

The Work of a Worshipper

The Work of a Worshipper

Senior Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Arts and Sciences
Brandeis University

Undergraduate Program in Creative Writing
Olga Broumas, advisor

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts

By
Elaine Mancini

April 2016

Copyright by
Elaine Mancini

Acknowledgements

Thank you to

Where the Children Play for publishing
At Night

And all those who have let me share my work.

And thank you to Olga Broumas, who helped me with
such dedication to form this thesis.

For Parker

“Extinguish my eyes, I’ll go on seeing you.
Seal my ears, I’ll go on hearing you.
And without feet I can make my way to you,
without a mouth I can swear your name.

Break off my arms, I’ll take hold of you
with my heart as if with a hand.”

—*Rainer Maria Rilke*

Table of Contents

The Sting	9
Trinket Shrine	10
I Will Take You and Poe to the Beach	11
Though Your Frame is Meager	13
<i>Advent Season</i>	14
Note from the Author	15
At Night	16
Dissonance	18
Hokkaido	19
Husbands and Wives	20
Marry in June	21
Twin Carols	22
Place	23
Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark	24
The Truth About Death	25
Assurance	27
It Must Want Something	29
Advent Season	30
<i>Somber Interims, Martinis, Homes</i>	32
I Can Barely Stomach Your Body Being Any-Place	33
Seasons	34
High Timed	35
The Love Cycle	36
Winter, For Us	37
Through Windows	38
In The Year I Found You	39
Hunger	40
Prey	41
You Sizzle Now	42
<i>The Stations of the Cross</i>	43
Opening Prayer	44
Second Station (Parker carries his cross.)	45
Third Station (Parker falls the first time.)	46
Fourth Station (Parker meets his afflicted mother.)	47
Fifth Station (Scottie of Southie helps Parker to carry his cross.)	48
Sixth Station (Helena wipes the face of Parker.)	49
Eighth Station (Parker meets the women of Waltham.)	50
Ninth Station (Parker falls a third time.)	51
Tenth Station (Parker is stripped of his clothes.)	53
Eleventh Station (Parker is nailed to the cross.)	54

<i>The Pillar of Absence</i>	56
Trinity	57
The Truth About Death in Venice	58
Annabel Kills Poe, Gently, But Without Respect	59
Learning Sundowns	61
Foresee the Season	62
After Time	63
The Boy From Cambridge with Doc Martens	64
Different Breed	66
Comfort	68
The Secret Garden in the North	69
The Fantasy	70
Graveyards	71
We Can't Cook, We Can't Love	72
The Golden Age	73
Infant Grave	74
Dream Us Away, Our Bottled Ships	75
Mark as Read	77

The Work of a Worshipper

The Sting

When sunlight eats at your fingertips
sticky with salt, and busy
I know something—as also

between a puddle's breaths
when no one is looking at you
but me, though that is
rarely the case. I know

your knuckles, dry, soft
catacomb dust muted
as lichen. Your eyes,
perhaps, on some ice
laden shore, I'll know.

When you know
bite nails, pace. Flesh
my apple, leave
it in the sun; its
fermentation heady-sweetest
skin and blood.

Trinket Shrine

There is a ruth in slow transitions
of any kind.
Limbs through molasses
in a ghost town gutter, I adapt
to know you.

Ghosts have the same lazy,
sedimentary style as you.
They speak and do not
move. The living are worse—
I don't want them all
to love you but most do.
Though you are not

a kind man.
When your boy-legs quiver
and you fume with cold,
a grin lurks deep
in your chest. Its teeth
are sharpened ice, lips
black by hoarfrost long ago.
You smoke and smoke
through both mouths.
This is a toll road.
Nothing stops you.

Only the leaf-bruised
evening streets, draped
in indigo sick-bed sheets
leave you breathless for
a moment, slow.
I know you cold.
In offering my coat I
might not rile you, though
that, I doubt—you love
fights. Dust
touches your eyes, red
with the year of Mars.

The quiet in you, even wolves
of Manitoba do not know. Be
quiet. So everyone knows
you are small and godly.

Preface

You may have disturbed
an anglerfish so deep
in my gut that sediment
swirled in my ribcage
undertow. He came
swimming when
he saw you. He said
that you are for me.
I can swim out very far,
even on New Hampshire
beaches where rocks
glower from below.
They pump the tide.
I go so far I can't see
in which direction the
world ends anymore,
but I can navigate, and
he says I read the old
maps better undersea,
when the moon is hunting.
My anglerfish suggests
conviction. No weeping.

Body

I don't usually take
advice from fish, or
people—just from me.
But when they prophesy
death, you can't ignore
them. You
will die alone, but
we will die together.
I may not die as soon.
I'll bring the things you
need to the bedside table
as you recede. I wonder
will I have time to make
coffee, and hope you do
not choose cremation.
They will want to see
your face. They will
want to love you, once,
before you go.

In conclusion

I plan to end, myself,
in the sea. To be the pall
bearer of all your pain,
to burn your casket
into the sea. Poe and I will drink
gin on the beach. Will write
of your sepulchre for
decades. Weep.

Though Your Frame is Meager

*You who like an ephemeral shadow
pass light-footed and serene
over the stupid mortals who have judged you vile,
statue with eyes of jet, towering angel with head of brass*
—Baudelaire

stand for me.

You are lofty when you enter a room
a draft exhales from the halls of whatever
long ago mansion you command.
There, you display your smallish bones,
your flesh in the image of *Davide*, compact.
Florence does not know you are in her canon,
I know better.

Venice also loves you. She watched you
the night of February onyx over the bay,
Carnevale, when the soul of Casanova
dripped from all the wet stone city.
You bowed your head in an alley
to the moisture, cold. She knows you.
But you tricked her into thinking you
dead. That you are steeping in the rank
summer teal, roiling through canals—slow
moving crab. But that couldn't be you, for

your lizard tongue has just now spoken
in Zurich. It quoted something we once
knew of the world and later forgot.
They don't want to hear it, but
one glance from you, Basilisk boy
and they bow their heads, they lift
their palms to the sting of heaven's wasps.
They listen. Don't you want them to?
Next, I think you might learn speech
without words is your dialect.

Run your fingers over the Ouija board
in those late hours when you are so
afraid of my love.
You will feel dark,
and comfortable,
and pure.
It will talk, and so will you.

