

ABSTRACT

Title of Document :

FLIGHT ANIMAL

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Flight Animal is a collection of poetry in four sections. Specific layering of names, countries and cities frame deeply personal experience; the speaker's tone, in patterned free verse, connects events and perspectives. New Mexico, London, the Chihuahua Desert, Italy, Prague, Mexico and New York are reflected upon. Objects that aid travel ranging from buses, wings, trains, legs, bridges, planes, bicycles and cars serve as both literal and metaphorical "vehicles." The title of the collection, *Flight Animal*, suggests the book's inherent subject of movement as a means of survival.

FLIGHT ANIMAL

By

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
Of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts
2007

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I

BORDER CROSSING, I

Some things are like this old woman:
 the thread dangling off the strap
of her nightgown, your side of the bed,
 the lake at sunset when the light
breaks like pieces of yellow glass,
 a word like your name,
the only thing that presses through the front
 of her mouth.

Some things are like her body that ran
 through Mexico and into the US,
and the fact that I never found out how,
 exactly, she got here.

Her skin translucent— a wet piece of rice paper
 covering blue veins, the lines
a sketch of her curves and the place she was born.
 She hands me a picture of you both.

Your nose was bent, even as a boy,
 eyes unaware of the camera.

What were you thinking? Your black hair
 braided, thrown around your shoulder,
clinging to your mother's hand.

Down an alley guarded by adobe walls,
 down a steep dirty stairwell we walk.
Your hand on the back of my neck,
 fingers pressing me forward, leaning
into small bones. You, the shadow, content
 on my periphery guarding my steps,
but pulling away whenever I reach or look back.
 You're with me only when I've almost
forgotten your name, a sound, the charcoal night
 and me enveloped.

I stick my head through the door, I trip,
 and you catch me. Someone yells your name
and you move through the room to a friend.

 Later you ask if I remember the funeral.
Which one? *The one during high school.*
 The one, that boy's. The one you said
was your brother. The one who sat in front
 of me in English and walked me
home. The one where we stayed
 listening to everyone leave
the wooden pews, and hid in the priest's back room.
 There was a picture of a narrow flooded
passageway on the border. It hung next to a window

that stayed shut. It stayed.
We stayed till morning
and the sound of seagulls, the dove's
belly-cry crawling out of its throat.
The priest woke us and gave us a blessing—
a useless thing floating over my head
like a broken halo.

I say I remember.

*I have to go, you say, don't pick up
the phone no matter how much you want to.*

We walk up the stairwell (you behind),
and they're waiting for you, but grab me instead.

They don't wait for me to react: they ask
for you. I don't look behind because I felt you leave.

They ask and ask, but I have been taught
not to talk, so much that it riddles every aspect of me.

A gun shot in the distance:
their bodies flinch ready to run to the sound,
but one puts his gun under my chin,
tells me he will remember my face and leaves.

People appear from the alley, their voices
calling police who have already left.

And already you are becoming *aparecido*,
collecting your footprints, leaving me this—
your voice the flooded passageway.

AND WITHOUT WINGS

She's thinking of the novel she's read: what would she do if her baby had two heads? Would she kill it? Or let it live?
She knows she would kill it.

He's building her wings from chicken feathers on the Laguna Pueblo in Paraje. He wears an *I Love Seoul* t-shirt
and will be hit by a train

his father built— every boy is. And he'll think she's Korean,
not in the literal sense, but in the made-up sense,
the way love's at first a projection.

She lives with her aunt and they keep peacocks in the backyard.
He saves the peacock feathers for the wings while studying
languages on the reservation,

his hair longer than an Indian's. Life's the trouble we get ourselves into,
body against the sun, against language his mouth
can't shape.

She sees herself in the orange beads that separate one room from another
that, when pushed, make the sound of rain on his back. The girl
isn't listening as her aunt talks about marriage,

because there are too many stories of girls giving themselves away
or who are given away. Would she kill it, the baby?
Or give herself away? In a box

by the orange beads are the feathers, and wings from flightless birds
of no use, so on a windy night, on top of an edge of a mesa,
they let the feathers go, each one riding higher

than the body that held it, higher than her thirteen years, than his twenty.
Each feather, in the dark, floats in solitude,
part of the air that carries it.

