

this particular house is shivering
it is ringed pink by the suburb stucco
like white people hands with winter rash
rub cold
dry flaking
dandruff soft
scales of goose bumps
this is the house

this small family deposited
from an island
into
a family of winters
building tragedies like kinex fortresses
under the soft coloured daycares of
a miscarried language

their mangled speech left clinging to their cheeks
and eyes
incompatible with the designs of
spectacular networks
words which don't hum
hubs without wires
no sidewalks along these scarborough trails
the calf bushed
shaved heads of small houses across the street from modern castles
with the open mouths of three car garages swallowing suvs and
spitting them back out

across the street one seventies sedan that doesn't run with its
chipped hood
and gray weighted shoulders
eyes into the mud
waiting to be interred

this mausoleum of lives
these caskets
this row of figures

head stones
head scarves
head colds
heading out

pitched between high schools
of religious brick
and white glistening sick slick notice boards
on paths of cracks and
mulchy grass
chain link fences and stone stepped railings
the basketball courts and soccer fields failing
in the november net that draws up all their playing
and leaves them pinned to a bitter trembling sky
no movement and no escape
while the cubicles swallow up the measured
rations of days
between this and the highways
a short pitch
somewhere between road and ditch
slung out into the meadowvale stretch
down through the wild flower weeds
the thistles brambles cola cans and seeds
the garbage stripped plastic and cigarette
reeds
left along the swampy edges of a city
between the open trees
there is a family with rotten teeth
short shoulders
a hunched family that munches in the darkness and never leaves
here there is a family that's come from
another country
and has another language they could speak
here there is a family with handicapped children that can't walk
with sons who speak no more than single words
and screams

these neighbours of the nuclear decree
this nuclear family desperately clings to what control they can
conceive
before collapsing in oblivion
for beyond any work or speech
any politic or masterpiece
they pop out of the communal memory unrecorded
beside their statistic which stands proudly in its place
every member of a community becomes a figure
somehow
in works of art
or bureaucratic papers
here the soft wealthy couches and unplugged treadmills
on the flat carpet cut with a vacuum and garments

a litter of garbage
many shoes from children young women and weights
dumbbells and cardboard
a tray for the jewellery
a tower of necklace
a flower riddled box
and the plastic cabinets with its drawers of clear
hangers on top of it
boxes and toppled fake flowers in dollar store bronze
on the ironing board beside the iron
next to the window of the basement
the backyard with its well tended grass
showing off in the sunshine
and upside down triangles of
blue and of silver from toppled kids toys
the perennials dressed in the cold autumn air
through the slate of the blinds
the wood fence too high
to see what's beyond
a watering can and a plant in a glass canister
a bunk with pillows and pooh
baby centre plus and press to unlock
written between butterflies or shamrocks
coloured in blue
a beanbag chair
and a dying vine in a plastic pot coloured white
beside a desk chair
with carpets and welcome mats coiled on top

this is the room the painter moves his painting stuff into
like a nestled asteroid
buried
a calligraphy of flat pure walls
rectangles of colour over their rectangles of plaster
the noise
banging against the gentle ears
of the mother
delicate eyes with quick hard fast fingers slipping covers under the
bottoms of lifted furniture ripping off plastic
slapping it on and patting it rapidly to ensure that it is lodged there
before sliding out in less than a second
briefer than reading a sentence the job is completed

the painter plays music in long veins like blood against the skin of
the air
waves of sound continue from the closed doors

this is the mother beside her son
watching while the painter invents chaos in her home
the job that she ordered continuing on
her job as a host
strained to its limits
sitting with her
challenged son who can't speak or walk
at twenty years old on his bum on the floor at her feet
wringing her hands
using her ipad to distract from the slapping and jerking rhythm of
work the squishing sounds that come from her house changing
colour
this labour
blonde haired and grinning
slobby
wearing his shoes into her room of prayer
her watching with disgust but asking politely if he could kindly
remove them
if he could
kindly turn off the music
if he could
patch this piece of the wall
and sand off this
and if he could do some extra calking
and whether
the closets were included in the quote
and if the access to the attic could be painted as well
and if maybe he'd be willing to redo the doors
and third coat this room
and take out the shelves
and move them here
or maybe here
and if he could put them back
proudly telling him
how her husband who died
leaving her in charge
buried in the suburbs
with her eldest
the daughter
who works with the government
just like she did
for forty two years
and her two sons
both of them disabled
one who can't walk and the other
in school in a specialty program

one kneels at her feet three times a day while she feeds him
before brushing his teeth and putting him in his crib
the other
shares a bed with her
and this husband who died of causes she won't speak
that redid the floors in the basement
that put in all the shiny white shelves
screwed
into the closets
applied like cages
the terror of anything
ever
coming unhinged
written into
how they're applied
excessively secure
locking them to the wall and adding four hours of labour
to the painting of the closet
that now she's paying for
asking
oh if you could please
leave it
and could you take it out
it should be easy
and you'll be sure to put it back
won't you

these are the neighbors

this is the nuclear family
just before winter
two thousand and seventeen years
since the death of a god
that they don't believe in

the pipes and the tub rain runs through the hallways
it's tiled floor glowing with the ape grunting
of the older son
please behave yourself
while the younger chatters
in clawing vowels under the mothers hands
hands that held her phone
hopeful eyes
do you know who sings this
playing a song by yusuf islam
from the twin speakers at the bricks base

while she watches the empty hall
her eyes gliding along the corners of the room
the cut lines
the latching that she's still hoping will be done
before the bus comes
with her youngest son
fresh from school
knocking on the window to say hello to the painter
and being rushed in
for a bath
scolding him
whining
please behave
while she scrubs him
did she give you home work
and why does this teacher never give you home work
she's supposed to give you homework
speaking of soap
then in the closed room with both her sons beneath her
one she's washing the other she's watching
one with low long moans the other panting high pitched grunts
the fruit bowls standing on the marble kitchen tops
very modern
waiting
cut papaya
and watermelon
ready for the youngest son who can feed himself
and the oldest who needs to be fed
the leather couches moved and shining with the front windows
sun
in the centre of the room so the brushes can go gliding where
the walls meet the roof

in the next room
listening to the squishing sound of the elder son playing with
saliva and cheeks
bubbles and drool across his chin
lips and chest
and her examining the younger while she dresses him
desperately as he says yeah yeah yeah yeah

the painter replaces batteries
double a from the burnt red wood cabinet
in the beige honeywell on the wall he will turn cranberry
which controls the temperature of the house
after she asks him what it says replbatt