Advent Season

Note from the Author

His bones rattle in the white night ringed
in asbestos and still cosmos. Lowering
his head, lifting on a wing
of pinprick death. Pain, mutinied
by blood thickening like asphalt,
he shrank into the night, walking,
dark and walking.
Do you remember his name?

*Beauty has lived its life of sorrow
to make us understand that it is not
of the world.*

(W. B. Yeats)

At Night

continued, no stanza break

I am the ragged, shrapneled
flesh hung like lace, wandering
towards you from the grey-tinged
moor, heavy with exhaled breath
of soil languor. My wet lungs
rattle through the thicket, hungry
for air that smells of ferns,
bone and sediment. Track me
by the blood on twigs,
stains in the yellowgrass, a fingernail
on the log I sat on awhile—you didn't
catch up. I lurch on.

One breast lopsided, the
other torn, leaking pus and lead.
The fluids splay
the ground. With every shudder
the forest paints. The bog
watches. My mouth is almost
gone, teeth grinning through
the cavern cheek, dry tongue
flagellating gum, blood and
spit seeping. Femur
shattered, ankles puffed plums,
falder. Ground animals
bite at them—I smell now
like food, but walk.

Over the deep green hillock,
your grey light is small,
blackened by rain, ridges of
peat and blank sleep.
I find you nodding
off there, stoned. Alone.
Your teeth don't show
when I amble over
the ridge—a bloody head,
your banshee
bitch with no words, I sway
closer, the smell of
iron wafts from my holes.
You don't even dip
your head. You look. You stay.
I've never touched you. My hands
first find your chest,
its beautiful shoulders. Don't

move. I vomit
then kneel to clean, to polish
your shoes. You may kick
my fingers, touch
my hair, take
my three-fingered hand, I tell you
I am the one, your death, capable
of everything but bleeding
out in the night grass, capable
of everything but holding
your body to mine.

Dissonance

Cold, fingering digitals,
we pretend this
is something it's not. Winter

sets in the western
corner of Maine. The leaves
shiver, nauseous

under the cold sag
of sky—a full-belly
dark. Also the Arctic

mildly thickens, ominous,
and Russia bears
the leaden snow.

We are pretending, faceless,
digital, I hate
clocks and computers, I don't

want chocolate
from you, nor to beg, but wrap
us in gauze swaths lost

centuries ago, in a desert.
Seeing them now,
crusty, blotted with

pus and blood. For me—

wash them in a crook
of the Ganges: cleaner
than me, than us.

Hokkaido

Small demons live among rocks in the snow, some say.
A boy from the West, you jump the imps to stand
before your favored winter sun settling on the inlet.
Fishing boats gather, one, two, three, in soft dark
looking for lobster, crabs scuttling through the frigid
thick. Crustaceans who have never seen snow
feel the sky lean, heavy on the roof.

Waves never mention how many times a day
they're killed, and why they're terribly
green some days & brown on others, why
the water always tastes metallic and the people
shudder to touch it. So much ice

floating. Crates
of mackerel on the dock. Blue-fingered
fishermen fiddle their wives behind the tea house.
The walls are paper. Whispers—*come inside
where it's warm*. The dark floors creak their jubilation
at Yankee footsteps. *Bring him back here, bring him home*.
Through dust-meshed halls, an orient tinge of camphor marks the air.
This place has stood for ages, a coffin on the sweet
Japanese snow, bodies of girls rammed in
its pillars, their black teeth grinning at the moon, bearing it just.

You'll sit down at this tea house, at this low table, lacquered black
and slick as an eel threading the undertow, the air a sea
of must—tatami and what you take for samurai, geisha, monks.
You hear drawling bells, swords clatter, a tentative
gong, samisen, and the mute hiss of snow on the pebbled garden.

You say it isn't bliss to live in this dark house, to clutch her pale
flesh, a cold parted lychee in light syrup
in your palm, like all you ever wanted to pay for
and forget. Before sunrise, she pours you tea. But black hair
drapes from a corner of the ceiling, a sad
spirit cuing you to leave. The grey bay called you
for a reason. It nibbles your peachbud ear, whispers, *Go
rot with the fish—she'll finish your tea*.

Husbands and Wives in Church

We all knew they had fucked because of the kids.

I don't want to walk outside. It's raining. The berries
on the juniper bushes look frosted like in a cookbook.
It's so raw. The old women's perfume reeks. I'm
still horny after dreaming and everyone is
shaking and talking and breathing
in incense deep and I have no location without you.

Marry in June

Your love is an unloving thing.
A mass dragged from
a rotting cardboard
box. You left it in
the mildew shed for years.

It smells of rank wood.
Water-marks, mold all over,
spongy, cold, leaves residue
on the fingers that smells
like abandon. You want
to cover your mouth with
something when you're close.

A squirrel died in the shed,
once. It froze there over winter.
And in hazy spring, we went in
searching for a book on Lazarus.
We found the box where its thawed
guts remained, as close to the box
as in winter. Frozen flesh on frozen
flesh, and snow on the window
keeping in the shed's old rage,
quiet as dust, as grief.

The book now smelled a bit
like carcass, but, anyways I lay
in my room for weeks—naked,
fever-sweating, trying to read
about how I could die, and
come back again, into a world
where I'd stand in our kitchen,
pour you another on the rocks
and ask if you wanted to die
in April or March, if you wanted
to marry, then, in June. Flowers
everywhere at the wedding,
to cover our smell. Mildew.

Twin Carols

(HATE)

cupid
vermin
a beast
you're crippled on the floor
beast
with nice white boy
clothes
you look great in 'em kid you look
great
you're disgusting

(LOVE)

Oh! Come let us adore him.
Mary's virgin cunt
spilled you.
The stars breathed
sugar-breath heavy
down everyone's neck
dank in the manger,
breathe it in. *Holy boy*
of dust and sugar cane,
dice, and small,
lucky things, cinnamon
and steel wool
is born is born!
You come to me on a white horse
reeling
dragging all the hearses,
all the corn.

These, my dreams.
Though the tears
are pearls of adoring.

Place

People shave off their breasts
usually a few days
after the new year rings

in quiet steel hallways
with drugs
and grinface doctors
to hold their hands.

Skeleton-wafts
from room to room,
day by day,
beige beige places,

thrift shop sweaters,
undersmell of death.
Instant coffee. Stiff blankets.

Looking out the window
all the time.
Cavities along the spine.
Dozing.

Yellow soap stings.
Doctors going rotten.
It hurts it hurts
it hurts.

Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark

“You’re like Jack,” I said

“Who?”

“The Ripper.”

“Why?”

“Look at
yourself—

you go around

cutting a lot

of things,

usually flesh”

and you stick

to dark corners.

“I really don’t though.”

“You do.”

“I don’t.”

“But it seems

like you do

that’s what matters, what counts—

you’re scary to see

and one day you

just might

scare yourself.”

The Truth About Death

continued, no stanza break

Static as a corpse
in the bloated stage
of decay, head
shrunken, body
in swirls, like
a butterfly.

The grass along
the sidewalk upon
which it lay is dry,
yellow, but you
wear your coat
walking by, though
the still air is hot.

The corpse
in its bloated
stage of decay
can't move
to you, can't
vibrate air with
swelling tongue
sour with blood.
No moaning.
No feeble pinky
fingering the grass.

Actually,
it's looking up
as if the world
were a dry
hazy theatre screen.
One can't.
One can't move.
Sometimes people
don't move
on, lie there
awhile, trying
to understand this place.

In its bloated stage
of decay, the corpse
sees you trot by,
your scarf against
the palm tree wind

and the bones of jackals
dancing far behind
in a cloud
of sugar and dust
syrup and blood
to the music—
desert nights and
West coast jazz.

A corpse in that stage,
bloat and decay,
on a winter morning
in a hot, hot
place where you
are still cold, cannot
touch you, nor breathe
your name. Did you smell?
Or are you used
to cadavers.

Assurance

continued, no stanza break

Our steps are
sluggish through
ice sagged rice
paddies, slushy
but crisp,
tumbling down
the white hills Buddha
grins through grey
tree-light of night in
forest. Every path
acts out different
names. No one
could see us
climb to the shrine
by cutting through
rice paddies because
it is quicker, and
here we are shielded
from moonlight by
shade from mountains
where Bashō once
clambered on softly
decomposed limbs.

In this glen
the lonely snow
is too thick
like puffed
sugar. Your voice
muffled, *what*
are you trying to say?
Just walk towards
the shrine, you'll see
a red lantern, a bronze
bell through the
hissing, churning
grey. Little dark gods
will guide your
shuddering frame
and the trees strung
tall like slender innards
left to freeze will fade
into the haze
of the forest and of
your waking dreams.

THE SQUALL WILL FADE.

It Must Want Something

Black frost bite, flesh
brittle, thickening, toes
bent dark purple, skewed
but it walks, it walks, look
at the frigid skulking thing
through the brush on its way
to Bloody Brook, a dirt-grey stream
that runs beneath the junction
near Crawford Notch
for the baptism
of a cream colored fox
and a man who
peeled the flesh off of
most of his chest
and reads Goethe all day long.

Its frozen limbs
heal everything. It speaks
through the winter air
on the snow plain
exhausted below the mountains.
The world tends to the weak.

It waits by the stream
for the first crocus.
Peeling off layers of
long dead skin
while the man
spits up blood
from time to time,
the fox bends to drink
and the white owl coos past dusk.

If I die first
I will dedicate my bones
to you and canvas.

+

Some saints lived in ossuaries years past their death.
In mine, I want whatever you used
to stab yourself in the ribs. Then
you went to class, a wet, grey day, not very cold.

You understand things, but your beauty
devours like Kalki or some pagan whore, and you trail
like ends of December sky drenched in sugar-plum and bruise.
Soggy nightfall hunching over old churchyards in the mountains.
Thunder-weather, backdrop horizon

of velvet, blood. Godly backdrop, yes, you are beautiful,
blood on your lip. Yes, I'm walking, I'm walking away and towards
the chapel nestled in damp northeastern hills
full of bones and ghost-seed. The only spirit

who whispers to me through the the holy music and scratch
of leaves is you; son of earth-devil and father-dust, boy of Western
wing, of sins, soft-spoken plagues, who eats
the lotus and dewy flesh left for

men and for Darwin in the sweet-scalding wet of Galapagos.
Ungrateful little deity. Kneeling in the pew like a peasant suffering for bread
parched throat and gums with splits
from the arid breath of those left wanting your body. Your blood—
what's left in the sediment of the chalice for the last in line to drink

the sacrament. I vomit everything before I may
take you, little goldfish in your bowl-
goblet from the grim geezer by the altar
groaning that you are a road rotting to the horizon.

+

If I die first
no one will know
the box of bones belongs
to you.
Take it.
Bury them at dusk along

the coast by Hakodate bay
when the snow is drenched in sapphire,
may you suddenly find
words for me.
Speak them to the cold
snow-swept Asian sea.
I'll hear them.
I'll kiss your silly hair
before you leave.

*Somber Interims,
Martinis,
Homes*

I Can Barely Stomach Your Body Being Any-Place

The horror
of your legs in tight black pants
walking, so spindly up the sun
and water studded path.
I am below, on the hill.
Spectral, in shade,
the usual. I admit

it is spring now.
The bones of baby animals
poke through the snow,
trinkets lodged wet
in smacking soil.
Dead grass sweating.
You even took off your sweater.

Why was I afraid? *I could smell
the scent sweating on your back.*
Why was I afraid? *For the love of god
it was like I saw you
for hours and hours, days.*
My heart filled up
like a cemetery in August
with so, so many graves.

Seasons

Strangely the boughs of trees
dipped in ice as fingers in a bowl
droop and form your name against the snow
and sky as if a black
torch consumed entire by the moon's

rippling illumine. Guiding a boat down
the weird eddies clustered
with cormorant's eggs and bones leads
a simple prophet to heal. More important,
buttercups sprout on the bank. With every turn the marsh

smells less rank. Somber cooing
trips across the torrid sea astride a fog
horn, a scream tracking the shadowed
hotdog stand. Furtive, I clench you, our lips, our hips
press to the dying heat of sand, violet, sunset-

flushed. Once set, why wouldn't
we leave? The rot descends in skeletal
finger wisps from trees, again unearthed as if
with squash in the harvest, our hearts carved in
and spiced with cloves for all to see. The warmth
from you to me—wet
blanket, edge of sea.

High Timed

A necklace of bee-stings ring her.
A robin lies dead in snow.
I see that you will not answer
but track wherever I go.

The pavement lurches under.
The cars shudder and slow.
A light is on in your window.
It doesn't matter you're home.

