

## TO INTER

## I.

There is no beauty in ruin.

The orange building, the  
lead paint. Footprints out,

then back again. Slate gray  
sky and dirty snow.

Just west the brother tells  
his sister to try the jump.  
*Try it* he smiles, and it's

a real smile, no ill-  
conceit. Yesterday's

sun melted the snow; last  
night's wind froze it over.  
The jump is what's left

of the foundry. A red sled  
overturned. Quiet. Footprints

out, then back again.

## II.

In the car we sing *Kalamazoo, zoo, zoo, zoo, zoo. Kalamazoo. Kalamazoo. Kalamazoo,*  
*zoo, zoo, zoo, zoo. Kalamazoo. Kalamazoo.*

## III.

It's true as we grew I knew less about you. You ate at certain times of the day and never said grace. The coffee roasters on the corner was your favorite spot—honey, no milk, and you brought your own mug. At least once a week someone asked why you put honey in your coffee, and you told them they should try it. Might help with their allergies. Every fourth Tuesday you delivered Meals on Wheels in the west part of town. You'd stop and chat with the seniors. Sometimes you played them a song. Mondays didn't get you down like Sundays did, something from our Protestant upbringing. You don't...you didn't like to talk about it. Same with football, but you

watched the Citrus Bowl every year and rooted for the Big Ten. It doesn't go with pacifism, you'd think. Neither did your fondness for Korean barbecue over shoestring fries. You disliked the term "deep ecologist" for semantic reasons, mainly that there must be a "shallow ecologist," too. Any ecologist will do, you'd say. Even you. Grew your own tomatoes. Mowed your yard with a push reel. You baked. Your son listens to rap, and though you didn't discourage it, you didn't like it, either. You feared he'd choose his mother over you, so you just left Decemberists' CDs by his place at the dinner table, hoping they'd take. His mother. In bed you'd stare into the dark as you mouthed solutions. *Compassion* contains the word *passion* and this was not lost on you. The soles of your shoes had worn thin on the inside of the heel and ball of the foot. You had money for a new pair but didn't bother. You wore a beanie you knit from dryer lint. That's right. It's wool and cotton and rayon and silk. You didn't know what a dryer did to silk, found out the hard way. Your son wanted nothing to do with a hand-me-down pair of silk boxers, so you gave them to the dog. She sleeps with them under her chin. She doesn't care where they've been. At night the dryer spins a rhythm like shortwave radio, which is capable of sending communiqué around the curve of the earth.

#### IV.

Hi. Convenience Auto; this is Steve.

Steve, got an oil change and they said the radiator's out of fluid.

Uh-oh.

Yeah.

Bring her in, we'll take a look.

(Later.)

Steve here, from Convenience Auto?

Hi, Steve.

Well, you've got a leak. Gonna need a new radiator.

Like, a big leak? Define "leak."

When we put fluid in, it pours out. Leak.

Right.

So a new radiator will run you \$430. But the lines, see, there's lines that run from it.

Uh-huh.

Those lines are corroded. So if they bust while we're working, we'll have to replace 'em. That's another \$300.

So over 700 bucks.

Worst-case scenario.

Yeah. Thanks. I don't have it.

It's a good car.

It's a great car. I don't have it.

You can tell you've taken good care of it.

May just sell it.

Gotta ask yourself, Could you buy this good a car for \$700?

(It begins to snow. Lightly at first, then steady, heavy.)

My brother died. Year ago today. Car accident.

(Steve thinks, Go to commercial.)

So I'm not gonna be that person who adds fluid every stop. And I'm not gonna buy a \$700 car. I'm gonna tip over a gas station and buy something good. Something German this time. (Dreamily) A Jetta.

(Pause.)

Alrighty then. We got 'er here. Pick 'er up anytime.

Appreciate it.

V.

*One of the most notable Black-billed Magpie behaviors is the so-called "funeral"—when one magpie discovers a dead magpie, it begins calling loudly to attract other magpies. The gathering of raucously calling magpies (up to 40 birds have been observed) may last for 10 to 15 minutes before the birds disperse*