the microwave turns
an exhausting hum like the end of something

the clatter of spoons on bowl
and chewing

the eldest son plays with penis through his pants

she prays

the sheer curtains and the lush bowed rose coloured curtains are
folded on the antique rocking chair
and she worries in the night for their privacy
will you put them back up
do you have tape
should i put newspaper over the glass
what do you recommend
is it okay
cuz you know it's just us

the elder son hums and moans
and the younger continues to eat
tomorrow and done are the only words he can say well
and they're always being repeated

she does the dishes before putting them to bed
the painter shakes a fresh can
the youngest son laughs
piercing the can with the five in one and pouring it into the cutting
can
the youngest standing over
streaks covering corners in golden rice
the new colour
of this home
he's had his whole life
it was built for them
the mother will say
microwave bells going off
while he is saying wow
and the oldest
her daughter
comes in
saying

how are you to the painter
and the youngest
mispronouncing her name
runs up to her

the personal support worker
let in at the same time
to feed the middle child
who moves to her using his hands
the youngest has the pad
and is playing candy crush
i have keys to your house now the psw kind of laughs
just a joke
just a joke

done? the youngest asks the painter
as he passes
to go down to the basement
the cutting can finished
and go to the bathroom
all baby teals
porcelain whites and the faint lemon
stain on the cabinet
a circular mirror
and the false ornate fixtures with only one bulb
q tips paper towel dial soap two brushes in a palm tree container
fake flowers that are pink green and yellow
keri shea butter and glad air freshener
a yellow scrub sponge and a laundry hamper
three plush mats by every place that makes water
they're grey and the pink garbage can has a bag
with the words
food mart
tel: 4164313388
fax: 4164313389
on it

his phone held sideways the screen cracked and sticky
his paint covered hands type out texts
while the brushes dry out and he's on the toilet
the scraping of dishes
the middle child being fed
and soft sounds of stocking feet
of the family trying to end their day above him

with the unrolling of lavender shadows and evergreen shading
blushing out of each blade of grass
the painter leaves with a jacket
wrapped up for the night
and out onto the navy street
through it's yellow leaves
to wait beneath
the white and blue striped
shelter of glass
for the eightysix e

the driver behind a plexi glass screen
thirty six circles in six
concentric circles
i'm just painting at a house down the street
and i'm out of tokens
do you mind if i pay at the station
i live in the city
and i'm going all the way to Kennedy
phone in the right breast pocket
waiting for texts
about to die

circling the glass of the kiosk
going down the stairs to the right of the escalator
and onto the train
the red seat is empty
the windows open onto the city
far enough east
that the subways above ground

after the youngest said leave leave giggling and the mother asked if
he could just
finish that one wall and leave
putting the children to bed
and speaking in soft whispers
go to bed go to bed
her and the daughter talking about
the colour and whether it's too dark or too red
and the cracks in the wall near the ceiling

i don't listen to loud music she had said to him while she swiffered
the new flooring
they'd just had installed
as he stepped
out from the bathroom she explained was just hers asking

if he didn't mind not using it

the last nuclear family assembles
the men in their cribs picking at their penises
their countries in smoke
leaving invisible tattoos like nicotine
patches on their souls and their
shoulders
the women out of infancy wrapped in black veils
their stocking and slipper dressed feet
wander homes that are empty
wading through the failed domesticity
and the moans of their male company
which float and waft through the rooms
changing colours
the same walls
like learning a new language
leaves them huddled
with intruders slapping metal and foam and wire and hair
into the flat faces of their structure
long after night falls
and the youngest is asking the painter to leave
saying repeating how badly
he's in need of sleep

middle child left in a room with no furniture
except for the cage that he's kept in
the laundry hamper
and the closet with diapers
his mother passing in and out of the room
i've been on the go since this six o'clock this morning
i think it's less work to go to work
than to stay at home
she says

the home smote by new colours
the home that this nuclear family tried to
trap the world in
after so many years of danger
the disease of soft mindedness crawling through their blood
the best they can hope wheezing and exhausted never showing their
weakness never letting trembling anger or bitterness show
deeper than bones stiffening locking and making them brittle
until they dried like drops of paint in a home
ripples on a wall
otherwise flat utterly frozen

the nuclear family made of women turned into mothers
and men trapped in cribs
condemned to being infants
fetishizing their own passivity
waiting to be taken care of and die
the end of the family
drunk in prayer
asleep and disabled
collapses without ever having a proper bed to rest in or any place
other than diapers to shit

the painter
is in the bathroom
with diarrhea on the toilet while the mother
clangs away plastic against plastic
emptying the sweeping from the halls of her crypt
into containers padding back and forth from the front
to the whining wordless child drooling on the floor

in the toilet with his pants around his legs
pains in his stomach
like a whole suburban development was turning in the intestines
repetitive housings springing up in his guts
weeds and well planted flowers blooming just above the groin and
twisting out into the bowl
while he texts on his phone and groans like the middle child
looking at the handicap chair in the tub of the second shower in the
first of three bathrooms
drawers opening and closing in the kitchen
an endless stream of meal preparations
spoons slurping
microwaves
cloths wiping chins
swiffers on floors

it all continues and continues and continues
the way you feel on the toilet when you think
you might never be done wiping
and the client is listening on the other side of the door to you not
working

the last nuclear family are such a fraction
to be decimals repeating
they've closed out the sea
run

to the driest of places far north from the carborundum bluffs

tables and chairs linoleum new hardwoods and tile
shut out the ocean over which they had to fly
that faced from all corners like the bars of a crib
the island they were born in
this terrible wetness of such terrible size
and now
in their cracking flaking home where the mould even here
this desert of houses
a suburb between bushes and pink brick scaling across the sky
grows black and spotted in its corners

the painter
they are forced to invite leaves
the paint spotted blue
drop sheets
galactic in their image
in little lakes
across the floor of every room
swallowing up the
safe tile
linoleum and hardwood

there are things that hum and toll besides bells
hums and tolls that have nothing to do with sound
small like flecks of brush or paint chips from an
undercleaned pelican flaking in the wet paint onto old walls
little sparkles hung in the sticky new colour
hums and tolls of night
that come with cranberry colour
darker on the feature walls of the living room
of the last nuclear family
all gathered to watch the painter apply
as it approaches seven in scarborough
the middle
child grunting from his crib in the next room that has no furniture
the painter moves the ladder over across
sheets
the youngest says wow or says leave
oscillating between being impressed and being sleepy
and the mother and daughter
watch and worry
about whether it's too dark or too sloppy

and how long this white man who will not stop grinning
will go on cutting their room with a dark smoky pink
like a lipstick
the furniture huddled
and all of them
gathered while the sky passes from ultramarine into darker seas
through the steel fender and trees across the street
this hum and toll
of things ending in places we'd wish them to continue
and continuing in places we'd wish them to end
the streak across the complex labyrinth of time
all four of them
sick of communicating with only
faded politeness fraying at its edges
trying to be civilized a fabric between them
of patching different cultures and
mismeeting expectations