The bark mulch reeks, going rotten.
A rabbit chokes on some stones.
You never gave me an answer.
I only gave you a home.

A skyline stings the horizon. The fish
vomit blood in a pool.
I see the weather is rising.
I'm waiting to finish school.

The Love Cycle

Children are stupid and mean.
Even though many have counted
the creamed grey clouds like ribs
chased by their ripened, bleeding hips.

I, too, have counted clouds like ribs,
run with rabbits in the fen, I've spit
when you lie at ease on a dock
eaten by barnacles, sunlight, wind.
Stupid and mean, I dump a bucket
of oysters on your head, hurl your
glasses in surf, yell you're a leper
to dockhands.

Speechless child who cannot fathom
why I'd brand him a freak, you gawk
and blind yourself with the white
needled sea. Then I hop down
from the pier; wobbly ankled, ashamed
to die a child, ashamed to be born again
when you pass me that empty bucket,
laughing, *do it again*.

Winter, For Us

It is March.
Though winter is just beginning.
The most sullen snow
falls now, to the ground
where it cannot escape itself—
by noon the sun will gaze
through the clouds,
grey and nauseous.
No reason keeping cold
when keeping warm is,
really, hard enough.

Perhaps, were this not a cruel snow
in the slow, rigid depth of the year
a man could be likened to a weary traveler,
but few things move here.
A man could be likened to a pond
with a shade of ice on its lip
in the moonlight.
A man could be likened to rotting snow,
a man breaking down in the wild.

Outside the hotel window
terrible cement blocks loom—
crawling with windows, sick with rooms.
Birds fly on raw crosswinds
who may die before the next moon—
something to disrupt the skyline
on anyone, besides the moody flakes
falling sluggish, quiet with rage
and a man
who could be headed anywhere;

comfortable lodgings in the hills,
a reservoir's edge with ice like silk
or better,
a different month.

Through Windows

Hand me the string from your
tin can, little love, that old
rusted one—dead for years
after short stints with coffee
grounds and coins on the sill
of a back-room window—
I don't mind. Someone has
already said each word I've
spoken to you with different
lips. Nothing new. Nothing
sacred, don't wipe the metal
down

My can still smells of fish and
blood from when Carmilla cut
herself on the mean lid, opening
it for tuna casserole at dusk one
muggy, powdered May. *Bless
this rot-less sea fruit, bless this
new, fresh length of day.* What
of your mind, even then, swam
through the buttery night to
warm glass, to look in.

Pass me your string.
I've so many words to repeat.
Over and over, they careen
from my mouth to roll
in the can and soak
your string vibrate
virgin. My own ears
hear little in tin. They
catch your voice at the
waterfront, in the wind.

In the Year I Found You

Nothing left for the mind but winter's excrement.
Trees sliced themselves in the woods; crimson sap, surprising but
winter is always unimpressed. Nothing left for frostbite but
the cream colored fox, too smart; some banshee's nipples,
green, exposed; and little Nero laughing, drinking cold milk from the trees,
wanting to fuck his mother—or maybe just walk in the dark
part of the forest to cut his thighs, alone by a cluster of strawberries in shadow,
purple as summer death in a bayou, or someone's neck after sex. He mixes
their juice with his blood like it can make him sweeter. An early spring is a ghost
without conviction. Blood tastes better straight and very thin, the wraiths would tell.

He enters the forest again to speak with the spirit of lichen and dying wood.
Looks crazy, talking to himself. Send someone in to dispose of discarded bandages,
his
bloodied swabs, a soul flecked with pus. Hide it under floorboards of any mansion
you find
in this snow-slaked vale, where all one can do is walk, or sleep, or never speak while
sitting,
nothing but noting the small movements of a damp March of thickets and dead swans,
pine needles
on the brow and small grave plots for honest boys who fell to the ill
mists long ago, when demigods still sailed the marsh fog on barely twinkling nights.
Back then it meant spirits were coming for a whiff of everyone's broken bones
and offerings of fruit. The spirits feasted on Galapagos gems, the finest
Oolong, and a couple of children. Nobody questioned the god they knew. Tonight,
little Nero, you ask, "Where are we? Where are we?"

"Somewhere between the lines we didn't draw," I say.

Hunger

I think you might taste good in a piccata—
meat of your heart sliced thin, sautéed
with little mushrooms and capers,
white wine and lemon, a dash
of Romano cheese.

A picnic by the sea.
Someone will bring us
(your skeleton and me)
a basket with the full meal;
bread, wine, for later, tea.
I baked you a pie with shavings
of my breasts and thighs.
It's blueberry-cherry.
You'll like it.

We live a haunted life
in this kitchen, this park.
On the table, a letter
you wrote in your head
with strands of rage
and syrup from your heart.
I read, staring outside
at the steeping night, the bats
over the lake.
I understood you were living
in the woods, practically
anywhere. I understood
you watch me when you can.

I am hungry.
This house in an empty
gut. Everything
tired, digested back
in another life when you knew
we had to marry
without god, without water.

Prey

The tidal shifts occurred centuries
ago when Pangea withered
to continental shards.

I may have been a jelly fish,
an ugly insect. You
may have been a shaman sipping tea

from tusk china, chanting
poison and nectar to the jungle's
dementia, letting me crawl

over your palm, kiss it with little feelers.
You were big, I was small. Now
is almost the same.

You watch as I am eaten by the world.

You Sizzle Now

In the lush depth of the fen, he cooked
bacon on his wrists, his

stomach, kneecaps, ribs—doled out
a strip from every region of the body.

The savior always, selfish when he fed us
from himself instead of bread and fish.

Prisoners of war are rarely given more
than water, but survive. I'm given

little belts of skin, grease from his eye
creases, though I can't see when he pushes

that measly plate of grits beneath my door.
Boy, he went from frigid-crypt to sizzling.

*The Stations
of
the Cross*

Opening Prayer

He said to them “*My soul is sad
even unto death.
Wait here
and watch with me.*”

(KNEEL)
(STAND)
(GENUFLECT)
(PRAY)

I'll sing for him till the sun
blackens with mold—
grows so soggy it sinks
in the ground as detritus.

Join me in worship, in praise
for the boy who used his blood to water my flowers,
for the only man who can garden my death,
Amen.

Second Station

Parker carries his cross.

Shall I crucify your king?

Late winter winds in a Massachusetts suburb
have a curious, cruel way of speech.