ALEX AT NIGHT

You're asking me questions and with each
I feign comfort. Who's your bedbug,
leaving no trace, learning the alphabet

from signboards? It's Mayakovsky,
hanged-man removing himself like love
for a body. Or the skin underneath composing

a goodbye song, a sort of dying song.
Was it the third time? Yes, it was Russian
roulette. Did we make a mistake?

Yes, your hand on my stomach.
My brother's friend, nested silver bullet
and me a type of yawning angel,

you thought, falling from the white wet sky,
opening my mouth
and swallowing what you needed me to.

TRAIN IN THE MORNING

He wanted to get up, even before his father who woke at 6 AM. He woke and walked through the long wet grass to the tracks behind his house. He just wanted to see the train and how close it could come without touching him. He watched the front of the train coming towards him, facing him— wheels ground against the tracks, making the sound trains make—. He thought about his father, who was probably just getting up, and he wanted his father to be up, for the first time, with some strange feeling in his stomach. But *want* is a word hitting the air and falling and flailing to make itself real, just like the kiss blown across the room— a slow knowing in small drops hitting his face, as he imagined his father run, reach, and come close to pulling him off the tracks. Close, as the long grass leaned back with the force of the train. His father still in bed.

KILLING THE PIG

Outside the crickets sing and echo each other. They chant what you chant, the way your voice crosses over the phone and is right beside me convincing me of you. The way a pig is killed. You know those pigs. Buried in the sand in a gunny sack to cook, while everyone dances and drinks. And this matanza,

we'll use every piece of it and it will remind you of when you were a boy and your uncles crowed at you to take the knife, knowing that pigs bite when they sense death, that you would never let the blood from the pig's throat into a bucket to later fry into a thick pudding.

Then its belly opens and we're covered in it, red and fat to salt and cook. Its eyes stuck open, it looks at me to pet it, waiting for me to touch its snout. Outside my window we could lie down beside each other in the heat cooking whatever's alive in us. And I want that blade to peel me open and relieve me of everything hot,

everything that shines like the red suck of my tongue in your mouth, and like the pig that scuttled to meet my hand, I am too comfortable with this. *So, what do you want?* Whatever's left is yours: the stains on the table, the four hooves, the blue horizon framing the city, the stroke of sun on dry and cracking ground.

BOYS IN THE CHURCH BASEMENT

Played with broken toys on bare cement, locked
in the basement of that holy house.

A Russian Alex (Sasha) doling out pieces

of hockey stick threw the puck in the middle
of the boys running in that underground place
on one rollerblade, sneaker on the other foot,

let out only for lunch to eat tomato soup
with the rest of the church an old woman led.

Sasha hated tomato soup, read and read and

didn't talk for days, grew up learning that we're each
in the basement or are the basement or
are the broken toys in the basement. He wanted to want,

he wanted to know what it was to crave a body,
even his own. It didn't matter
whether they're men or women

just that they're running with one sneaker
like Sasha running
into the kitchen for those lunches with other people.

He just got tired of it. The basement, the boys,
the groping in the dark, the half missing playthings,
ushering silence, closing the basement door.

PLACES DRIVING THROUGH YOU

This town's a crime town,
the lights are on,
the boys on the bike work
for the men
who steal electricity.

Every person experiences
loss of light
during some point
in the day.

Your cat's a street cat,
I can tell
by the way it wants
to be close

and closes in but won't
let me touch.

In Playa Bonita,
our car gets stuck

between two rocks and Andrea
stops talking before
we get to Las Tiernas,
Cabarete, Santiago,

through the back roads, the campo.
You hate it here.
It has sucked from you
any kind of compassion.

You can't take in the beach,
or clear water.
Here, where we stand and talk,
you say you

have more compassion
for your dog
than for the man without legs
who waits, everyday,

for change on the corner
by your house,
more love for your dog
than any yapping thing
you're here with.