this mother
when she was eleven
came to canada
born in guayana where she claims
she became so particular
and now finds herself asking the painter
about each little thing if he could touch it or fix it
the problems he made
the ones already
existing and the ones she invented
like her house is an unending scroll of paper covered with checks
and ticks and boxes that will never be completed
that she cannot stop doing
laundry
dishes and checking on her sons

only ever leaving to work on the mowing

the first spare moment
at the windows
washing and cleaning
sweeping the crud that the squirrels dragged onto her porch from the
yard
her flowers
roses
still blooming and her

proudly
pointing them out
through the windows
she spends all summer cleaning
explaining how nice it feels
to sit on the chair in her living room
and the outside to look clear

this tomb
of the last nuclear family
cracking
at the crux of the wall and the ceiling
the house shifting
and long tracks through the taping
that leave the cut lines spotty and shifting
not straight
like she was hoping
the whole house is shifting
so that her hands
worn
by the cloths
and the handfuls of water
the bowls and the spoons
fruit that she cut
preparing for mister
the name she gave her youngest
the son that announces
coming off the school bus
that he's done at school
her hands full of scarves she wears praying
putting them on and taking them off
each time she prays
five times a day
saying to the painter as she passes through the open concept kitchen
and dining room up and down
seeking more things that need completing
you don't understand it until you believe it

and

i am a born muslim

and

there's no smoking or drinking

patting down through the wall and back to the kitchen
her hands
full of the bodies of her sons that she cleans in the tubs
full of all the garments that she does laundry
moving them out of the closets
so that he can paint them
the doors and the walls
adding hundreds of dollars as she asks
oh maybe we could do this one
each one realizing a new space that makes her unhappy
til she's staring
her hands too full to collect or catch or pick up
her house that's collapsing
the ruins of too many lifetimes
raining down through the well sealed sky of a country
convinced of its safety
that its blocked out the ocean
cracks sealed under layers of new paint
convinced it can never crumble
because its covered the flaws in the structure
every room and wall shining
the last family so nuclear
all of them smiling
all of them sheltered
all of them
with food and with jobs and with money and time
the last nuclear family
standing in the hum and the toll of a night
to which
they've taught themselves to be blind

it is four twenty when the vietnamese mailman
carries in the new shelving the oldest
the sister
the second mother ordered
and she
wearing her robe made for praying
that she only wears kneeling
is drawn to the door
the youngest who's supposed to be bathing or eating
calls from the kitchen and she's cursing the fact that
at the worst of times her daughter
is ordering things online
the mailman grunting under the weight of the shelf

boxed up in cardboard and waiting to be assembled
on the porch
the heft on his shoulder
and both his eyes smiling
happy to see the white blonde man eating on the porch of the suburbs
until the brief conversation
that finishes with i don't live here i'm just painting
and then the confusion of who is working and who's in charge as the
box is lifted and each person tries to help by carrying
or by opening the door
so there's more a tango than anything done
too large to carry without constantly
swinging and tipping
it finally is dragged pulled pushed and carried into the front hall and
dressed with the sounds of everybody grunting and sighing
the middle the loudest from his place on the floor
picking at his penis and drinking his drool

the psw
comes in
and says hello to everybody before warming up
the world in the microwave

with her long bib of a dress
she sits feeding the curve spined middle child
mouth open on his ass at her feet
gazing up
then washing those dishes
the youngest yelling at her to sit

before packing up
gently
speaking rarely
soft fingers
slow eyes
kneading meals into a mouth
the youngest asks when she will leave
counting the minutes down
when she goes
she gives a goodbye to each person and
disappears out through the front door
pulling and unhooking the child lock and out
a shadowed azure in the sky
leaving wedding veils on all the lawns
and the steel partition of perforated metal bolted to wooden legs

squat wide and secure at the edge
of a dip
across the street

the day rolls by in half hours
the youngest son sitting on a small leather foot rest
and watching the gold be painted on
pronouncing it with a d
for the hard g
where the shoes of the family
are kept
cut lines and
whiz of the door going from beige
into white
saying whoa as the paint is applied
his sister the eldest
that he calls mom by mistake
before she corrects him
fake laughing

he brings his smile
craning his neck back and walking right up to the painter
like it's an object he's learned to make with his face

she fake laughs in a similar way and corrects him
saying very simply and quickly
like its nothing

i am not mother

and he says to the painter

almost done?

and

more work

repeating and
alternating between them
missing the rs
and playing candy crush
listing off the days of the week
saying mo work after each
and then saying sleep
or later saying pee

his sister sits down
wraps her arms around him
and they kiss and he says leave

but i love you can't i sit here
can't i be with you

and she asks about his day

untangling the gibberish into music
math
and other words
the drum that he played
while he was in class
she asks
how his math was
oh you don't like math
it's hard
and she teaches the word move
he has to learn v to be able to say it
and skips it
he has learned to say easy
and asks the painter if his work is easy
the painter laughs in reply

when his sister teaches him the word gold
he won't say the g

he says hard word

she says you're not going to say hard words now
and laughs the way she laughed before

when the painter is leaving
and the weekend is coming
and the mother is staring at the
badly hung sheer curtains
she'll be trashing
when the jobs over and she's replaced them
that are hung
in an uneven ripple
over
both living room windows
he asks if they want it adjusted
they laugh
so embarrassed by how haphazard it looks

but assuring it's fine
and he leaves
taking a kit kat and smarties from a small
bulk nestle package
the mother brings him

he asks if it was for halloween
but it wasn't and they don't
celebrate it
he goes down past the partitions
of corrugated steel thin
bent in two curves
the ways
lower case ms and
some double yous can
sometimes be

between the squirrels sparrows
the stone stoop moss like varicose
at the door afoot and the butchered fence
piled in the tall grass hungry green tongues thick with dew after the
pinking of mornings start has melted off
scarborough squarely faced against the sun
our haze of cloud a veil
everyday a wedding
lifted to be kissed by the bald shine
or ended hanging and covered in the tears of rain
here is the doorstep of the last nuclear family
held by the cracking pavement hands of euclid street
off meadowvale
in a turning suburban beat with ditch
dead white chested black beaked birds and
acuras and honda civics huddled round

the painter arrives
passing the stiff brown feathers of the dead bird flat and round like a
fist
the little feet pointing to the door
the white faced garages all lines like jealous canvases
or untouched brides
along the street
the slick black suvs pathetic husbands
who come rushing home every eve

this domestic hold
where life is like garage and car
where we learned to imitate our tools
teach ourselves to be as divided as
home and vehicle
and arrange genders thus

