wreck, terrorist attacks are more common than  
accidents here, but they'll ask for our documents  
anyways, proof we belong. Here, where  
women are all the same, and men too, and  
people, the blame falls on all our heads—  
we'll descend into their grave tomorrow early, mourn  
in the morning rush, sweat out our tears and not  
say a word. Instead I let the phone ring and cut out,  
let my mother cry in the break room, waited to see  
who'd worry, who might think to call.*

## Dead Poet Alphabet

*for Cal*

Don't ask me which poet's suicide has made me  
popular at parties. The scholars know. They'd prefer  
to leave his heart exploding against the china cabinet

at that. Support the gentler explanations, ones  
that conveniently exclude the dictated confession,  
him tearing down the stairs with secretary after:

paper knife in hand. What dangled in the door  
at Yelabuga isn't party fare. Neither am I.  
I am good at the corner watching. I am good at the cat.

And which eight lines would you leave on a blackboard?  
Which poem would be worth scrawling in blood, mailing  
across town the night before your last trapeze act?

The bombs are falling in Petersburg and it's not just  
the prisoners they've forgotten. The poets, too.  
They'll starve for the next six days, eat their words.

And the one who will cough his lungs out in the camps,  
absolve all his sins that way: the taxi fares unpaid,  
a voiceless wife, that woman bone dead—

she clasps the rope the lover she never slept with  
gave her to tie her life together. World War II the  
best excuse she'll ever get. The heart or the head

or the NKVD? Let's not count the duelists.  
Just those who crept quiet into thirty, thought  
*How did I survive this long? How do I do it again?*

## **The Sister Manifesto**

When people ask,  
I tell them we're close  
as the DNA that gave us  
the same face, same height,  
different hair. I didn't ask

anyone to make those comparisons  
between us. Almost blind  
is not the same as almost  
died, no matter how much  
we want to look alike.

We have never wanted  
to look alike. Being first  
is not the same as being  
second. You wore my  
hand-me-downs, hated  
every minute. I didn't

say you were braindead.  
You weren't listening  
hard enough. What I  
meant was: I'm scared.  
My brain's not big enough  
to be mounted on glass  
in the card catalogs  
in Moscow. I am not  
the leader of the Soviet world.

Don't you know that if  
you don't get into art school  
you can become a dictator?  
History's already set the precedent.  
All the medals would suit you.

I'm sorry I look so good  
on paper. You're the one  
who looks better in real life,  
knows better than anyone how  
long I haven't been living.

I'm sorry I wasn't there  
when your gecko died.  
I don't talk to you

just because mom tells me to.  
I promise critical theory can be  
about Sailor Moon, too.  
I will write it myself.  
I will write your name on it.  
I will read you *Crime and*

*Punishment* aloud. You can sing  
me the words to Pachelbel's Canon.  
(In D). You can sing them screaming.  
Sing and I'll make my confession:  
I counted the brain cells dying in your head.  
Thank god you'd only fainted.  
Thank god the toilet base was cold.

Only we remember which daughter  
we are. Only you believe I might  
be as bad as I think I am. At the end  
of summer, let me shoulder the blame  
and your duffel. We've grown up

too quickly. Buried arthropods  
and tetrapods in the backyard.  
We've never wanted to look alike.  
How did we get so old?

## **Jinx**

We watched the transformers explode  
like fireworks from the cul-de-sac.  
Neighborhoods went dark for miles,  
Christmas trees extinguished and stars  
halfway visible for the first time in years.  
The next day we drove by and saw  
the telephone line dangling sheets of metal  
top of the pole scorched black as the house  
with our flashlights off. We played exorcist  
because it'd just been on TV, tried to make  
each other scream. I was the oldest,  
the devil, didn't know that two days later  
you'd be naked, that we'd spend Christmas  
day in the hospital. I didn't mean to curse you.  
The power was out. I told non sequiturs until  
the lights fluttered on, didn't ever want to sleep.

## **Lullaby in Anger**

Do you know how fresh you look  
when you've just been fucked?

Do you know how fucked you look  
when you haven't slept?

I watch my eyes turn pink, then dead.  
I'll break every promise I've ever kept.

## Putting Stock in Dreams

It's been awhile now  
since you replaced me  
as the heroine of my dreams.