*and fly off silently.*<sup>1</sup>

## VI.

I didn't have a Vernor's on my birthday and I'm just sick about it. The world makes as much sense as a shucked ear of corn, with a worm gnawing slowly at that which would sustain us. Whether I saw you today, or a version of you, I will act as if it is twenty years ago, your green army coat, your warm field eyes. The popcorn double feature—one with vampires, the other, wolves. How we screwed the Native Americans the takeaway, as if there's more to be said. Eighteen, nineteen years of pop culture wisdom with the occasional dab of butter: Salinger, Brautigan, Blume. The covers we made out of paper bags to hide *Forever* from our mom and any book with the words *penis* and *vagina*. Or words for the words even Judy wouldn't say. Then she had to defend her right to say them in a country that sterilizes women it deems unfit for motherhood. The world makes as much sense as a punched ticket: go on, you've paid for it. As the middle child our brother felt a duty to be ignored. He expected it and we expected it. As the surviving brother knows he has to increase his visibility. Makes his kids sing "Happy Birthday" in both English and Chinese. Asks me about school. Asks, *Are ya gonna marry that guy or what? My kids want cousins*. The conversation stays the same, but it stays. Kids want a cool pop on a hot day, the world to make as much sense as birthday cake. One: blow out the candles. Two: take and eat. His youngest doesn't want to be left alone, it's as simple as that. She will fall when appropriate for the boy with cobalt rings around his irises, and he will hold her similarly. The alloy. The poured iron. But first, the fire. Here an *Inferno* reference would work nicely but haven't we had enough of strata, of a narrator who begins with death. Maundy Thursday, as if the Supper produces some small comfort in its forewarning. *Take and eat*, for I will love you from afar. That's just not going to work. The point of the cobalt is to strengthen the vegetarian's diet with B-12. Everybody knows that. And the point of the iris is terminal matchlessness. So now what. Stagger as a lamb to slaughter? Forgive those who know not what they do? Carry your own cross. I'm the youngest child. I get everything I want. I saw you today. Tell Mom I've taken your favorite rugby shirt, maize and blue. Taken the Beatles' White album, one and two. The Chinese fortune telling sticks we used to shake onto the floor. The purple and orange boa constrictor. The boxes of M&M's from under your bed. The jean jacket. The red beanbag and dragged it into my room. What good is it there? How can we listen to records that way? Mad magazines. The Ouija board though it gives me nightmares. Same with the theme from *The Exorcist*, but I've taken your 45. I sleep listening to grandpa's radio, also yours. I

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<sup>1</sup> From [http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Black-billed\\_Magpie/lifehistory](http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Black-billed_Magpie/lifehistory)

sleep surrounded by your stuffed animals, as many as can fit on my bed.  
With the closet door open so the light stays on.

## VII.

One cup flour

One cup whole wheat flour

*The tune she hums is mild, made for the morning.*

*The cork lid pulled from the ceramic jar, aluminum fetched from wooden drawers.*

Teaspoon baking soda

*Nesting spoons chime. A cabinet closes.*

Teaspoon each of nutmeg and cinnamon. Make these generous.

*From the window she can see the dig-a-hole by the creek, shrugging its shoulders to erosion, spinning on its axis. The boys would love this, she thinks, were they still boys. Their toys in the basement, and she knows exactly where.*

Pinch salt

*Opens and closes her hands.*

A half cup white sugar\*

*"Just hold me tight and tell me you miss me"*

A half cup brown

*"While I'm alone and blue as can be"*

Two eggs

Two cups of bananas, from the freezer, black

*"Dream a little dream of me."*

\*a little less, if desired

## VIII.

*Worship* from the Middle English *worth-ship*, where value is assigned—  
a pair of opal cufflinks at the estate sale, a broken oak chair.

I measure your worth by relative frequency. Each time death is the only possibility, I start the count again.

## IX.

To involute to inurn to infuse to inweave to  
 intuit to induce to invaginate to inlay. To inure to  
 inveigh to invade to incarcerate to invite nay to  
 invoke to incant to inspire. To install to initial to  
 inoculate to ink to ingratiate to incent to infer to  
 inflame. To indwell. To indicate. To inculcate to  
 incense to incline to incite to feel this thing inside  
 me now to incandesce to inclip to increase to  
 incise. To incubate. To inculcate. To incriminate  
 to indemnify. To In•verness. To In•Diana. To  
 indagate, to inundate. To indwell. To inurn. To  
 infect. To infer. To inter yourself inside me now,  
 in the altogether.

## X.

I woke a spider  
 He was only sleeping there.  
 I thought he was dead.

## XI.

She: I dreamt last night I ate an apple that looked like the funeral director.  
 He: Someone really has to be in love with you to listen to your dreams.  
 She: His expression changed slightly as I bit into him. What?

## XII.

We drive through the inconvenient dark.  
 Heroic couplets of taillights, the smooth  
 consistency of guard rails when oncoming  
 traffic blinds like oncoming traffic. We take  
 the next pullout overlooking the lake,  
 polluted. Can't see it anyway and on the count  
 of three yelp outside the Dodge, the rain  
 attack rain. Inside, your hands free, one  
 searches the Wegman's bag, the other marches  
 up my thigh. I downshift to save the brakes,  
 push your hand away. Starburst and water  
 all that's left.  
 You're *so hungry* you could *eat a horse*.

