

## **Open the Windows Anyway**

Rain arrhythmias  
fast and blathering, smacking  
still entire, off-tree leaves flat,  
then slackening to sweet mist:  
I listen for gusts  
or some other explanation  
for this odd swirl of almost-December air,  
spun with warm, dizzy molecules  
that stowed away on a jet stream  
slow boat from China;  
I found a flowering quince branch —  
earlier, in a steady fall of drops  
that caught me as I walked —  
with three bold red-orange blossoms;  
I could use such heedless,  
mutant optimism,  
opening without regard for  
winter's quick closing step.

## **Widow**

What is  
not  
is larger than life  
dark alone silent  
even in the swollen heat  
you sit cold  
thinking what happened  
was a bad  
dream  
until you realize  
you never slept  
waking to the wait  
of some other outcome.

## **Unseasoned**

There are always things left unsaid  
about fall,  
just so simple  
they go unremarked:  
a skein of green  
runs through autumn  
until its late days  
when it frays pallid  
fibers back to skinflint soil;  
autumn tangles  
under the weight  
of its own issue  
and the madness of harvest  
stained finger purple with grape,  
not so much the fruit  
that matters  
as the heavy sunlight  
across a crackling meadow.

Something else about fall —  
as you're giving it chase  
it will turn and nip  
puppy-like oblivious  
with its milk teeth,  
and the snipping nights  
that come,  
but winter is another time  
and there are things  
best left unsaid about it, too.

### **Labor Day In Juneau**

Juneau took out its false teeth,  
hung them on the bedpost  
and swallowed the townsfolk:  
we had the place!  
Followed piers,  
pointed at pot-bellied boats  
and wharves  
banded  
with barnacles, black mussels  
and deeper in heavy green water,  
frail anemones;  
I put a monkshood flower  
in one braid and two alder cones  
as we laughed, closing in  
on the harbor  
stumbling gulls  
lifting, settling, uneven flock  
brusque fish-salt smell  
ripening the sea spray.

### **Ceramic Cup, Looking In**

Drinking beyond the cup:  
gray, that is, the impression of gray  
bunched through fortuitous  
limp winter sky blue  
over leaves once-wintered brown;  
gray, that is, the impression of gray  
as weather-drubbed rock  
wont to lichen.  
Tight on glazed sides  
tiny bubbles — eggs of a silver frog and  
one might soon see flickers of tadpole hatchlings,  
twists and glimpses of light  
on bright skin as they fastly brush  
noses against sheer crazed walls  
of this deep rock pool.

### **We Sat and Watched the Ice Break Up**

Who could have slid a fact  
under sky, lifted  
it away from sea?  
I swear they grew into one —  
We hung in their pouch.

### **So Simple, Summer Love**

Under a sometimes wind  
waves made gull wings  
on shore,  
white feathers lost their birds —  
they'd hiss and suck and  
I knew just hearing  
how water met land.  
Behind the door,  
I knew just hearing  
you had come,  
pause of sliding cloth  
while words dropped closer,  
until under the sheets;  
I felt that sometimes wind  
still on your breath, your face and  
gull wings in my ears.

## **Starts**

First thing the  
cat's ear  
brushed my lips  
an artichoke bract  
stiff but soft with warm  
butter;  
the geometry of morning —  
breakfast —  
I see you so briefly but  
the day fits together  
after.

## **April**

One morning, after one night  
it always happens —  
a green film;  
then, it is surely,  
cross my heart,  
spring.

This year  
I hurt wildly  
and remember my dying...  
but haven't yet, only held  
to grayness too long.

Now I am stabbed by petals.

## **Origami**

I fold my eyes  
and see a swan,  
crease the new day  
into an iris, a butterfly.  
I fold my eyes  
and see  
each day as I choose.

## **Nostalgia**

Don't cry on my shoulder wind.  
You've come unbidden  
pulling mould and  
forest-earth crumbs  
into my night —  
untoward bursts lisping  
of cloud change tomorrow;  
trees are used to your frettings  
but they unease me  
from my chair;  
somehow wet-woods smell  
leaks under the door —  
as if disquiet weren't enough  
you creep into my nose  
and fill my head  
with warm, soft nights  
already resolved.

Morning  
you're always gone;  
so just leave now,  
and take  
what is yours.