here is stationed the last nuclear family
tight fisted
nervous
with a black headscarf the mother at the couch
waiting for the painter to ring the door bell
chattering to her middle child who slobbers desperately
and drags himself the ass of palms against the floor
thumping it like a drum
cooing

middle child soft
gently shorn of head
smiling or giggling
peering
these expressions
on his adult face bend it
into shapes more often associated
with intelligence
suspicion
understanding
enjoyment
welcome
they hang like homonyms on his face
or as though the grunted vowels
accidentally recited an ancient poem

the mother sits the beige leather like sea foam swelling around her
from her lifted head a jewelled eye lands like an arrow
along the cutlines and patches
the brush strokes and rolling

she microwaves the painter chicken
telling him how it's her youngest's favourite
basmati rice with carrots
broccoli from the tupperware
soft and steamed onto the plate
telling him i owe you lunch
the tense morning washed away
when he came to receive a loose leaf page

with the bic blue cursive marking each one of his mistakes
and she took him around from dot speck nick and touch up
to the largest ones
the painter admitted quietly to himself that he had failed her
turning cold
bitter for being caught out in his laziness
cutting corners to be done faster
she takes him down upon their knees
and points out each

and here
here

well that rooms not done

down here
you see

well yeah

right there

i know it's not done

no
the paint right there do you see

yeah obviously
i saw it when i did it
i'm going to fix it today

and then suddenly she's sweet
the speech therapist is here at half past six
if you could leave before that
she's our favourite
we had her before she left the company
over a year ago
and he really liked her
so i have to get the rooms ready
if you could be out of here by five or five fifteen
and as he's finished
the living room
they've laughed
he eats her cooking on the porch
you work so hard
such a good job

i'm complimenting you
i'm sorry
you must think i'm so particular
i don't mean to be picky
staring from the leather couch
across the faintly perforated drying paint that
coats her front room walls

waiting for the youngest son
to arrive off the school bus

half an hour she paces the hall
her eyes across the windows
waiting for him to arrive

he arrives at four every day
but for half an hour she waits

and then the yellow black squares windows with all the children
riddled by backpacks secrets and their homecomings pulls up
a short popping gasp escapes her and out she dashes
across the porch
to the sidewalk in the stream of yellow paper that has fallen from the
trees
scooping him off the automobiles steps and into her house
scolding his behaviour

he's screaming monday

you're not at school
this is home
you must be quiet

the running violent of the bath
the house floods with the sounds of pipes
circling the clinical bathroom
the mother and her two sons close themselves in
drawing the youngest out of the school bus
across the red spotted hide of autumn lawn
over the soil pelleted porch and into the front hall
where he shouted monday and hello
this mother waiting with her eyes on the empty street
for the school bus to arrive

only for the report from the bus driver standing while the youngest
fidgets

to receive the report on his behaviour

past the painter
leaving streaks of purple just above the baseboards
on his knees
hearing as the house begins to pound with the hollow din of water
pipes and tubs and then the screams of the youngest
no no no no mama no mama no mama

what will you do tomorrow

the scream is pitched high from a broken voice
the promise made by someone being tortured

BEHAVE

five minutes later the last nuclear family is laughing while she makes
jokes about turning her youngest out onto the street

the eldest
the daughter
comes in with her sparkling patterned head scarf
and grey jacket
lipstick and earrings
her car parked in the garage

hey babes
saying to the youngest as he goes to greet her and in the kitchen
says
i didn't behave
a garbled maze of vowels
she draws the sentence out of the youngest
he made the little boy on the bus cry
you made him cry
no
the bus driver had to stop

they come in and he starts screaming the word purple
it's a nice colour
you like the colour your sister picked
yes
he yells and they pace and change and eat
a high buzz

no one still
no one together
every hand busy with a task
every tongue wrapped around
a syllable of worry
the filipino psw comes in to feed the middle child
and a bubbly irish speech therapist comes in with a bag
of games and laminated cards
sending the youngest screaming and bouncing between the kitchen
and the front hall
until they sit him down
and teach him how to say
i want

driving the next morning
markings of the storm that raged through the city
the night before are seen everywhere

the storm that shook every tree
the yellowing oak beside the painters home heaving
like it was saying goodbye all night
the car turns off onto the parkway and
tunnels through the treetops
rusted steel bridges springing to the left
a pastiche of autumn
like bowls of candy and bouquets
about him and his boss
her truck flying along don valley
and onto the four oh one
she's visiting the job site today
if the visit goes well they will be finished
strips of gray and twisting lines aligned
passing under the plaques on silver posts
the green and blue rectangles
the names of roads
onto meadowvale
euclid
fawnridge and
onto goldene
thrown in park outside the house

paper bag with monopoly characters
spread open on the console

wraps and burgers pulled out of cardboard
the strips of fries

sitting breathing leering out the window together
both of them waiting as long
as possible before entering the house

here i did notice something the second sentence spoken after their
entrance
and the mother's small quick strong thin finger springs out into the
air
arrowing towards dents and nicks and pointing the gleam of the fresh
paint in the window
that white there you see
that white

explaining slowly that it can't be helped

oh
oh
a little distrustfully
this tempered finally by the scuttling compliments

you did such a good job yesterday such good work

look look

drawing the boss into another room

didn't he didn't he do good
he did good work

the two women standing
the middle child fast eyes are scanning
the mother patting and gripping the painters shoulders

see when he takes his time
when he slows down
he does good work
that's very good
that'll go on your record

you're keeping a record for me

no no she is
and the boss who's younger than the painter

a white business student in a trial program at university
blushes and shrugs when the mothers not looking

rain flecks pearl across the glass above the city like a geometric
heartbeat or measure of a century
above on the parkway coming though the valley
driving home after the job is complete
trees in their againing
pillared canisters of starlight and rain in bushels and
wind fists full in bunches by the side of the turning dark
streaked by rain
charcoal pavement rippled and jewelled like a shore
a hard and turning sculpted strip laid between scarborough and
toronto
the radio jabbering and then still like a breath after gusting
both the painter and his boss go quiet
the black garbage bag of every painters tray and pelican liner coated
with the coloured paints that are pressed into every wall of the last
nuclear family
rattle in the truck bed behind them

costa mesa
golden rice
cranberry
willow wood
damask
farm life
rosa rose
the gripper
primer
diamond exterior
and semi gloss baseboard
paint
half finished cans piled up
in the covered bed
with crew kits and drop sheets
the basement empty
returned to dejected treadmill
and the dead husbands labour
piles of shelving
false hardwood linoleum
green paint
a washing machine and work sink
two magnets that indicate the hours that cost the least

for electricity
municipally distributed by the hydro company
the scuttling humming family
continuing

past the scruff and clean
of scarborough streets
the condos speckled with the evening rise up before them
as they leave
driving back into the city
the full truck leaving the home a little less empty
the barest thinnest layer added
now reduced
in this long returning painter's mind
to a pay cheque
that will be picked up on thursday

INTRODUCTION BY MITT PUMPKIN

I moved to Montreal after
the marches for free education failed. I was 22.
It was a fabled city to me. My maturer friends got their
undergrads
in the
streets with red squares pinned
to camo jackets, uploading experimental shorts and
chaindropping molly in techno clubs.
The very year they left, I arrived to attend
a classical conservatory, with my double bass and folders full of
sheet music.