*We need to find you a White Castle*  
 I regret as I picture the World War montage:  
 ships in the Harbor, the ungodly cloud,  
 rumors of horsemeat in the sliders, beef  
 overseas to feed the GI's when we slide  
 around a bend too sharp for a '95 sedan  
 and the front end faces tall pines and  
 oncoming traffic comes on sideways so  
 we skid to a stop half on, half  
 off the highway when the lights of Ithaca like  
 a candlelit vigil burn warm  
 in the valley below.  
 We're too close.  
 I shift into drive, keep my foot  
 on the brake. You look dead  
 at me: *Where is that horse.*

### XIII.

The guardian angel takes the night off. Carries her wings like stolen Mona Lisas. Slips into a booth at Knight's on Liberty. Orders two cheeseburgers, one for each grin. The bartender taps his baton. The rain can't help but fall back into the sky.

### XIV.

There can be no room for song. No Mamas and the Papas, no Three Dog Night. No Moody Blues, no Pink Floyd. No Miles. No Blondie, no Madonna. No Tribe Called Quest, no Dignable Planets. Leave Billy Idol alone; no touching. No Mahler. No Yaz. No Go-Go's, no INXS. No Phillip Glass. No This Mortal Coil. No Throwing Muses, just put them down. No Cocteau or Thompson Twins. No Jackson Five, no Prince. No Talking Heads and no David Byrne's solo career, either. No Laurie Anderson. No The Beatles, The Who, The Monkees, The Feelies, The Sugar Cubes, The Cure, The Violent Femmes, The Ramones, The Replacements, The Cult, The Police, The Specials, The Jesus and Mary Chain. No Skinny Puppy, Dead Kennedys, Circle Jerks, Sex Pistols. No Johnny Rotten. No Butthole Surfers. No Beach Boys, no Jonathan Richman, no Modern Lovers, none. No Camper Van. No Echo & the Bunnymen. No Joy Division and no gay Joy Division/New Order. No Suicidal Tendencies. No Bauhaus, Love and Rockets, Tones on Tail. No R.E.M. No 10,000 Maniacs and no Natalie Merchant all on her own, cute little vegan. No Siouxsie Sioux. No B52's. No Brian Eno. No Dead Can Dance, no Death in June. No Big Country, how your brother loved them. No Supertramp, he loved them, too. No Madness. No Ministry. No Simple Minds. No Yes.

Organize these albums in milk crates from Town and Country market. Plan to stash them next to the furnace, so when the revolution comes, they'll explode. In your

planning don't linger long in his room, the orange shag, the MAD magazines beneath his bed. Don't care about items disguised as memories—they're like music in a movie designed to make you feel. Silence leaves you alone. Step into the living room. When your dad, voice barely above a whisper, hands you a guitar, *You want this? I didn't know he played*, take it. But don't strum, not even to check the tension of the strings.

## XV.

You asked me so I'm telling you. Imagine you have to find something from his closet for him to wear. All day church calls to ask about cold cuts. The neighbors keep bringing soup. *So sorry for your loss* and *Don't know what to say*. You follow rules of behavior you want to torch, want to send to the heavens in a radio-controlled rocket. Trade them for one conversation. Pull the sheets back so your mom can crawl in next to you. The dog wants out. You whisper epistles in the dark.

## XVI.

Justification keeps me company in the city cemetery. The pastor's writing found on the back of a credit card receipt: *Hope is here*

slipped between the bible paper verse: *He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you...*<sup>2</sup>

## XVII.

I think Victor is the only one who works around here. Someone left a Huffy chained to the sycamore, where I sit. It doesn't go with the flowers and the marble. So Victor grabs the bolt cutters and snaps the rusted chain

in two. Frees the steel from the bark.  
Hops on                      rides downhill.

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<sup>2</sup> Luke 24: 6



## XVIII.

After that job in Utah, I remember how you told me, while you were still with me: Did you hear the one about the Mormons in heaven? When you die, Saint Peter greets you at the gate, gives you the lay of the land: over there are the Roman Catholics, drinking wine and crossing themselves; there are the Lutherans, each with a song in his heart and fork in his pocket. And there, eyes closed, are the Mormons. They like to pretend they're the only ones here.

## XIX.

If you're sore afraid of angels, stay off the bridge.

## XX.

I'm having assorted cannolis for lunch today. Five to a box. I considered eating a bowl of soup first, for appearances. But then I read the label and decided between pistachios, hazelnuts, cocoa, vanilla, milk, cream, cappuccino, and sugar, something in there would sustain me. Something would keep me \_\_\_\_.

## XXI.

- The smell of an oak-pine barren after a rain.
- Mexican food at El Huarache in Holland, Michigan.
- Lake Michigan.
- Lake Superior.
- Something about a dog, a sweet dog, swimming toward you, stick in its jaws.

## XXII.

Someone get the door.