## **In February**

Where it's now iced night  
the afternoon ran rampant  
over fine-stemmed,  
wafer-leafed  
weeds  
and shin deep snow;  
wind rasped puckered seeds,  
chimed dry oak leaves  
against a pearl-gray sky  
stubbled with tree fans;  
bright colors were round and hard,  
bittersweet and rose hips,  
or soft and round  
scorched orange underbelly  
of the towhee  
beneath a tree beset  
with puffed cardinals;  
leathery-green honey-suckle  
leaves  
not letting go  
and lavender veins of blackberry  
canes  
as tearing sharp under snow  
as under berry.

Day  
light leaves piquant air,  
drains down rift-barked trees  
frays off drifts,  
finally puddling in footprints  
that cradle  
moonfall.

## **Solo**

Morning falls  
all over itself —  
I danced all night  
god, I'm tired of knowing  
how to be alone.

**We**

The past has found  
its boundary  
I won't push  
Now  
You and merely I.

## **Let's Play**

Here we are:  
I'll win my father's love  
and you can reach your mother,  
dress up, make up  
we do this so often  
I can't find myself  
and overlook you.

## **Our Gift**

We always feel  
easy,  
woman,  
in loving:  
keep your legs  
together  
soul closed  
suffer empty.

We may as well suffer full.

### **Feeding Hummingbirds**

It isn't so much  
a thankless job  
but translucent,  
and just sometimes  
comes a wee chirp and blur  
through the insistent  
trumpet vine  
hanging its orange  
flowers around  
as if  
we wanted them abundant,  
a quick stab of sound  
in the summer bug and bird  
symphony  
darts past —  
elemental bird  
model of an atom  
dense in the middle  
and electron wings  
whirring about a life  
occurring mostly elsewhere —  
beak quick to the sugar water  
and zip into the hedgerow:  
between episodes of hummer grace,  
I think about  
other things  
I've done and doubted  
that throw their own light  
more elsewhere  
but nonetheless everywhere  
and refill the feeder.

## **Dream Message**

I have heard it said,  
pay attention  
to your dreams —  
and I dreamed  
my eyebrows  
popped off  
two lovely furry crescents  
in my palm  
and double-checked  
my dream mirror  
to see only wispy shadows  
stayed  
on my forehead;  
I briefly wondered if all  
my hair would follow  
but the dream moved on  
as dreams do  
into landscapes  
and gardens leaving me with  
surprise, knowing that  
this isn't really how  
eyebrows are  
except under dream rules.

## Harmony on God's Lips

There was at first  
a moon  
thin, round rice-paper disk  
translucent on a morning  
sky  
until disappearance  
right after the laboring squirm  
of geese  
called for autumn  
to come faster  
out of the green  
still surrounding us;  
the pokeweed bloomed —  
always declaring its own season —  
purple berries and green,  
alongside waxy-white flowers;  
a frog spoke  
quickly on the jump  
as insects danced and verged  
and made lace over the mud;  
ragged spiderless web  
hung in tatters  
festooned with scrunchy blue-black  
old leaf fingers  
caught,  
trembling  
while the wind strummed  
along blue spruce needles,  
humming of what might yet unfold;  
on the fence row,  
some trees escaped the height  
rule set by rusty-wire and  
stuck  
up tall  
carrying tiny patent-leather grapes  
in community bunches  
up nearer the sun;  
crow caws and tawny soy bean leaves  
married ear and eye, I didn't know  
how like caterpillars  
soy pods looked —  
a ravenous hoard indeed  
if they were chewing, not ripening;  
swifts stitched and twittered over  
water, a scattering of sunlight tears  
breaking, winking, and flowing in golden  
ribbons, bounded by shore-muck,  
rippled back onto themselves —  
and, sweetly, the wind breathed  
away pain,  
letting loose our grief with milkweed  
explosions.

## **Open Heart**

I have hidden  
behind a heart of stone  
in darkness  
too long  
held fast to suffering  
unlovable  
in ways known only to my  
soul —  
so certain of being  
unworthy,  
frightened like the tiniest  
quivering birdlet uprooted  
from woven stick cradle of  
softness and sustenance  
by a wind that only blows  
unknowing, unaware —  
afraid of being loved,  
afraid of being seen and  
still being loved,  
barely feathered-over  
beating tender bird-flesh  
heart,  
no protection  
except behind the stone  
which holds fast and cold  
against  
the wind.

## **If Only**

Perfection  
is a stubble-tongued whore  
who clacks her bedroom  
slipper false-teeth  
and twitches well-oiled hips  
knowingly  
you coulda done more  
you shoulda done better  
if only and if only  
you'd sweated harder, never slept, tried again,  
double-checked, revised, replaced  
been worthy  
deserved to be right  
it would all have fallen  
into place  
by now.