*He was rejected and avoided by men,
a man of suffering, accustomed to infirmity,
one of those from whom men turn away.*

The pavement in the graveyard said so eighteen
times already, along with the raised sarcophagus
in the western corner, and the rose quartz stone
for the woman who killed herself, because
“She was above all things glad and young.”

I don't listen. Never to the dead.

He's somewhere on the windy plains, shaking,
looking too posh for Waltham sidewalks,
and not with the kind of people who help
him when he trips and
grazes his chin, chips a tooth on the curb.

God says, never mind, this boy
is a nuisance, and if he goes,
it best be soon, and softly.
So I ask, “you won't get him
hit by a bus, leave him dead,
drunk, on a Dorchester doorstep,
a switchblade hangin' out of his mouth?”

God says, darling, I don't grant wishes
the pleasure is not yours,
but mine.

Third Station

Parker falls the first time.

“No, I’m fine, I’m fine.”
There is a serpent of briars
‘round your ankle,
dead skin peeling everywhere.
You had a few bad dreams about jackals;
those are the nights you want me
in your bed. The rest of the time
you’re fine jerking off in a towel—
you cry those nights instead.

Stand up,
wipe the dirt from your cuts.
We’re only at the river’s delta.

Fourth Station

Parker meets his afflicted mother.

Woman, behold your son.

See his enflamed torso wracked, sweaty with dirt.
See his broken toenails in the grit, caked with blood,
stinging in all the cracks. We ought to fashion a
bed for him of satin sheets and reeds, in a quiet
bend of the brine river snaking through the marsh.
We ought to bring him spiced liqueur from Germany,
platters of coke, a roast duck; let me be the one
to lift each forkful to his canyoned lips, to cut
his lines, unless, mother, you want to do it yourself.

Woman, behold your son.

See him in his purple and white robe, staggering;
a boy in his old pajamas, a man with arms that can pound
like the hind legs of a stallion—they would shatter our
breastbones, mash our noses' cartilage if he loved us less.
So he bears the black claw of the crucifix jutting
from his shoulder, from his back that is an aching tooth.
Mother, let's pull it out, let us relieve him of his spine.

Woman, behold your son.

I don't know if you're a church-going woman.
I am not. But I said to the lord, "Jesus Christ
I will lay my offering below the blanched white
marble cross, from my body to yours. 7 fingernails,
3 teeth, a clump of skin shaved ALL from the knees
just to have seen his birth!" To have lurked at the bedside,
Mary, I want the fluid from your womb, I want
your baby's first breath, I want to kiss the tender chest
of your infant and weep. I will hold onto the vial until
his body becomes a shrine—I'll do this because
I think your son,
 the son of god,
might trust me.

Fifth Station

Scottie of Southie helps Parker to carry his cross.

“It was like being the only pallbearer
for your own coffin,”

you said.

There was someone inside you
red, angry, eyes of liquid
ruby, flesh like cooling
magma: a bad guy.
He came out to help you
carry the cross
through laughter in the streets.

When you got there, you tried to kill Sottie
instead. They began to nail him behind
Triple-O’s, and you fled.

You ran from the place of the skull,
the bones that wore you out—
you got the fuck out of Golgotha,
lamb, I don’t want to see you hangin’ round.

I’ll find you there, regardless
with a gut full of wine and drugs,
whispering to Whitey in the corner,
because you want my body,
and Scottie wants blood.

*Brave but trembling came the Woman.
None but she would flaunt the Roman.
Suck his cock and leave him broken?*

*Moved by love beyond her fear
—if only she could break him,
kick him off the pier.*

Sixth Station

Helena wipes the face of Parker.

She murmurs,
“What the fuck were you thinking,
baby, *whatever* were you thinking?”

Her cloth is clean, white as shell,
damp with healing oils and salts,
and when she kisses you (only
when it seems you’ve fainted
from the pain) it’s a little sweet
like chocolate milk or pudding.

Sometimes it keeps you walking.
Sometimes it slows you down.

But you love to watch her
sip your tears from a spoon,
and that she saves them.

Eighth Station

Parker meets the women of Waltham.

*Come all who pass by the way,
look and see whether there is any
suffering like my suffering.*

Well, they say that the
outfit is quite nice, but
there's no indication of
pain, your accessibility to
drugs is nice, but the way
your voice rings, hollow
a touch of mucus
and sick conveys nothing
of a broken heart. The way
you fuck suggests you feel
the same about yourself,
although we know that Jesus
plain and simple lived
and died for pain. The girl
you say you hate has better
understanding of Catholicism
than we do, so maybe
she just sees this endless
suffering in waves, in ways
you're far too afraid to display
for any woman who you find
worth fucking in Waltham;
city of your dusty rage—
wiped with a towel, watered
leaving you whole, full,
Deranged.

Ninth Station

continued, no stanza break

Parker falls a third time.

Dear Lord,

I lie prostrate in the dust;

Give me life according to your word.

*I declared my ways, and you answered me;
teach me your commands.*

Make me understand

*The way of your precepts, and I
will meditate on your ~~wondrous~~ deeds.*

My soul weeps

*for sorrow; strengthen me
with your words.*

This time, it will be like
Christmas day in the trenches.
Your foot is rotting through your sock,
and the ankle is looking bad, baby,
but you'll have to walk again—
this skeleton road is long;
a spine winding back to the soggy
trenches, hushed, but no less dark
on Christmas day
you fall and I collapse with you,
bite your bottom lip, only for an instant.
I don't want them dragging me off,
too. But we can crouch for an instant,
sweaty dust-smudged, smelling like hot
animals. I'll lick your bleeding brow
and ask our father to make it taste
of strawberry syrup. They'll give us
a moment behind the palm fronds,
a conjugal visit. They will listen
when I demand
this instant for us.

Of whom should *I* be afraid?

I know, I know your knee
is throbbing, tendons
pierced through the cap.
But you'll walk, dig
your nails in my wrist;
a white clench so tight
the holes fill up with blood
like a flooded canyon.

I even stretch out my
neck so you might bite
on something when
they skin your belly
and calves;

*My heart will not fear. Though war be waged upon me
even then I will trust*

that you won't sever the jugular,
that your body will rise
when you want.

Tenth Station

Parker is stripped of his clothes.

They gave you wine mixed with gall
and you would not drink.
You kept looking out towards the forest,
the April buds on the hill.
Blood dripped in your eye.
You commanded I finger it out,
commanded me so gracefully.