Upper management promised  
it would be a change  
for the better,  
that it was people  
like you who brought  
adventure, style, box office hits,

even though half the time  
you just stand around  
talking to anyone  
but me. Though  
no one notices me  
anyway, even when

I keen white noise  
until the windows  
break. You are too  
enthraling. I walk off  
stage right. The dream  
continues on without me.  
You are regaling everyone  
with some strong opinion.

I want to run back  
pull you down, grab  
the crest of your  
hair and beat your head  
against the hardwood.

I keep walking.  
I can't stand  
to see you cry.

## Сдохнула

*If God grant me this one request  
I will follow you like a dog  
into your grave loyal as Orpheus,  
singing you songs for the rest  
of your scrawny, bug-eyed life.*

Then I wished to find you living:  
that you wouldn't be hanging skinned  
in a doorway or trampled into brick.  
I shouldn't have worried. You've  
always been too sick to pick on.  
Now I'm begging—let me go.  
I just want to be your widow.

And yes, I know I killed  
our daughter; left her tied to a table  
in someone else's kitchen but  
you don't want to start this game with me.  
I am tired of being kissed in warzones.  
I've been waiting twenty years  
for you to file for our divorce.

At nineteen you felt like insurance.  
At nineteen this felt like love.  
We're really just a pair of sinners.  
Neither God nor Stalin has forgiven us.

Don't look back now. You can't make me  
disappear that way. I am not your  
Eurydice. I will follow you like a dog.

## Глухо-немая

*Молчание—знак согласен. I don't de  
sire. All the pain I've caused you. Это теб  
я не касается. И вы, как вы  
знаете? What makes you feel most whole. You've said  
things in the past. Понятно. Я не трус, но  
it hurts. Feels natural. Don't you speak. Why  
won't you listen? Я боюсь. I am. So  
what then, lionfish? Easy. Я стара  
юсь. Like cutting off my own hand. Хватит!  
Хочешь похудеть? From crying. A whim.  
Спроси меня как. Shouldn't have fought it.  
But can't we just be friends? People change,  
брошенная. This isn't about you.  
Ничего не поняла. Переживу.*

## Deaf-Mute

*Silence is a sign of agreement.  
This doesn'  
t touch you. And you, how do you  
know?  
Understood. I'm no coward, but  
I'm scared.  
I'm try  
ing. Stop it!  
Want to lose weight?  
Ask me how.  
jilted woman.  
I/she didn't understand anything. I'll survive.*

## **Self-Control**

Good people eat three meals a day.  
They are never jealous. Read the horoscopes  
each morning, fall in love with everyone.

Not a single one of them has ever gotten up late in the morning.  
They wouldn't dream of letting an avocado spoil.  
Their produce is always in season, fresh, used in a timely manner.  
It seems unlikely they'd ever vomit at the smell of the refrigerator.

Good people are never sick.  
They take their medicine when they're supposed to.  
On Sundays they refill a perfectly empty pillcase.  
There is no need to explain imbalances to the doctor.  
The bloodwork is clean as a whistle.  
There is no need to blame the stress.

A good person's body is a whole body.  
They shower six times a day.

It would never occur to them to miss kissing.  
Or to live anywhere but the present.  
They wave smooth palms at frowning passerby.  
They make jewelry out of their regrets.

No good person would ever cry in public.  
Just in case, they also never cry in private.  
I've never seen a good person faint at all.

None of them ever needs to read a textbook.  
The answer to the question is right at hand.  
When they speak, everyone wants to listen.  
When they laugh, everyone tries to laugh along.

Good people are too good to be lonely.  
They finish ten books a week.  
Their hands are always on schedule.  
Their eyes never need sleep.

## **Out of Body**

You can do it in the shower.  
Scrub hard enough  
and you can wear the bone  
down, watch the wet linoleum  
shine through the crease behind  
your elbow. Or take the slow  
route, admire the blue river system  
flowing through your thigh.  
You grow more and more  
translucent. This is the  
Twilight Zone. Hold up  
the film reel. Someone's  
snipped out your cells  
sewn the scenes back  
together, better actors  
playing all your old parts.  
You're what's left  
when the credits roll.  
Rod Serling behind the door.

## **Last Night: When Halfway Through Cooking Dinner My Vison Blacked Out, Legs Collapsed**

I lie flat like the morning my father  
said he might stop breathing.