HANNAH OUTSIDE

Hannah likes to hear you, at least twice,
 talk about faithlessness and how the Czech
aren't atheists because that implies a problem

and for them there isn't a problem.

 Instead of telling her, you send the letter twice.
She's in Prague before Italy, before you,

looking to buy the glass figurine of the rabbi
 circumcising the boy. She found it once,
but you can't find it again. You are both

Henry Moore's sculpture of two points
 almost touching in London, at the TATE
MODERN, by all the bridges

where you can pretend your life isn't
 a poorly drawn church sitting
on your hipbones, blocking your sex,

so you can't feel. Alex has to help you.

 Alex puts his mouth there and tells
you how it feels or Hannah gets her books

and tells you how they feel, moves your
 hair from your face, and listens
to the difference when you talk about

your uncle: he closed the door,
 taught you to stand on your head,
then pulled the outside plants

from their roots when your mother
 wouldn't let him see you again.
Hannah has a mother, has a place

that's touched her, in London, Piccadilly Circus,
 where Chris refused any
kind of umbrella so Hannah refuses any kind.

CENTER OF THE BLUE

But it happened. Like the clasp
of her mother's bra under her mother's fingers,
and the skirt that played delicately at her mother's knees
when she walked. And where she is,

is in the center of rocks, dirt, ocean, and people
burnt brown from being too close to the sun.
In the house there were too many dogs,

too many to train and they ran loose in the town,
and they all blamed her— mostly women,
heavily made-up, breasts pushed up to their chins,
the Virgin Mary cushioned between their cleavage,

at least 50 pounds over weight each of them.
And she ran, 12 years old, fighting and wanting
the dogs wild and upset. So, maybe she forgot

to lock the gate, and in the blurred water-colored
light of morning, when it's still hard to see
the shapes in front of you, she ran with them until
she dropped in front of her uncle Enrique's window;

she swore her lungs were ripping with each inhale.
She knocked, hands pressed hard against
wooden shutters, demanding to see her uncle.

She wanted to take his dog for a walk. *This early?*
he asked. *Fine, fine*, then gave her the key to the gate,
behind him the shadow of a woman— her school teacher's voice.
She ran faster until she reached the ocean,

the dogs behind her, and hid in a cave to watch the sun
lay itself over the water, then took off the dress
that she was slowly getting too big for, and swam

into the clear and floated, closed her eyes and imagined
the fish staring at her awkward body, half-grown in seaweed
and salt, feeling the sun pass over her as it passed over the sky
until everything was a cool dark blue.

She wanted the whole town there, so imagined
they all jumped in— the whole town— looking for her,
stomping the sea's bed, the sand pushed up underneath their feet,

until they could no longer walk and had to swim,
the tide pushing them back just when they thought
they had reached her. But finally they got there,
the town in the ocean, feet and bodies pressed

against one another trying to make their own space.
And she in the center, a floating body.

II

PYNCHON'S BIRD

The day Hannah flew back from Italy, there were a few hours
where she could've seen me. I had not packed or gone to sleep.

At 9 AM, Ben was in my bed. We'd walked all night
and early morning through the city. The park was slick with it—

dew. A slight fog, the mosquitoes thick in summer by the fountain.
He showed me the railroad tracks by his old house, the knife

his father gave him, cried, and we ate breakfast before we fell asleep.
Before we could fall asleep, we had to make ourselves want

to sleep, after the cocaine, the clenched jaw, we had to reconsider
what made us want. He hung a sheet over the windows to keep

it night. Alex was gone during all of this, watching a documentary
in Mexico on the Berlin Wall,

even though he doesn't understand Spanish, he thought of me,
and told me and imagined me walking across the East Side Gallery,

the largest part of the wall remaining. On the wall
was a bird, its wingspan extended, a chain in its beak.

The chain lengthened, like a wing, with a rose at its end.
Alex's name was on the wall, fading, drawn in straight lines.