Why, then, did I strip you bare?
Why did I help them offend your body
on this road of crushed bone to Golgotha?
They cast your designer shoes, designer socks,
the hand-tailored leather coat, in lots.
I told them your things were worth less
than they were, I confess, I smiled.
But remember,
I snuck you water, I slipped you
the snuff box and a few hundred dollars
in case you got out alive.

*“I looked for comfort and I found none.
Rather, they put gall in my food, and
in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.”*

I could have sunk blades in their groins
for making you sputter like that
when you sipped from their jug with tearing eyes
on the sunny hill, in the dry piazza.
They wailed and wailed all around you;
jeers or morbid laments.
I kissed your chest and your fingertips.
I stood before you,
shielded your cock from their gaze
with my empty body.

You didn't deserve this, begotten son, how
could you think you deserve this?

“All who see me scoff at me.”

No. No, no.

Eleventh Station

continued, no stanza break

Parker is nailed to the cross.

“O my Lord, I cry out at night and you answer me not.”

The sweet smell of rock rose in bloom
came on a wind that slips over
your open wounds.

Your biceps spasm as the first great nail
is stuffed into your wrist,
snapping the little bones strung like lace.

“I cry out at night and there is no relief for me.”

The animals from the plains will come
to feast of your body if you last after dark.
And shall I let them?
Night is an answered question, a conclusion
to your fear that pain is unending.

“All my bones wracked.”

Why is the body a delicate shell of nothing,
Lord, why are our mighty souls
stuffed into fragile pastry?

“My heart has become like wax melting away within my chest.”

Why didn't you tell me that night in the car
what really happened to you, and why
your eyes are always black, wide as a cat's,
why your lids are a sunset storm in May.
I could have chosen a nice pine coffin,
I could've rented out the basement of Jade Garden
for our funeral reception, I could have died
with you. And now do you wish to speak?

“My throat is dried up like baked clay, my tongue cleaves to my jaw.”

Of course, of course.
It seems gods are often tongue-tied
or writhing, drowning in hot, dry winds.

“They have pierced my hands and my feet.”

This is why we are gathered here.
Your pain is a great feast—

you died for us in the years of crucifixion
from which the word **excruciate** came.
In this year I held a drop of your blood
for the first time, on my tongue.
I kneeled, bitch with a wagging tail,
below the gouge in your right hand
raining flecks on the soil, on my
revelling forehead, my palms.

"I can count all my bones."

No. Let me count them for you.
Let me be the one to boil them down,
scrub them clean with a toothbrush—
I don't mind the smell, it will satisfy
all the dark and curious disciples
living inside me.

The Pillar of Absence

Trinity

Am I the nut-crack baby, eyes oozing smoke by the stair—am I she?
Am I your nightmare, rushing teal seas of the holy ghost in skin lingerie?
Am I she who wanders downtown, a beached whale, searching for you
like a whore for money? A woman becomes herself, a shy effigy
in a locker room for girls that smells like boys.

It is because I am she who stalks through poison fronds and nightgrass,
looking for bits of your bone, gum from your teeth—little minions. I am she
who eats for free when the cook isn't looking and doesn't see nine pearled fingers
snatching a rump of roast beef, no, I am not subtle.

I am drinking your Hennessy outside the market for white boys in Cambridge, I kick
your bare ankles with pointed boots as you cross streets, oh, tender annoyance she
is a trickster witness—these types need craft
in threes.

The Truth About Death in Venice

I felt his soul; a wisp of river fog
below the Pont de Vecchio.
But Tadzio won't follow me to Venice.
I will die alone, luckless, without that
image before me on a somber, eggshell beach.
It will occur during one of the longest dusks ever seen
that stretches all the way down to the jungle
where it finally touches the darkness
and it mewls, it sings, like a poisonous bird
and it rustles like daffodils cringe in a late March wind.

Where will flighty Tadzio be?
Galanting through graves and wilted leaves,
carousing amongst raspy trees, or high,
sweaty in financial district clubs along
a blue, blue, different sea that sucks
the gums of Boston, those little
dirty teeth. Sure, the kid might die
in the Charles—not in front of me.

If somehow I do die in Venice
in winter, on the beach
snowflakes will land on my tongue
and gift his mouth to me—a haunted
woman, a gifted medium speaks one
last insult, one last breach into the peach
bud ear of a boy on an ice flecked sea
that hisses as moons crack over Venice,
the alleys of ghosts in a mildew city.

I will hear, no need to see.
Every sense to feel his body—
I furl out the Ouija board from the depths
of this roiled, spitting sea where we are nothing
but a pair of corpses drifting the bottom
with anglerfish and tube worms
in the cold, black heat of the trenches.
The two salty, waterlogged things
might finally graze each other, once
in the night of the ocean; the solstice,
the longest ever seen.

Will our bloated heads nod in agreement—
we both lost something we need?
Indeed.

The sun never beams
without bringing me dreams
of my beautiful Fibber McGee.

When the clouds are lined in neon grey
and green melts from the trees
with the air sharp and sweet
on an early autumn Friday
before the fallen leaves,
I think of him sweating sweat
that tastes like sugar cream.
My senses dance in images
and the sun's yellow heat.
Perhaps his path is not for me,
but his clothes are very neat
and in a certain way he speaks
the bright grey of the asphalt seems
good enough to eat.

For the sun never beams
without bringing me dreams
of this beautiful Fibber McGee—
he's a traitor, a champion,
a leper and beast,
an old ghost in the mansion
that appears about once a week
on the same part of the staircase
in the same shade of grey.
I've hung up all his pictures,
but I have to drape them in lace,

*You can see all the drugs
in his face. Look at
his skeleton, chemical face.*

There was a funeral last evening
for my favorite of his face.
I had to take it down because
pictures have no taste and
I can only forget in the dark
that he looks delicious.

The sun never beams without
bringing me dreams of
my edible darling—

my husband and bride
in this sepulchre by the trees
too far from the sounding sea.
My body will dry this autumn—
leave me a landlocked,
leathery heap.
But know that my eyes will weep
and perch this town on an inlet,
just for him,
for me.