David Somerset and Jack Salmon were classmates of mine.
I'm not sure they ever knew I existed but

I followed each skirmish obsessively:
police dodged, powders parachuted, group sex... I
scanned their youth and borrowed its fragrance.

David and Jack traded notes in their student mailboxes. An epistolary
romance of jokes, poems and places to meet.

I intercepted as many
as I could, reading and returning them. Jack was studious about
collecting David's. David, however, left his mailbox more
unattended
and often when
a little noted lingered a week or two, I tucked it into my binder
and took it home, pouring over the words alone.
They were in love and I was in love with them.

That was ten years ago. I now teach private lessons and take night
courses in
coding. David tours extensively, I know. There is no trace of Jack.
Last month, during some cleaning, ten folded pages fell with sheets
of dust from a
sun-bleached binder. The little capitals of Jack's handwritten poems,
opened tunnels of autumnal longing in my chest.

What follow are the pages that remain of Jack Salmon. I have titled
them from the
only poem of David's which I remember perfectly:

*When I am caged, I say "Fuck you" and create.
Do horses long to paint?*

OUR ROOM ON GILFORD

The

water damaged room, with the shower where the mould
rolls off on your elbows and the ceiling falls in, where you and I
shared beds and magic tricks and made each other food.

The street's close. We worked and woke up to

the same room, a cluster of our desire, the windows, long
goodbyes, the close up flush of hours dying in a touch, after movie
theatres, coming home, on drugs and in each other's arms,
it can be said, tearing laughter off

like changing sheets or shredded cheques, crying, shot, we
fought, with nothing to keep us safe, to be alive and love in pain.

OUR TWIN SOULS

I rolled out Montreal so we could meet.
I made a mound of roof out of the phlegm
of my spirit so we would have a place
to stand. I bring you sleep when the rocking pins go quiet
and lift that weight from you every night. I bear
it in brick circles while you rest. I wear
your sorrow in dark paint beneath my eyes.
From February to October, I
have made this city safe for you. Those car
tires spinning the street are underneath
the whip of my twin soul. I'm training them
so they deliver all the sadness I
collect from you in Christmas gifts transformed
and wrapped. They wait for you in paradise.
I will not mar their perfection with the wish
that I could be there when you arrive.

NIGHTS IN YOUR APARTMENT

You took me in when I
had nowhere to sleep and I
listened to you breathing.

I listened while you
slept and wondered
if you dreamt of her.

Your loneliness
is physical, I could
taste it in the room.

MISSING YOU

If only I could say to you how the math of my heart is unwinding,
how all my old proofs have come apart. I only wanted to share
everything with you.

It's like our faces start to match. Are we too similar to see each other
need too long? I wanted to share everything with you. Is there
anything I can do now or will I only make it worse?

Is this the newest magic trick? To hold you, quiet as I can, and wait
to see where we land?

TO MY BROTHER OF FIRE

Somehow in fall, all the memories come in.
You can keep nothing, not dead leaves or naked branches,
not the soft mornings spent in whispers or the afternoons of music.
Nothing stays,
not the voices that sing, or any human face, not a single labour of the
mouth, no holler, smile, kiss or spit,
nothing stays, nothing's kept.

My father is a dying elm, your father a christmas pine.
My mother was made in the ocean, your mother made in the fire.
Let's make a home together, you and I.

I believe in a love that will blow the smoke away.
I believe in a love that will break old worlds apart.
I believe in a love that cures blindness and buds new limbs.
I believe in a love that mothers roads.
I believe in a pigeon-hearted love that is always in the street.
That ruins nights with wakefulness.
Ruins days with light greater than a thousand suns.
That changes aloneness into beauty.
Betters friends.
That resurrects and retouches resurrection itself.

PRINCE ARTHUR & SAINT LAURENT

In the pavement mulch and brown fetters of
a broken winged city, you and I, my friend
on Prince Arthur in the autumn mulch
and scented leaves, were picking locks
and reading poems, watching starcheeked
passengers of heaven walking by.

My great friend, dark-haired, greek-lipped,
picking a closed door in the afternoon, and me,
watching for cops and reading poems, gypsy broke,
wearing your clothes, with a red leaved heat.

In my chest, tied with a rope of breeze, I wrap your
fingers in the shadow of my back, leaning over
a lock in the day, saying October's secrets
in a low voice, feasting on the mulch of suns.

In the brick wrecked hours, both of us late
and in your shoes, spent the after autumn in a
scattered alleyway, with the last two Belmonts
in the box, turning steps and words over our shaved
faces under our sore feet, laying our lost trail
of ideas, our long path of laughter out to be
followed to the doors of a singular eternity.

WHEN I WAS AN ANIMAL

He told me, when you live alone you're an animal,
dirty fur in the chopped scruff of dead flowers, head
in the black bags of chopped bulbs, feet in the
cracked words and amputated stalks.
I was, cupfuls of ash, platefuls of burnt paper.
We split whispers naked and started fires in our only
rooms, wandering through cardboard and aluminum cans.

I was too caught up to even begin thinking.
I had just discovered mirrors.
One person moved in. Two people moved in. Three people moved in.
I slept in new beds every night.

And only after everyone left and I was mute, I
realized, this October, you made my
den a factory of art and invited me in.
I, too busy pulling curtains across my
room for new evenings of endless loneliness
trying to insist on my existence,
neither touching my face to the furnace
or choosing the cold morning.

THE WIDE WINDOW

1

The city is blistered together.
Everyone's skin is red. New
wounds bud on them everyday.
They blossom with laughter
like spring flowers,
rooted desperately in the black
milk of the earth.
Babbling begins and ends and begins again.
Sometimes, they sing and kiss and wail in the
chasm of the
apocalypse of language.
Words flood like autumn into
the black
pit of dancing and the
souls of the street,
washed down by
the rain and worn by the brutal sun
like a flag, and
rise again like hot ash and
sparks to fill the sky.

2

This city's a mistake against
October, sharing beds and basketball,
movies, weeping over poems,
fixing each other's sheets, doing dishes
for each other, sharing meals,
wet mouths, warm arms, and thoughts
as constant and new as the wind
that can only be lived.