## **I Want My Own God**

What I need most  
I cannot take —  
Faith is the fish-hook  
always barbed  
to hold  
first the bait,  
the lure,  
then the catch  
without mercy  
snagged by rules  
someone else spoke,  
held fast to a god  
someone else wrought;  
I wriggle,  
trapped by my own needs  
so pressing  
a golden point  
and sodden worm  
will hold me fast  
to emptiness.

## **Pain As a Fine Vintage Wine**

Pain grows  
in many seasons,  
each batch bearing the  
special mark of the flesh  
in which it roots;  
even as I ache and twist  
its bouquet draws me close,  
to sip again  
just in case it won't  
prick back,  
hoping it will only  
envelope my tongue,  
sweeten my throat,  
in case the intoxication  
at last warms me joyfully,  
but each swallow  
drives  
caustic corkscrews into my toes,  
bedecks  
each finger with burning rings —  
I know it will,  
even as I put my lips to the rim  
because I know it so well,  
so much better than the unknown  
of not hurting.

## **Pain As A River**

This thing  
this pain  
is inside out —  
its definition,  
its course  
is mine, alone, to name,  
and I know it as  
tributaries of nerves  
like little brown creeks spilling  
alongside railroad tracks  
banked with patent-leather leafed laurel  
and green-feathered hemlock  
through coal towns  
at the mercy  
of slick-mud, clay-cheeked water  
spinning  
creamy eddies higher and higher  
until everything — outside in —  
swells over the moment  
and I am up to my neck  
pulled along, thrashing,  
to yet another whirlpool  
or tar-black stump snag  
and plead for deliverance  
instead I am a headline:  
*FLOOD CLAIMS ONE,  
NO KNOWN SURVIVORS.*

### **Where I Am (Not)**

And I thought,  
it is such a perfect autumn  
day  
I should go somewhere  
to enjoy it – more –  
where the cloudless  
blue sky  
is bigger or  
bluer –  
I should go where  
the trees tremble more  
exactly in  
the breeze  
better – more quaking  
and scintillating,  
green-yellow blades twisting  
each on a fibrous  
cord  
in the soft and silky gusts:  
it is such a perfect autumn  
day  
to be where I am  
unable to see  
I can never be  
where I am not.

### **The Path of One**

You are many  
skins -  
wax paper thin  
laminates  
of wants needs expectations  
stuff-yearning  
love-lorn disappointments  
and clutch your  
crinkling layers  
to an aching longing heart,  
bunched squeezed  
clutching death-grip tight  
as if these casings were  
real  
and mattered;  
release fingers, one by one  
or a hand all at once  
and let the shadows  
slough  
fall away  
lay at your feet,  
nudge them away  
with your newly free  
toes;  
walk out, walk on  
do not be afraid  
of the first surprise of life  
on exposed self-skin  
welcome its authentic breath  
on who you are,  
be it  
and be it!

## **My Parents' Unhappy Childhoods**

Blame shame  
knit purl  
pick a bale of cotton  
bad good  
bad bad  
blame shame  
again  
again  
I am I  
in eyes of my parents  
at fault for being  
a baby bundle  
of pointless soft love  
and needs, please  
feed me, carry me, change  
me, hold me, feed me,  
talk to me, look at me  
at me  
at me who I am  
too exuberant  
too knowing  
too caring and speaking  
so much I overflow  
my want banks  
and am dammed  
and damned  
and blamed and shamed  
but that was yesterday;  
today I am I  
in my own  
eyes  
and I am now  
myself.

## **Making Scents of It All**

I am skin.  
An integument of odors  
and clandestine  
wishes  
like for bacon – forbidden  
pleasure salty, fatty –  
and taboo Indian Red  
bleeding all over  
and between my toes  
under the influence of  
sharp, nose-knocking nail polish  
remover, hiding persistent carmine  
in the valleys of my feet;  
as well, the honey-salt  
pearlyfish scent of warm  
enclaves –  
along with Vadalía onion  
lording it over the lavender  
floating on my palms:  
I pull in smells and try to store  
them up like nuts tucked  
in tiny meteor holes by  
squirrels whose maps must be  
better than mine  
or they'd starve –  
the aromas are elusive  
runners away when I try  
to dig them up, the  
smoky sweet perfume  
of mysterious  
wisterias  
or mellow scent of autumn  
and its winds -  
part loss and part  
revelation.