Learning Sundowns

The last of periwinkle light
on Ogunquit beach prepares
to shut its lid. Remains of docks
morph as graves, as massive ribs of sea
skeletons, black against sky. My last condolence—
frost bitten photos, a teenage man, too young
a smoker, fall to cold puddles in the sand,
bloat, flake away. Everything in your heart

was a wild card or a joker. I, luckless, gambling
on Mid-Atlantic shores where hotel brunches,
always with a mimosa and sausage links,
are the best and only meal all day—I was so
hungry for you every car ride down
the ugly strip, the trash-strewn sea road
to the grey motel, all of us sticky from salt,
nicotine, and sand full of garbage and dirt.

At home I'd found asylum in a damp
March place, where leaves stir in the flow
of icy rain or the torrents of snow
melting into the ground above your first
lover's grave. Really, dear? Did she
ever die? Over again, you'd said

you would take me. Mt. Feake is my place
to be when blood is drowning under wet
moons; the graves washed dark, grey,
anew. Tonight, dear god, the whole place rocks
inside an undulating water droplet in a blurry sea,
in an eye socket large enough for both of us.

Here, God eats my ankles, thighs. The bugs
let me cry. Nothing gnaws on my heart
like the Charles where your body, rotted,
eddies along the tomb studded inlets
where every month is present and marks
another month and another month of our horrid,
mutual failure to love.

Foresee the Season

It will be full of stagnance and dull, quiet cards,
my words as self reproachful, unlingering, as a mouse.
We will continue not to speak. I'll send one card,
per month, as I promised myself and he
will devour them whole, the way
he ingests no human food. At dinner
I've seen him take three carrots, eat two—
his palette more suited to Starbursts, post-
nasal drip and Nat Sherman cigarettes.
Nothing in the kitchen to feed him
this week.

Who am I to be, his un-exorcised
girl kept in the attic?
Fed meat scraps from pot roasts, from cold
cut platters, from sausages lined in rows, left alone
to lick boils with demons and rage at tissue-
winged angels who need only strike a match
to die. Still hungry, enough to gnaw on a wooden cross
with nothing but canopies of wooden beams to hear
the smack of saliva, teeth, on wood. Am I
supposed to be her, or watch it? Bite the cross
or eat it?

No. I am carnival glass, I glow
like a séance ghost, a north harbor.
I am a summer spring in the Alpines,
colder than marble slabs on the throat.
I am frosting on raspberry lemon cake.
I am grieving. I gloat over death like choking
on blood pudding, iron thick in the throat.
I am a shivering beast in dark December,
ready to go indoors, shed its skin; a flesh fur coat.
I am a mother in a heatless parlor waiting
for her long-dead child to come home.

After Time

I write on how they brought in his body at night.
The kind of body you bury in darkness—
or else you notice his crawl from the ditch, dew
from the grave glistening sick in white sunlight
on skin reeking of vinegar and roses. He
has the gall to interrupt his own funeral, and he will.

The Boy From Cambridge with Doc Martens

continued, no stanza break

Look at you. Look at you.
Designer socks; J. Crew,
cased in big black bouncing souls—
a clomping, stomping Dr., You,
of witches, hopeless whores, and boots.

Versace ought to kill you.
You bring a peach silk-shirt to fury,
no floral patterns taste your chest or name
without a moment of consideration
for your steady, fragrant rage.

What wicked seagull taunts you from the bay?
What seabird squawks and mocks your
tired jetty heart, your crab-leg thoughts
that scuttle, scuttle sideways from you.
I have tilted my head to hear you.

The sea-night wind culls your black-belch words,
your insults slushed as artificial snow,
your silent screams in a dark dorm
soaked in tangy tyrant tears—
two roommates, you refuse to leave your bed.

How does the mirror help you—
does it lick your boot, does it beat you?
Do you grind the glass with mint-fresh molars
or moan as you let it gnaw you?
No, you check your hair in those teeth.

Teeth that catch my jugular, in a quiet
girls hall bathroom. I bleed to the song
of young orthodox women taking a piss.
How is it my mind still saw you—
your slender frame at a urinal, dodging my gaze.

Ceramic boy, your putty cracks are ugly,
jacket torn, what could a seamstress do?
But prick her finger, stain your seersucker suit
a shade as red as pomegranate suns
and warm as August dew.

Though I'd rather she not touch you—
leave you ice-laced, messy, blue.
I bought a set of oil paints
with plans of blending you

into the landscape, the view.

Yes, God lives in the background,
with tired, lurking trees, in a few
thin clouds, or in the corner with
the signature. You sleep there too,
in the darkness, Parker, little boy blue.

The sheep are dead in the meadow,
cows get fucked in the corn or boil in stew.
I can force feed until you are hungry,
and wash it down with white wine.
Is that what you'd like me to do?

Or perhaps you'd prefer a brew,
a pale ale drunk from my shoe—
you love a woman in heels
but you'd never admit that it's true,
as with most of whatever you do.

I'd halfway built you an ossuary—
your fragments hinged with screws,
skull scrubbed for it's grand debut
but you'll skip it, all green skin and flu.
Will I sop up the vomit? *Boy, ask.*

I suspect you've been nauseous since June.
In the salt air your demoness grew.
You didn't know what to do
but pray for the vessel's safe passage
and whorl with its skeletal crew.

All teeth, bones, and ocean grey-blue
you march with the dead two by two
and their shoes breathe a rhythm less lovely
than your pricy, black, panzer-man boots.
Fashion, sharp fashion, your words still crude.

There's a long, long blade in our fussy chests—
hearts you'll throttle till grisly plum-blue.
Parker, you asshole, I'm through
till the north wind shudders, compels you.
Oh, there's always more I can tell you...

Mischievous boy,
my little slug, oozing
from the lettuce patch
to greet me. July, Northeast,
such heavy rains.

My sudden, quiet thing
of lichen eyes—they dart
like splashes in a Nordic
spring and gleam
your meaning.
I must believe it's close
to what you meant
my cautious, lurking pet.

I find you, like a cat
sleeping in sun beams on steps
of beautiful tombs, or posed
in smoke-stain shadows
on the bridge, or there
on that lobster boat, hollering at men.
Again and again, in the city,
in every lurid sandwich shop.
On foggy nights, pissing in an alley,
a bottle of Brut
still dribbling from the neck.

Hey you, Mr. Vinegar
Tongue, cruel elf hammering
my heart to build up veins
for every Christmas, I will huddle
alone on a couch crowded by husbands—
I gag on their wives' bad breath,
my aunts and their ugly, acne
scarred mates.

Devil-cake boy,
I choose you—risen
from sugar sponge and blue
winter-night thoughts,
heavy as syruped pears.
I pick you and your mistakes,
your eyelids lifting to me
in the shadow of you

saving face. I'd rather
win in your place.