3

The city's blue tears and the happy laughter of the lights
burst on the garbagemen and bus drivers.
Student lie alone in the fires.
The sheafs of dry prayers have become as hard as
stone on their cold floors.
The branches are naked in the evening.
Traffic glitters, it's jewels as bright as
the eyes of the lonely who still
see the emptiness of the sky,

past portals of wind where people leave a scar on the darkness,
pressing their bodies into each other.

4

Dreams pour from the caged eyes of the city and fill the street.
The first snow comes with November and the evening.
Long braids are fired from all the windows.
The city swollen with empty pockets climbs down
from their apartment blocks to the street,
nothing to the light.
Mazes are trampled into the first cold diamonds of winter
and disappear in the next fall.
Humbled in the moons of a lover's
hair and its own crazed solitude, one mouth whispers winter's
promise in the dry steel language of a worker's
dream on the wet tongues blanket of time
and evaporates.

FORGET ME NOT

David,

For years beyond the window,
at the foot of the stairs,
I blasted my eyes by the stone flower pots,
shivering in the christmas sky
with a book of poems and a cellphone
smoking under your windows
while you spoke with her or cried alone.

I can remember the cracks in the pavement
and the
pillar painted red orange
on the corner of the step.

I remember the tiled floor between both
walls of glass, the door code,
the painting and the mailboxes.

Also,

a shadow of a gust like a grey face
against midnight
shifting above the city,
tangled up in stars and smoke
speaking to us
on the point of disappearing always
like a cloud caught in the wind
filmed and sped up.

When I think of it my chest feels like
a tall dollarstore glass.

Think of it man.

We made memories together and both
of us went snow blind
on every street
speaking for hours or pretending to speak
or finally finding some scrap of silence
away even from the buzz of loneliness and self.

I'm glad to leave it behind.

It's done and I'm done with it.
It's a prissy thing to have expected I would
get the youth I wanted
but this one seems like more of a mess
than I predicted.

Its problems are less pretty.

A lot of it is like those cheap glossy tea towels
I ended up with that look fancier than they are
and can't absorb anything.

But there are a couple things that are fantastic.

I can't say it all and I don't really care to but
just now there's one memory
I'm thinking of that kind of gets it.
Then I'll say goodbye.

We were standing in the snow
outside of Gilford.

I remember you walked up, listening to music, the
middle of the night and everything
was shining. I think it was early November.

It was the first heavy snow
of our second year.

You were
trying to catch a hold of that imprint winter
leaves on us when we're children, which can
always be shaken loose by weather and the right song.
A chase most of us
spend all of our lives on, and that this poem is kind of
about, which I guess is just remembering.

Anyway, you walk up and you look lovely.

You talk about how it's beautiful.

Everything is shining.

We're standing there.
Neither of us are really happy, but you can tell we
still love each other.

That's it.

I wrote a poem about it when it happened but
it's lost somewhere now. I think it said something like

We measure the world by the people we love.

which is, I guess, how I felt then.

Certainly worlds are made

with love,

Jack

“My skin is
the music of
alleyways.

The sun is a bell above him.
The schoolgirls go past on scooters. The movers are here. Light
fades on the apartment walls and glistens on all the windows.

“I have come here from a landscape of love absolutes
to sit on this step.

“I believed that every lamp had a circle of whispers and
I made a romance from every departure.” The children
have their shovels and people are coming in from the weekend.

“The shadow of
a woman out
in the heat and
the iron of an
evening on the
balcony passes
through the
alcoves of
my eyes and
leaves a song
more constant
and varied than
the wind.”

The neighbours daughter passes in her black curls

and her jacket. There are long red skirts the colour of bricks
around the faces in the street.
A red shovel is lying in the snow and the birds,
winged dusk, are born from the roofs and write brief
lines over the clouds.

Born at the step of the new year, a morning cradled
balcony, flagged with the poetry of schoolchildren,
flesh by the flesh of a worker's hand,
emptied forms a canister of smoke & a bleeding eye.

The voice of dreams — “Listen, people are not avenues of
suddenly every face is distraction to be filled with your lust
a spring of light, for human connection.”

emptier than a snowflake
or a rainstorm, pressed with
a thousand kisses,
“I become
skin and am distributed.”

a blue jacket, brown hair, and her dark eyes in the morning
on the corner store step, standing
in the sun, what do you consider, so
wrapped in blessings,
human inarticulate,
blue hair, brown eyes
in the dreams and the pavement, the street jacketed with the sky, the
stores pouring
smoke, the dust step gathered, the carcasses
of buses and your feet, the people, come
pray with their footsteps,

you are not a statue
and you are not a statue and
you are not a statue
or the sun.

The sound of clapping

water-ocean waves on the streetlight, church windows,
the sky, after night, we walked the iron steps —
inside, hot with people, the room was a candle, music of footsteps,
soft voices,
bowls of water, marble statues, we went up to the belly of the
organist.
In the basement, I touched the stones.

I am	I lay outside
these stones, more song than stone.	the bathrooms,
The voices they've heard, made beautiful,	while you wrote
I have heard and made beautiful	poems
	on the stairs and traced the
	old wall with my fingertips.

Outside, "We should sit on the steps. We should sit in the rain."
Two cigarettes,
"My throat is so open." The musicians smoking. "How is your soul?"
"Overflowing."

There are times when the world	
is so filled with poetry	
there is nothing to say or write,	My hand against the stone
then I choose to be a stone.	trembles —
	this is my applause.

Let us wet our heads against the sky.

1

On the grass, by a bag of oranges,
the sky flaking into red flags around them...
The summer is coming with its dresses and its skin
but today there is nothing to eat and tomorrow the rent is due

2

Cheeks above their children,
they cannot be hidden from the eye that weeps
silver or the white paper with ink but you hide them
from the rind of your sorrow, fermented under the tree
without leaves

3

Then swear, your laws do not touch us. "Burn money,"
the banks said, "if you wish," with a mouth of fire,
around the false tears. "It is not against the law."
Well we have none to burn but we found the fruit
you planted in our comrades and we blind you by
the hardened stalk of that forsaken tree.

After the march, the park was empty and the signs were dead in
the grey grass.

Police officers bought pizza. I'm not sure when I lost my lover.
Her arm was in mine on the street, "It is good to march with you,"
After the march her eyes were untouchable, almost afraid. The
traffic lights blinked on the corner and people walked out of
grocery stores in a haze, their eyes untouchable, almost alien,
comrades become pedestrian.

On the benches, couples and families, exhausted, legs dangling
in the evening remained.

City making music, my saxophone
voice is you, is in you, was born.

Street, beautiful in people,
sky, a dress of blue paint.