I took a picture of it with the camera he imagined me having.
Next to it was a door, rusted steel, the overgrowth of a bush

eating its foundation. I call him, he imagines, that same night
sitting on a porch, a garden hose, dusty and in haphazard circles,

a dead bird lying on top of it, missing its head. I tell him
it makes me think of Pynchon and *Entropy* and the bird in the story,

wounded, the young man who held it in his hands, not knowing
if it would live or die. He still held it. His warmth sliding off

into what he did not know the end of. I tell him I still love him,
will take a bus to where he is. Across the border.

But I don't want to see his body in another country. I, really, am
not on a phone or writing letters Alex never reads or reading

his that ask why Ben's with me. Why we're sweating without sleep.
Because, he wouldn't ask to kill me. He just would.

I lay my face between the tattoos on his back, arm his chest
with my hands, because I'm not his mother sweeping.

BEFORE ALEX LEAVES TOWN

He was full of half-spoken things.
Words took shape in his hands,
hanging in the air

like the mobiles that lined
the ceiling of that tiny diner.
In the hotel room he told me

he didn't want my sex— asked me
to lie down, said he liked my face:
nose, mouth, eyes.

I didn't want him displayed
in memory (in my distorted way)
next to the others. Silence clung

to us, until it became a wall
of glass, keeping him from me
and keeping me from leaving the room.

NEAR THE RAILROAD AT 1 AM

She can't leave what lives by the railroad tracks,
a solitude larger than any space outside, a room,
with exposed brick and concrete floor,

the wooden beams slanted up and pieces of white
string hanging down from each, were tied to each
by someone for a reason that runs like her in the dark.

It's dark here (she's been mad before, leaving the house,
not coming back when he calls). She lies down in the middle
of the room. She's in it. Forgets about speaking, looks at

her feet extended, her toenails, leading up to her calves,
her lower legs, until she hears him and she could hide,
so he can forget about her and she him,

and he becomes the bed she leaves every morning,
a place that continues to lose her. Or will she go to kiss
him (she lifts her legs) instead of closing the door?

LUCIEN & THE HEM

Earlier on in the afternoon, not under the roof, but while the dogs were barking, the weight of their bodies pushing against the wire fence, I was wearing

my mother's favorite summer dress, translucent, the daisies peaking through to skin. Lucien brings a Birthday Flower and knowing grass doesn't grow long in desert,

he runs and falls in it. His palm open and up, he asks me to read it, I could if it wasn't confusing syntactically, all lines unconnected, and refusing to point

to themselves. Or read my favorite line to Lucien from the books my father got me, keeps getting me as I refuse to read after my friend dies or thinks she's going

to and after everything she might as well: *Tess of The D'Urbervilles*, *Dreams of Long-lasting*, *Delta of Venus*, *Tropic of Cancer* and what made them believable

is a specific language not always, but sometimes, a different language, that fits his favorite line "If I had seen the mother first I'd never have looked at the daughter,"

or "Filmore had already grabbed her by the arm, but with her free hand she grabbed the coffee glass," Lucien knows the coffee glass will soon be pieces of coffee glass,

the way Anais knew Miller and wrote, "Henry had to see a doctor. Gonzalo needed glasses," the way we pretend to be them or pretend a friend isn't dying or gone

like dying and that she and I weren't sweethearts. Lucien has already grabbed my leg but with my free leg I kick. Lucien wants his favorite line, the line that's the hem

of my mother's dress, that parts, when reading becomes less interesting and the soil underneath the grass like the skin underneath my stockings is pressing.

CONVERSATION BEFORE A FUNERAL

We pile into a green Volvo to go to a church
in the South Valley, me the only girl.
His arm reaching over me to change
the radio station.

He came through my window the night before,
his voice the crippled dog buried
in my backyard, the moment we become
the people we pass.

My knees on his shoulders,
palms over his mouth,
I was what he wanted to hear and he didn't
want to hear my voice.

We stand in the back of the wooden pews
creaking with people. His hand
on the back of my neck,
the bowl of holy water rolls

back and forth, the pale
saints' mouths slightly open,
as if words would erupt
from their walled lips.