My miniature jar of straw-
berry preserves, content
to snooze, uneaten, safe
below wax on a pantry shelf
for years. The house
changes hands, my calves
grow tired and old
from climbing stairs
in heels, a lifetime, no help.
Then again, we have needs.
This strange little city
harbors different breeds.

Comfort

One day, in an old
old day, my hair back
to brown, my body
smaller and hunched, pink
hosecoated, with its hands
wringing in a lukewarm kitchen,
I might think of creeping
to bless myself and the holy
mother, outside, under sun. This,
the fiftieth autumn of my life.

Less questions about us, then.
No slipping outside, I stay in.
You shuffle into the kitchen
for cornflakes with cinnamon
and a small glass of bourbon
for your sleepy wake, your
messy head growing from
the trail of a boat out of water.

I expect your wakefulness,
your slow, steady rise, less
a child than when we were in college.
I feed you from my source, not a spoon
like the old, hungry days—the famine
autumn of the twenty-first, the twenty-
second, the old, cold twenty-third.

In this mimicked fall when I am ugly
and my hair has turned back to brown,
can those hungers kindle
again, even when we are ugly,
tired, browned like the baked ridges
of an apple, like ridges of meat
on a cow heart gone sour.

The Secret Garden in the North

Boy, you live in an icicle, why
tend to a garden of ice shrubs and
popsicles, a garden of frozen fruits
and vegetables, peas in a bag, I am.

You go tromping and smash them to shards.
The rest never rot so you stomp the lot,
all of us fury in the garden of Pluto;
the end of the world as far as we see.

The only gems that grow faster than sugar are
ice crystals, I freeze again and again. You
feed from the ice garden, the ice
garden already fed. She grows,
spreads endless, instead.

The Fantasy

Your eyes, dim obsidian, shimmering like Baastet
bore with subdued cinnamon flame, can I believe
you here, before me, our whole bodies gaping,
a runny wound in the grey dark?

This is how the gods have wanted us to love;
in a bundle of soggy blankets tumbling off the moon.

This is Zeus in his most passionate affair.
This is Narcissus made clean and whole again.

Graveyards

So the insane have
someone to talk to.

We Can't Cook, We Can't Love

Gentle substance, where are you as I sip
on grenadine and gag-proof vodka in a little
basement: stonewall
shell of the man I love, and others—none as quick
to tell a thing about themselves at parties.

Are you hungry? When that tide rushes us
we gather the clams, the minnows, starfish.
Throw them in a stew. Boil till cooked through
in salty juice—broth for this feast
of the dead between delicacies.

How do they choose what they want
from an offering: do they re-grow tongues, can they
smell through decay? Is that why they lean
towards citrus fruits; the cleanse, wet nourish
of orange and lime? Awake, Awake, you dead
droopy things. Dance with us? Eat?

The grapefruits are no longer plenty, the dead
avoid our rich bisque. *We're college kids,*
darling, we aren't any good at this.

The Golden Age

My baby teeth fall in his seldom presence—
the lingering child breath in blush
saliva hovers between fingered tooth and floor—
I smile, sick for this evidence of legacy
without reigns, without understanding. Sure,

one day, a grownup, he struts, *Didn't you
enjoy it? The thrill, the fields of me you plowed
into paper, mashed lead, broken pencils, pens, the
teeth saved expertly on the sill, still attached to thread
you pulled them with. Well, didn't you enjoy it?*

The hag supplies *I didn't.*
No, I didn't.
Lies, he whispers,
Lies. You'll go to hell
without me.

Infant Grave

Our time together suffered a short month's life—the baby was pink and new, we fed it smashed pears and talked of bad guys in movies, why we love them, why I mistake dead logs for rotting bodies by the road any weekday—weren't we hasty? The baby wailed in the background; you had to go in and smother it.

We couldn't hear a thing above the pink screams, sick whoops, hunger shrieks—my bitten nipple sour, a milkman milked. Call me a witch. In death, that baby shut up, but we were broken, both, too guilty to say a word to the other and expect a sensible response.

The grave is very small. We leave flowers when we want.

Look at you—strange, sweet baby,
an oyster boy in his shell, scared
to slither down my throat,
raw and cold after bedding ice
beside a lemon and some shrimp.
No seas shanty serves a better platter
than this run-down restaurant
in my ribs. There is hot oil
bubbling round my heart
for the orders of fish and chips.
I am roiling on the seafloor
searching for creatures—
both fisherman, and fish.
Nets catch in my fingers,
toes, ribs, there is no better
seafood restaurant than this.

Look at you—strange
crab scuttling side to side.
Indelible, the backwards way
you move, your steady clip to
shore, though dragged from the coast
by brutish, low-tide storms.
Shellfish smack the jetty, the
ocean laughs, deep from its belly
but not with me. Cigarette lit
in a rain swept car, I, beached,
dry heave, in fear for your tiny life
held by a skeleton on the outside.
My sweet love, what'll you do
if you catch in a net and I cook you,
stuff you in wontons with sugar
cream-cheese? Smile, I eat.

Look at you—a strange young man
dockside, cold with eyes on a dawn
the color of dead-man's-fingers
dried to yellow foam on the shore.
Pull the boat in, unload
the dingy full of mackerel, cook
the old men stew with bad cream
and greased guts of fish. Brew
their coffee, boy, so you might
hear tall tales from a fisherman with

one fog-eye and a front-shark-tooth.
Stories, all for you to tell
with smart addendums, with your
hard-jaw sturgeon smile that gleams
for the love-lost ghost in the sea,
for waterlogged fools like me.

The Letter, *dear*

cantankerous boy, melon sheller, sick squirrel caught in a cellar,
it said many love-him things, ended on leaves turning
with the moon—irrelevant. A letter's goal: to erase
time, erase distance, blur the short cold
colorless days, invite views of eternal spaces—mine
brimming with ghosts in brine, the scent of his fingers after petals
crushed; crushed cold afternoons to read, think, roll
under covers, never want to rise, each alone
in our blankets. They smell less like home, more
ourselves, never each other. Imagine—our bedding
sweat, dust, and cinnamon, our heart
a wreath of holly and cloves. Rejoice,
rejoice, *something* is born this frigid season,
this frigid year, late-November iced
over—gutting the carcass
of the turkey, I find words

for another letter:

mark as read.