City, forgive me,
I did not see you
til you marched in me.

On, on, the statues w clubs & visors,
on, on, tho hungry, we forget,
we do not have bellies, we left
our sore feet on the street,
climbing each other's shoulders, on,
on, beside strollers, the little heads
of children, palm flags for Thursday.

A comrade in pain
could not walk anymore
and walked on, on.

I heard someone say,
"food and
beer, to the patio!"
There will be time for
patios if this is ever finished.

A comrade came back, patio sick
thinking of tear gas, over
beer and beef scraps,
he was sorry, we held him.
On Monday, I called him Artist.
Today, I call him Comrade.

After the march, on, on, we talk leadership and tactics, laugh
in my lover's home, sweet. I leave without a kiss
and, walking home, weep.

		We touch each other's lips but refuse to kiss, our tongues across each other's mouths on the ramp where the boys cannot see.
The boys are bored or boring — in the garage, looking for some catch, a noose of keys.		
	My comrade tonight is sickled in the rain, his face is money. Brood unhappiness, nobody laughs.	
We go to the roof and measure distances, do nothing, when the sirens come, we run.	His friend is tall and in love with him, they wear the same clothes, he lets him touch him or pushes him away as he pleases.	
We take The key from security, high whine, we run.		Now I see the city's blue and gold, brown with bricks, the stud of bodied streets, green automobiles underneath. The first time I went up I didn't see a thing.

She tells me to meet her on the roof. It's raining. I leave them.
 "I'm going to find somewhere to piss." I meet her in the lobby,
 she caught the door, closing, and slipped in. We take the elevator
 to the seventh floor. Over the city, we kiss and kiss again.
 I tell her the story of a church. Our hair gets wet, we
 hold each other's arms and touch each other's backs
 breathing heavily, "I don't want to take you
 away from them." She says, "I don't want to be anywhere
 else." Both our faces are made of moons. The streetlights
 glitter on the floor, making bracelets on our electric eyes.
 It's too cold to fuck. The clouds are white. She takes me
 down to her apartment, wet, we get naked in the bed.

6:30 birdsongs
 the garbled street, up
 through the wet melt &
 munched concrete

Blackbirds draw
 up the domes of
 copper, the
 brown heated domes
 and panes of glass

The windows open, diagrams
 of salutation

Jean opens the Tim
 Hortons door, buy him a coffee
 tell him, love, your
 name, give him a
 cigarette
 to roll his weed
 on

The streets an
 ashtray.

Morning
 from a lover's home, blue bed,
 leaving kisses with a
 sleeping body after a
 night in this
 lover's arms, back
 More beautiful than street
 light on bricks, climbing
 the holy morn
 there — on this back
 forth — in the street, from
 the bar, through
 the parking lots

Bird songs. Dreams
 of the green hills and
 a city split by sirens

Dropping the name
 in tongues and lips
 across
 this lover's skin.

The windows open, the curtain rages
 against the name-thick room — two sexed bodies,
 their faces ecstatic with love in the
 night, street, room, bed, writing the
 accidental dawn
 across the covers, kissing names, in each other's arms,
 silent canvases, erasing hours for a stake of colour and sound.

Looking for apartments
The streets are lace
Names are written in blue salt

The buses horn across the caging eyes.
Groceries, a phone, your bag of books, this bundle in the

moving dream

The streets lace across our bodies
Brick, window, grime

garbled in un
kissed tangles

you and I set a
candle spelling city
in the street

With your palm, your
cheek.

under the skin of bricks,
the light of love,
the light of love,

love will always rhyme with solitude

I am thinking so little, I am
so close to silence and noise
so close to silence and so close
to noise, I am thinking so little
so close to silence and rage

under the skin of the
the bricks, the light of love.

love will always rhyme
solitude
love will always rhyme with
solitude

I see much less than the
colour of bricks, the colour
of rags falling off the city,
the stripes of sound

the breath of the stars under
the skin of the bricks, love will
always rhyme with solitude

I see my sisters and
brothers in whispers,
barely,
through glass and
through a veil.

love will always rhyme with
solitude

I am thinking so close to nothing it scares me.

I am thinking
so close to loving

I aim thinking
thinking
for you

I am thinking
so close to you

the work is silenced

let me, lover, touch, do not say
touch, her silence is troubling, the work is silence
do not say beautiful my friend, my lover
he is silent the work is silent
so often, the breathing comes
close to dreaming
he is silent of her the work is silence
my friend, my lover
the work is silenced the work is silent

let me, lover, touch, do not say
touch, her silence is troubling
do not say beautiful
he is silent
so often, the breathing comes
close to dreaming
he is silent of her
— he says he's
he says he's lonely
the trees are soft and warm busy
the bricks melt into stars he says I'm sorry
his uncle calls he says
Goodbye and keeps
listening
Bank statements and
cash receipts
keep coming in.
he says love is curious and he burns
a sheet of paper He forgets all
the music he
listened to.
He forgets how
to speak.

A man on the street tells him his name
he says he has the
power of islam

show me people
listning to music
alone

show me the places people love

so, show me their city,
I am curious about every brick
show me how they open their doors
do they have balconies or trashcans?

show me the places they sleep
and the ways they find silence.

you fool, flicking your cigarettes into fences
stop hiding and start dancing

you have nothing to be afraid of the
windows and the stars, the city itself
and the people.

the black tree
out in the summer
against the summer
sky.

I name ideas infertile

young car are you off to see a lover?
is there a lover inside?
does she know his name?
has he ever been cruel?

Behind your yellow doors
are you crying for a person with no name?

I never really lived
where I lived

I'm sorry and there's no excuse for my ignorance
But I love you and I want to keep listening

I just heard a song and it made me think of
nothing but the beauty,
it reminded me of you
it reminded me of you I am smoking and this
letter is almost
to nobody

I'm sorry it takes me so long to reply
my silence will be deemed unforgivable

a life can come so close to sleeping

so close to silence and
nothing, the ideas are unforgiving,
I carry them with me.
It becomes cold.
The street is beautiful.