Ache of onions, mess of dishes.  
Clammy hands. The water hard boils.  
What kind of woman gets cold sweats  
in winter? From the floor

he whispered calm that when sunspots  
start dancing in your eyeline the biggest risk  
is falling. Stay still. The phone is on the table.  
Call if my chest stops moving. Try

to think up a prayer—why am I up  
at this hour anyway? Making a meal I know  
I can't stomach. Nose like a pregnant woman.  
The smell of cumin like that lover's armpits

and my father kept talking the whole time  
about the black widow spider suspended  
in a jar on his desk, what a big girl she was  
and how brave. After six dead minutes

he got up, cleaned the toast fallen buttered-side  
off the carpet. Resurrected. There was no  
breakfast that morning. There will be no  
dinner tonight. The garlic is burning.  
It's going to stain the pan.

## Sorrow Song

The lacuna you left in me is far too wide.  
Fifty poems is not enough to fill it.

Sometimes I wonder how to stop  
my hands in air: if I cut off circulation

bruised my wrists beyond repair, then would  
they scribble manically, finally fall still?

My love is not an illness. I am sick  
of being sick. I am sick

of devil's bargains there is no devil  
to make with, the toes and ears and

first children I would have exchanged  
for resolution. I want so badly to have something

to show for this: a bright-eyed mouth, a joy  
that sticks. I have the nine weeks I spent in bed.

Clearly, it pays to be more fickle.  
You don't get to grieve for this kind of thing.

You're the star of all my dreams.

## Хотеть, это дело тел

Vampire child, miracle of modern medicine:  
too pale today for the waiting room aquarium blue  
as the bruises in the creases  
of your elbows. The vacuum fish inhale  
filth and the doctors pump it right back into you  
adjust the tubing taped between fingers  
pretend it doesn't hurt

that sewn-up mouth. Twenty-six crosses  
stitched across scalp. Snaggletooth:

you were almost young  
forever. Almost committed to the earth  
and not for one second would anyone  
have thought to expect grandkids  
no matter how wrong your womb who you love

woman only by grace of needles buried  
in thighs, three years of choking down  
horse urine. That flat chest you were so proud  
of. Panties without stains. Now that body

bleeds on command. Odorless hairless sack  
of bones stacked up in order. One hundred forty pounds

of meat and witchcraft. Swipe your thumb  
across my forehead and I, too  
collapse, the girl crying over

bras in the parking lot. You'll outgrow them  
in six weeks. Drown whatever life  
you dreamed of. Grow used to a world  
without touch, where you don't wash  
your hair for months and no one

no one notices, not even when you smolder  
start to stink of ash.

## **Fantasy I**

red and blue  
bundles, tight as cables  
behind the television.

gnaw your wrists apart.  
tear out the plugs.

## Instructions for a Visit to the Museum at the Bottom of the Poet's Subconscious

The museum of Russian writer miniatures is not open to the public. You have to schedule an appointment three years in advance, send in your passport, visa, and V.I. Lenin State Library card for crosschecking and approval. Upon arrival, you must recite select passages from *Crime & Punishment*, *The Brothers K*, and Vassily Grossman's famous but little read work *Life and Fate*. Present your PhDs at the door. Photocopies are not accepted. After all, only those who sold their souls for knowledge can possibly understand the importance of stitching together Gogol's bob from the hairs of an Arabian steed, crafting an exact model of the bicycle Tolstoy rode at seventy, two and a half inches tall. Along with these marvels, the Lermontov starts duels, the Pushkin jumps at rabbits, and the Brodsky was promptly exiled back to New York City, where he so clearly belongs. Chekhov dispenses pre-recorded platitudes at the press of a button. Yes, the Tsvetaeva will fall in love with you. *Yes*, the Okudzhava sings. Your stay is limited to fifteen minutes. Tip Akhmatova when you leave.

## Something Haunted, Something Blue

Imagine your hearing stretches to all parts  
of the house, cozied up in every nook,  
the space under every desk  
or dressing table. No one is talking about you  
and no one will. You have not sneezed  
for weeks of felt an itch creeping  
along the back of your ear. The ghosts

would tell you please come home  
if there was a home to go to. Home  
is where the heart is, and the heart  
is still in the ICU, sucked in a breath  
and collapsed last summer, ventricles  
rolling across the hearth and landing  
at your feet. They had to rebuild her  
from scratch. The bandages won't  
come off for another six weeks.