### **Too Early for the Sting**

Where August  
butts into September  
the sun slip-slides  
into yellow jacket light  
swarming us  
with fair fire  
that never burns  
but scorches leaves  
into scrabbling colors that dun  
and drop  
divulging the twig-lace:  
I wonder how apples  
newly born each season  
know  
anyway every year  
how to turn ciderish  
where they land.

## **I Am Always**

ready  
to be  
left  
void  
unfilled  
alone  
and my chest  
under the skin,  
tight to the bone  
is tattooed with  
burning ache  
scarlet ink message  
squeezing my breath  
down out of the way,  
*don't open little heart*  
*no point*  
*it all goes away*  
*sooner, not later;*  
always ready to be  
let go, turned away,  
frozen out  
I see it all through  
a prism  
of abandonment  
because, after all, I  
am less  
not so much to love  
or they wouldn't  
always  
go.

## **October**

I know  
the roses have gone  
but for a curled crisp  
afterthought  
but  
I go outside  
anyway  
in the sharp air  
blunted with early sunlight  
and my breath  
puffs softly  
white  
like pollen  
promising  
bloom then fruit.

## **St. Valentine's Day**

I wondered if I pierced  
a tiny hole, blood let,  
let rage  
squirt out my head wouldn't ring  
with knowing  
my mother, my father couldn't love  
because they could only speak  
in tongues of loss and lack;  
the first time I almost exploded  
in my brain  
was over love, or rather  
over not love  
and I wondered if my mouth  
would let the spew  
rage out about  
having to stuff my own  
heart into valentine shape  
with snatches of words grabbed  
from other lives –  
how good, how sweet, how funny, how glad we are  
she is our child –  
closing my eyes I could almost pretend  
as I shoved the filling into the saggy velvet heart  
hanging loose in my chest -  
I was that wanted child and not  
an accident, an inconvenience,  
a warm body of need, need, need,  
what did they know of need except their own  
which sucked the air out of my lungs  
and left me gasping until I thought  
about a tiny holes in my flesh  
for relief, instead  
I sprayed my green Quaker parrots  
into globe artichokes  
round and full of feather-bracts,  
joyful in the water trusting  
ready to dip into the love I have  
tried to grow on my own from  
seeds I found around.

## **Leaving at Midnight**

After hearing her  
story,  
my skin seemed to float  
out softly  
billow  
like gauze curtains  
around my bones  
and felt unmarked  
and safe,  
an uneasy boundary  
sometimes –  
thin border  
claimed by two  
sovereignties,  
surely not protection,  
because some women  
have their crust  
pounded flat cannot  
cast off  
blue-purple staining yellow  
black blossoms  
like their wedding bouquets  
death do  
them part,  
as if they were  
unmerited  
simply by being woman.

### **Umbrellas for the Walrus**

One of the great  
summer surprises  
was an invasion  
overnight, which along the  
Arctic Ocean  
is waxing and waning always light -  
tide pools each fitted  
like a glove holding  
a giant beribboned parasol  
softly pulsing away  
its peculiar, precarious  
version of life:  
we were just sky  
and tundra separated  
from the sea by rounded magic  
rocks that bloomed from gray  
to flowers  
in the mist -  
and of course, the  
sudden jellyfish.

## **On Being the Center of the Universe**

Young green  
earnest in the truth of  
myself once  
feeling all eyes  
on my skin thinking I  
was the center of their gaze  
the target of their words  
recipient of opinion  
but they were focused  
through me to some other  
place  
of their own.

## **We Are All Too Something**

Odd fish, square peg  
misfit  
disconnected  
glorious in our imperfection,  
gleeful with self-pity  
because  
we are wretched  
like no other on earth  
until we see our tooness  
makes us one:  
too much, too little  
too early, too late  
too fat  
too skinny  
too intense, quiet,  
black, white, red or blue,  
yellow, too rainbow,  
too transparent, too fast,  
too slow  
too up or down, too poor,  
too rich, too well,  
too ill, too busy, bored,  
compulsive,  
careless, too stiff,  
too dumb, too smart, too  
floppy, flabby, rigid or  
crooked, too straight,  
too deaf, too blind,  
too broken or together,  
too soft or hard, tough or  
easy, too strong, weak, powerful,  
meek, selfish, selfless,  
too hot or cold, too ugly,  
twitchy, still, too lovely,  
flashy, dull, glum or silly,  
too sweaty, too dry,  
too mad, happy, asleep,  
awake,  
too godless or godful;  
as for me, I am too loud  
even  
when I whisper.