No, no distinguishing body marks, scars, or tattoos.

## XXIII.

She plants a kiss  
On John the Baptist's lips.

The orchestra tunes in the gut.  
The sound of chaos.

He sears a kiss  
On her lips.

And the orchestra exhales  
To rhapsodic applause.

XXIV.

Every light ablaze in the house  
*And let the darkness not overcome thee.*

XXV.

I can achieve a cruising altitude of 175 centimeters.  
I can offer you two policies for the price of one.

I can hum.

I can identify a lie.  
I can discern Jupiter from Venus in an early March sky.

I can recite the balcony scene.  
I can do the unexpected better than you.

I can write.

I can take your order now.  
I can move you to another section.  
I can knock you into the middle of next week.

I can guarantee you will suffer for what you've done.  
I can tell you've won.

I can tell you're from downstate.  
I can tell you're 3 miles of bad road.  
I can throw you under the bus.

I can follow directions.  
I can lose my way.  
I can chase the moon  
soon.

I can only imagine what you're going through.

I can only give the information I'm authorized to give.

I can assure you everything is going to be ok.

We've done all we can.

The doors will close automatically.

## XXVI.

The community counseling center is open  
to all. Appointments scheduled one year in advance.

Either anticipate demise  
or plan on staying miserable.

Turns out you can give yourself  
carpel tunnel. Clench your fist, release,  
repeat. I should take some

responsibility. When the man on the bus sits  
in front of us, feigns a reluctance to focus, then sets  
his sights on you—just out of high school, conditioned

to smile like good girls should—you turn your head  
to laugh, though what he said wasn't funny.

He follows your hair. He is two feet away. I open  
my hand just so

and pin his throat against the window.

## XXVII.

No *How bad I got it*, no *Feel for me now*.  
No incest in the outhouse, no murder in the afterglow.

No terrorists in the subway, no indecent exposure. No semis  
heading south this time of night.

No sweat. No puritanical  
need for rain.

No foul in the backcourt, flagrant or otherwise. No  
thundersnow.

No excessive celebration. No razors in the shoes, no laces allowed.  
No questions asked but one answer given: Not now.

No reinforced infrastructure, no more than one plow.  
(For the whole town? The whole town.)

No reincarnated ghosts. No giant plastic  
heart, dissected, to walk through.

No fist bumps. No sparkling bathroom tile. No choice  
roast or faulty furnace. No water stains on the cathedral

ceiling. No purgatorial coalmine. No Emanuel. Lord  
help us, no evangelical loitering.

No wrapped slice of American cheese found  
in a corner trash. No drive-thru bourbon. No psychotherapeutic

nods while you listen to her,  
over coffee.

No clueless curtsy. No curtain closing as he fumbles

his lines. No boy in blue on a bench in Indiana,  
defeated, his face in a towel.

## XXVIII.

Between the rusty nail clippers and Dum-Dums, the floss and the shank: aloe.  
Merrilee lost her high school boyfriend. She lives and grieves in southeast Michigan.

Northern Cardinal. American Redstart. Yellow-bellied sapsucker. Mourning Dove.  
President Obama defends the nuclear pact, paves the way for "lasting security."

Pluto's no longer a planet. But you knew that.  
The Body Shop, turns out, has nothing to do with morgues.

Who knows. Things may change.  
Every construction site disturbs a rattlesnake den.

God, Country, Notre Dame.  
Sign says *Back in 30 Minutes*. Why not *Closed*? Then surprise us with your return.

## XXIX.

She says        When are you coming home?  
 She says        I've made oxtail soup.  
 She says        I've washed your sheets.  
 She says        And now I'm ironing them.  
 She says        There's a mouse in the wall.  
 She says        It followed me into the kitchen.  
 She says        It could smell the soup.  
 She says        When are you coming home?  
 She says        We need to remember.  
 She says        We have to remember.  
 She says        Commemorate.  
 She says        No flowers bloom in February.  
 She says        Remember we forgot his birthday?  
 She says        In Florida. Remember?  
 She says        Maybe he'd understand, plastic flowers.  
 She says        Dad said Son's too old for cake.  
 She says        He was six.  
 She says        There's a critter, I think it's a mouse.  
 She says        I'll only iron the top sheet.  
 She says        I can smell the soup.  
 She says        All the way in the basement.  
 She says        Are you taking the train?  
 She says        When are you coming home?

And I say

## XXX.

She leads me to the basement.  
      Fisher-Price, a plastic horse.  
 I run my fingers over its familiar mane.  
  
 Outside, the snow piles high against  
      the sliding glass doors.  
  
 In the banks of the creek we'd wedge  
      ourselves in. The cardinal and the water.  
 Remember? You and me, buried.  
  
 Soft the winter sun set. Nothing left  
      but the light that was the day.