Your toes drag the ground now  
that the heaviest thing inside you  
lies far out of reach. It would only take  
lopping off a hand, forgetting how to eat  
and you could float off like a kid's balloon.

It's hard to know who would notice.  
Certainly it would be a few days  
before someone found the bluing fingers  
in the grass, the leavings of your stomach.  
Certainly you'd sneeze a lot then,  
just for a little while, and soon

you'll have bumped the ceiling,  
pressed palms to the atmosphere  
and rotated there, invisible as ever  
as your heart pumps tired  
in an iron lung, is willed away.

## Друг для друга души

And where are my letters now?  
Torn up, or burned, or lying  
like yours in four shoeboxes  
at the back of my closet,  
the other contents almost laughably  
nineteenth century? Lock of hair

in scratched Ziploc bag, yellowed postcards,  
and so many dried up flowers  
I could sell pounds of potpourri  
and give it your name.  
And the cup I gave you  
right before we parted ways—  
do you drink from it? Or is it  
in a drawer, thrown away?

And that hat. Woven together  
from strips of black and white paper  
circlet of ribbons, a flower.  
We stood watching them catch light  
in the window. We wore them  
out of the store. Into the sun. Today,

you are more beautiful than ever.  
Your hair is longer now than  
the first time I saw you.  
You never kissed me with lipstick on.

I stare at the pink stain  
on your coffee mug and wonder  
what that would taste like.  
I know already. Chalk and fish scales.  
I prefer a plainer mouth.  
You prefer another mouth entirely.

## In Season

The man on television  
slices the pomegranate  
into thin red rounds.  
He ordered his wife  
from the last issue  
of *House Beautiful*.  
His kitchen, too.  
She stands pristine  
in blue silk bathrobe,  
holds a pinkish seed  
at the corner of her lip.  
Her hands are clean.  
His hands are white.  
Someone told me once  
to split pomegranates  
underwater, that then  
the translucent eyes  
float out from under  
their yellow wedding veils,  
that you can skim them  
off the top, stay out  
of the warzone that way.  
We dug our fingers in  
like savages, juicestained  
every surface. Ears  
and throats. Waists  
and necks. Our summer  
violence. A bloody floor.  
Now that we have  
both come out wounded  
we pretend to be civilized.  
Don't speak of the skin  
under our fingernails,  
the flesh still stuck  
in our teeth all these  
months, years, after.

## Now In Technicolor

Neck and chest cut  
inside the letterbox.  
Two black rectangles  
and that x in center. The woman

always knew she wanted to cut men open,  
pull back the flap of flesh  
and see what made her skull  
different  
why they were surgeons and she  
a doctor. She was probably not

as red as this. Would not make such a  
mess as a horse on the killing floor  
calves kicking out headless,  
giant rotisserie chickens tied to washboards  
and lying pink in their own silk skins.

It seemed like the normal thing to do:  
line up the cows' heads for counting,  
carve the man from neck to chest.  
If your father was bad let the dogs eat him.  
If your mother was good then she's dead

anyway. All of this contained  
inside the letterbox (all of me  
contained inside this creature)  
which plays the same until age sets in,  
skips and mutters and sticks,  
the chickens turning back to calves and back  
again, frozen fish eye and all that's packed into the skull  
hangs out for the world to see, slams shut the fingers

she never meant to peek through.  
It's less upsetting to know  
a lamb's been killed live on television  
than that most farmers hold  
those down muzzles in their laps and  
stroke them like dogs  
before opening up

a throat. The kind of love every trusting  
animal deserves. What was it Derrida said  
about shame—that it's mirrored in the glass

gaze of the cat that looks us up and down,  
the calf who still doesn't know  
such a thing as a knife exists. Such a thing as a knife

exists and even we are trapped inside the letterbox;  
pull back the flap of flesh to find the animals  
that therefore we are, lying,  
pink in our own silk skins.