I hear the sounds of a baby and I
cannot tell if it is my neighbour having sex
with his partner or if it is the cat
in the kitchen or a video

music made everything a little warmer

one last cigarette
two more for the morning
I hear the baby again

I thank you for my memories
the time goes so fast
I forget to stop and
remember them

you were sitting
out with me
smoking cigarettes and drinking wine
in your new sunglasses
the stove was on everything looked
green and
your skin was filling with
sunlight

thank you
the kitchen was filled with groceries
I will bring oranges tomorrow

tonight

		The pool is soft and takes me by the hand It kneads my body
Hear me	my voice is like a rag	Woman my soul is water Wish in me
	Your eyes are two sheets	Hung
	Weaved like wind in trees	like a curtain
	I ease the sun through my fingers	Stretched tough body bold body like a stain of song
The mythology of lovers and a horde of children in the water		
	Come, Lay yourself inside me and you will be made new	

You are the first person
I've truly tried not
to lie to

Let me build a
boat for you

These boozy days
are dying
and we're getting
older

I miss your mouth

These wretched hands
These rigoured hands
This wicked mouth

I became a cloud
and slid and burst
above you

A leaf touched my
naked hip

These wretched
hands

A leaf touched my
naked hip

This wicked mouth

Secrets touch each other	
and crumble the day,	It's time
bubblegum wrapper,	
let's go buy ice cream	we danced and cooked
Crucible of kisses	together again
Silent hours	and get drunk
I want to wrap my	You made the word
hands around all your	
plates and make your	human for me
Woman, bed again	real
this afternoon	If we could watch
is missing you	a movie go for a
This is true	walk, if you could tell
	me my body was beautiful
throw out the dimes,	Blonde fish
under your hair,	
sweep the shelves	wrapped in
let's lick each other	a towel
Can you feel my	by the pool
soft palms	
	This is true
Breath taste	
of cigarette and coffee	
	out to buy some wine

I take the car I rent out down the 401, bridges link like woven rope around each other. I pass into the small towns after the city and pass through them too. Off the side of the highway, three opened structures with twenty foot doors and towering peaks, parking garages for farming equipment, are pinned to the beached gravel and concrete of the rust fenced lot with a small marker indicating video surveillance and the name Miller on the metal. I pull onto the shoulder and walk down. In a beard of smoke and light rain, I watch the reflections in the pools in the potted pavement, touch pads of falling water. I finish my cigarette while the glow softens and the shadows are kneaded out and pinched into sharp lines. The pinking, cut plum sky scatters itself over the ground as the rain ends and greens flush beside me, turning my head to leave. The cigarette out in a sheet of wet sand, I get back into the car and drive over the long rolling yellow lined concrete.

A short overgrown path opens onto the bay. I walk through, following the crashing sounds, my parked car blinking with hazard lights above and my blinking eyes adjusting. The spray hits my face as I come onto a narrow strip of large stones and a laughing herd of waves. Perched on the smooth stone nearest me, I light a cigarette. The lake sharpens. The red button in my cigarette flares at the bottom of my vision beside my translucent nose and ring of doubled knuckles. The rhythm of crunching, squishing and splattering is hypnotic. After the cigarette is finished, I hover there longer watching the patterns of the bay.

Rising, a stinging track of shocks races out from my knees where they were bent. I walk back to the car, take a deep breath at the drivers entrance and look back across the water.

Lightning flashes deep at the edge of what I can see and a crackle runs back to me seconds later. My throat is dry. I feel dizzy. The lightning flashes closer and suddenly the clouds sweep over and my hair is wet and stuck to my forehead and my cheeks, my clothes are plastered and transparent across my shoulders and my wet denim is sticking to my legs as I leap onto the rock, tearing everything off, whooping, and dive into the pitch lake.

My arms pound against the surface and I dip under, pulling through, stroke after stroke, drawing up, pelted by the storm, clawing at air. My body becomes liquid. The undulation takes my shoulders through my legs, sweeping me like a ribbon, my arms springing up and hammering into the coming wave. My whole body becomes a star, a kernel of raging heat, the effort wipes my mind clean of sounds or colours. Panting I lay myself out like a finished tapestry on the top of the water, its tongues lifting and passing me, the rain splattering down.

When I lift myself onto the rocks the stretch of chewed bushes and driftwood in the grey curtain of night is totally unfamiliar. I'm panting and shivering, nude as the rain wraps itself around me and the sound of the waves beat against the sand I stand on. I look up and down for a sign of something recognizable but its too dark to see and what I can see, doesn't register. I follow the course of the waves whether they would've blown me to the left or the right of my vehicle and walk against their direction towards where I might have started. I pick my way barefoot over a soft sanded beach, dodging branches and larger logs that have been washed up or rolled down from the wooded entrance. The rain finally softens and a warm gust comes over the beach. There's a narrow patch of green where the sand ends that I pick through and down a path and I am on the stone spangled water's edge. I make my way carefully, often crawling, my bare body stretched over the rock spine of the

shore line. Fumbling forward, I can feel my palms prickling then burning from being scratched so often, my toes stubbed into numb howling. I lift myself on the flat palm of a stone and look up and down the lands edge disappearing into a humming ash all around me. I stretch myself out, heaving and let the breeze like a solid thing, the thinnest sheet, run over me.

The lake is a rippling bouquet when I wake up, the sun has just started peaking above the line of trees, and my nude body aches in every place. The dream fades into the mist at the horizon's far reach. I stand slowly, blinking off a crusted mask, my mouth sticky, my back throbbing. The rock beach seems to open a little further down from where I'd been sleeping. I pick my way through the shallows, slapping against my calves and over the stones, into a swampy thicket where the beach curves. Ahead theres a smudge of colour that might be my clothes, bright against a rockface. I pad through the sand and over the stones in piles, the hairs across my skin rise under a short breeze as I let myself into the water and swim down the shore towards it. My shirt and my pants are wrinkled and damp when I find them, the box of cigarettes is soaked through. Taking the keys out of my pocket, I walk over to the car and get into it. Through the windshield that the streaks of rain have evaporated off of, I can see the rock knuckles and the fans of spray crashing against them. I pull out of the pathway looking over my shoulder to the road that I'm pulling onto, change the car from reverse to forward and drive away.

After stopping in at a museum in the nearest city, a red brick building like a school with a glass windowed entrance and a black lettered white marquee, I sit in the thick grass boulevard across from a building that must be older than the country, having a coffee. Dusk hits and speckles the sky with glowing golden dimples as I drive home.

Thoughts come like waves.

The condos are shells along the traffic.

At home, the canvas is stretched out and shining along the chipping planks of the attic.

I lift my head. The room folds up and closes and the canvas before me crystallizes on the chipped wood. She is nested above the roaring waves, drawing colours and sending them to me. I stroke against the canvas and she stands above the lake. I turn and glance back from a place between the clouds and the fresh water's rage and give her my sight again, the moon glancing in spears above my head.

In the attic of her brain, with the closed door, I am sculpting for her, small details, patterns to be discovered in the dust under bridges, blankets with a thousand threads, the crinkles of a clutched pillow before sleep, all this so she can taste the flecks of moonlight coming through the drops of spray, I am dividing darkness from light in the most precise gradations.

When the painting is finished I stand, unlock the door to the back deck and step out. The green glass vertebrae of condos sprinkled along the southern edge of the city. I feel both of us evaporating.