

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.

Belly-up

A knock on the door of the breastbone.
Pound on the door of the breastbone.
Who is this, please? A dent in the ribcage.
Fruit growing too fast for this cavity,
knees pressed to chest—

Block the door. Can't come out that way.
Can't beat out of you that way. Can it?
Not if you pray

to the blood in your ears.
Hear that? Pulp against bone. Knocked
its way out of there. Knocked you

out. No wonder you're still breathing.
No wonder you can't sing. Sore
and a spine. Sore and a spleen.
Call work

from far away.
You're not home now. Who
could count the hours till you arrive?

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

Кощмар!

-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.

Golub'

Cross-eyed crossing herself
she stands in front of the staircase and sways:
hands to heaven, hands to the onion domes
checked with the blue white of sky,
a gingham jumper—she can't go in like that
not with her hair all uncovered
lurches at every woman coming up or down
maybe to ask for a loan, maybe to snatch
some more god inside her, because there's god inside her
and Jesus too, doesn't matter
that there's pigeon shit on her shoulder
and she never eats, her eyes are shiny
prayer beads and not even nineteen she knows
how you rocket into heaven—when you've got enough god inside you
and a flock of doves at your feet—

A man's hands in air. Flapping, flailing,
spray of ratbirds

bursts up. Spirals away.

Stream of shouting:
blank stare, dead arms, his fist and laughing
again
again
again

The world pans left:

watches the peonies bob their bleeding heads.

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
enthralled. 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 Vision 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
pinning 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.