## Не получилось

The sun won't rise for six more hours.  
I'm sick of beating my head on the desk  
like an unhinged cat, could write Tsvetaeva  
on my wrists in morse code—(dash dash dash)  
or get up, make do with that. There is no god  
as judgmental as Tolstoy, and I want  
a refund, don't want to live  
in the airport and join the hare krishnas.  
You said move to Tibet. Shave your head.  
The memories will leave it.

*(please just don't cry anymore  
we don't want to hear it)*

You rain down punishment like  
manna. Construct cosmic jokes  
that aren't that funny.

*(constituents always complain)*

Tell me a secret.

*(loving only gets you as far  
as money, won't save you from death)*

That's a horoscope, not a secret.

*(giving up things is the easy part,  
пошлая)*

It's the people we want to hang onto.

*(no matter how much we hate them)*

Where—?

*(was I running on my last night in the universe?)*

A monastery.

*(no dear.*

*away.)*

## The Problems of Translation in Unfamiliar Contexts

You said *please*  
so I read you a poem  
about things we will never do again  
in a language you barely understand:

this word is *ya-bluh-kuh*,  
this one, *sun*—pretend  
I never learned the body  
no mouths or knees or breasts  
shadowed behind the buttons  
on a shirt. No tongue to hold  
them on either. I do not let

my voice waver over the words  
of wanting though I want  
to understand this ouroboros  
of me pining after you, you  
pining after her, and she  
some bird we are forever

plucking... To press my cheek  
against your collar, stay there  
still awhile. Want.

## **Whatever Sex Is I Don't Want It**

Touch me  
and I fold up  
like a ladder.  
Trait learned  
from ancestors—  
black lacquer bodies  
buried in earth.  
I'd rather you  
be speaking and  
there be moths.  
I'd rather the moths  
be speaking and  
you be silent.  
Beautiful mouths  
beget beautiful voices.  
No mouth at all  
is just a tongue.

## Limbo

I watched my dad all December  
and I'm better now, can dice an onion  
halfway right, end up with pieces  
halfway even. In French onion soup  
size doesn't matter: they can be as big  
as peas or thumbs, still come out  
heaven. You were always better  
at that sort of thing. Using a knife properly,  
keeping a kitchen clean. Throw a boiled  
tomato in ice water and its skin  
slides off, pulp pressed  
like a little organ, cook it ten hours  
until it starts to unstring. I make  
three-course meals with the lights off.  
I throw most of them away.  
Fried chickpeas, lentil salad, broth  
and a hint of lemon. Sweet potato stuffed  
mushrooms with goat cheese and  
avocado. Tofu crepes and pickled carrots  
and toss red peppers in the oven  
twenty minutes four hundred twenty five degrees  
until they sprout black spots, start screaming.  
I strip off their wet, slick skins. They sit  
soft in my palm like a quiet animal.  
If you asked to smell my fingers  
they'd smell how I want them to:  
lemon and garlic, turmeric and rue.

## **Journey's end in lovers meeting**

The parking lot is packed with snow  
and your hair is bundled up  
on the top of your head like it's summer.

We could go to the library or the coffeeshop  
or the Fresh Market but we decide to head back  
to my place, where we can watch a movie,  
continue six months of not speaking.

You choose *Harold and Maude*,  
which is about straight people  
and hasn't been my favorite movie  
for years. Who knows what I saw  
in Bud Cort in seventh grade.  
Now we're too much the same.

But the movie plays different this time.  
There's a blizzard and it's New York City.  
Their eyes and hair and coats get heavy  
and damp with snow so Ruth Gordon  
suggests they stop by a laundromat,  
dry themselves off. They put in  
their quarters, start to talk philosophy  
but the sound fades out as the camera  
zooms in slow on the dryer window,  
the bleak circles of black and brown wool.

There are the exact right number  
of blue couch squares between us.  
I know this is just a dream.

The camera still wants to watch the dryer spinning.  
Coats plummet to the bottom of the screen.

## **Lady Mantis on Her Deathbed**

Being queen: face like a viper  
but no real crown. Arms that only

slit and cling, all the touching  
you want and no one to ask:

no one not eaten. Not blessed  
with hundred-year lifespans; bored

too quickly, though we stand for days  
still as earth. Only prey moves us—

and love. But they are one, as with  
all creatures: someone to pin against

a wall. Carcass with the choicest  
pickings. The rest is a twig trembling;

leaf rot on the edge of summer.