## **Crows In a Moment Passing By**

I caught them  
almost  
quiet:  
pine tree dreams of  
slick black rainbow feathers  
within branches armed  
long, spiky needles  
clasped by sweet sap,  
roiling caws  
started and black shapes  
with shaggy tail feathers  
bobbed out along limbs  
took flight  
long, sweeping flaps  
leaving the trees  
still.

### **Hunter's Moon**

It isn't the usual moon  
hanging around like some  
gibbous creature  
waiting for completion:  
this is a moon that has  
been places and seen things;  
large and ripe  
and mellow creamy-orange  
it draws our inner tides  
into the confluence  
of the cosmos,  
coaxing our cell water  
into lunatic rip tides  
as we howl with  
bare-branched autumn  
delight  
to be alive.

## **Midnight Sun**

Fine sea spray silk  
scarving  
around our cheeks,  
first early morning  
walk  
curled inland  
on hollow crunch  
beach ridge gravel:  
we ended up  
holding hands.

## **Spring Grievance**

There are several ways  
to feel about trees:  
a kite flyer  
sees witch's fingers  
greedily seeking bright paper  
and cloth  
from high and gusty March airs  
snatching treasures  
and wrapping shreds  
about the nodes and knobs  
of unloved knuckles;  
but, understand,  
she is lonely, unleafed  
so don't begrudge her  
the wooden-spined butterflies  
she unwings to flaunt  
as spring's first blossoms.

## **Pain As a Pair of Red-Velvet Evening Gloves**

I can turn myself  
into a sack  
a warm sack of moist bones  
starting with my toes and drawing  
heaviness  
up slowly, carefully over my calves  
and knees, stopping to feel the  
softening, the release, then,  
covering my stomach and chest  
with mental flannel  
all the way up over my chin,  
mouth, nose and eyes —  
but my arms  
still don't get it,  
they lie burning, pulsing  
muscles pushing out against  
skin like shrink wrap resisting  
so I must turn them into  
long, red-velvet evening gloves  
from each throbbing, stinging finger-tip  
on up  
and then I peel them off carefully  
shove them into an imagined glass cage  
— a terrarium for poisonous pets —  
watch them twist and squeeze  
each other like deranged  
tango partners  
beset with sudden loathing —  
and I lie quietly  
breathing deeply in  
breathing deeply out  
observing pain in  
my mind's eye  
until the gloves begin to tire,  
dropping quietly  
in a boneless heap,  
red-velvet turning  
finger by finger  
into glowing silver-white light;  
I let the radiant gloves  
slide gently back over  
my fingers, across my palms  
and wrists to my elbows:  
I am finally fully unified.

## **Word of Warning**

What happens  
to our word waves  
do you suppose  
after they part our lips  
and dive off earnest  
tongues?  
Do they creep out windows,  
cat burglars stealing off with  
velvet bags of lovespeak jewels  
or a papersack of  
grubby, muttered spitball  
curses;  
maybe  
slide away  
backs to the wall  
guns drawn  
out doors like cops  
at the ready - leaving  
us baffled  
and ever uncertain;  
might they stick to walls  
ceilings and floors  
slowly building up  
like yellow grime cigarette tar;  
where do these word waves  
make landfall  
splash,  
end up,  
collide or  
finally diminish  
into nothing  
if nothing exists  
maybe they live on forever  
carrying every utterance  
into the pulsars, nebulae, guts  
of other galaxies:  
oh my god  
maybe we should think  
before we speak.

## Diagnosis — Glioblastoma

It seems sometimes  
as if your tumor  
lives in a safe house,  
secretly de-briefing you  
and you never let on  
if you've cracked the code,  
I am a spy —  
standing outside in the  
sweet fall of new snow,  
trying to see what is going  
on in your head.

I was there all along,  
the conscious one,  
out in the open,  
who watched your surgeon  
cry  
as he told me,  
"It was the bloodiest  
one I have ever seen,  
I don't know what I got out."

Yes, it's all yours,  
subletting  
your right frontal suite,  
but I have to pay the rent  
and find some space between  
the black-out curtains  
to keep an eye on things  
in case it defects again and  
drags you along.

**After the First, Another**

The glioma is sneaky  
behind its blood veil,  
with blunt fingers  
pulls apart  
the gray matter  
turning it into  
deranged salt-water taffy —  
I have to look  
but can do nothing  
except wait for someone  
else's cells  
to turn  
Benedict Arnold  
again