BORDER CROSSING, II

And he remembered my face.
 And at night, during one of your visits,
when it was too hot for anything,
 we climbed on the roof in our underwear
and listened to the rats in the alley shuffle
 through garbage.
I told you about the policeman.
 How he was looking
for you but was distracted by my mouth,
 my face, at least that's what he told me.
Skirt bunched up around my waist I faced
 the bedspread. He wanted me to call
him your name— I couldn't say it,
 my throat empty.
When he left he had forgotten
 all about you,
was sure I was the reason he came here.
 Where was I? you asked.
In the closet hiding,
 watching. Yes, you remembered,
but who wants to remember being pushed
 in-between hanging clothes,
looking through the slats of the door,
 hoping not to be heard.
Why didn't you do something else?
 You saw him, I said, it was impossible.
And there was nothing I could do,
 but wash the sheets, no condom
to throw away. I sat in the bath,
 filled with cold water;
he was the thick air of summer
 that made my skin itch.
Before silence devoured us,
 you asked me if you could be him.
You wanted to be the one to hold on
 to my hips until you forgot
the very thing you came for.
 In the bedroom we find
his hat. You put it on,
 and tell me next time I can wear it.
That I could wear that thing,
 the way you wore your hair,
before it was cut.

Years ago, wood shavings passed
 to the ground until we weren't able

to tell them from the dirt
 as we carved our names into a tree.
You had young hands and promised me
 ridiculous things like grace
falling from the sky,
 pale pink cherry blossoms.
I sat and watched them blow away,
 the way a wish fades
and becomes a memory of a picture. The picture
 of a child laughing under a table, toes
peeking out, cradled by a dusty piano
 and silent ivory keys.

A TABLE BETWEEN THEM

and he
father
and she
daughter

and she
she is no longer small
stretching as far as she can
in pink tights singing
Ballerina Girl
along with Lionel Richie

And she
she is no

longer wearing
the white dress
from México embroidered
with flowers of all colors

and she
she is no

longer held tight
in his arms
as the camera snaps
their picture

and she
she has had jobs
and lovers and bills
and he
he holds her
in the soft flesh
of his hand

and he
he is waiting
for the day when he

he must let go

and he
father

and she
daughter

and she
she is no longer small
and he
he is stretching
as far as he can.

IN THE SCHOOLYARD

The priest hands out rainbow-colored Skittles after school,
after the sermon that morning at Our Lady of Fatima,

after you confess that you made fun of a boy, pushed him on his back
and wanted to continue to push. Your friends

cheered you on, your hands calloused from the baseball bat,
from holding the girls' bathroom door to keep it shut.

To keep it. No, have your friend keep it, you hate Skittles.
They're the most worthless candy.

The taste lingers and becomes sour, so he can taste it on you
when he takes you behind the dumpster during lunch break

to press himself on you before he tells you that you're too innocent
and he can't do this again. And you're all of 7th grade scraped knees,

you're all of a panting dog, you're all of a girl trying to be a boy.
Before all this, before the pushing, the sermon,

the boy's mouth on your neck and the skittles, it was your friend,
who told you about her uncle's book. A woman naked on the cover

and you love those things you shouldn't know. So you listened.
On the cover was also a man. He had a knife.

One of the woman's breasts was on the floor. You thought about it all day.
During the sermon and especially when he held you

against the dumpster. When you became a body and forgot your face.
And what does it mean anyway when you're the one that wanted it?

You can't blame the boy. Instead, let the colors of the Skittles rub off
in your hand, because you hate them anyway, lie in the grass,

look to the sky, think of God. You realize when you die
you'll be just like him—. You want to find the boy

to see if he can look you in the eye, but your mom's here, you have to go home,
dust off your uniform and hang it in your closet for tomorrow.

TYING DOWN NAMES

It's a good enough intention,
a new year's resolution, to keep the body clean. But you need it.
Why you need it is abstract. You say it closes a space

in the heart or stops the nerves pushing that space to open.
And aren't we glamorous?
The way we choose not to remember our lives or stop all of them

that had a name that started with a letter,
because you can't make your mouth fit over each
of their names or stop his clothes

dirty in the laundry basket for weeks from being dirty,
or stop it from ending in the name of the place they're from.
But this isn't about any of them like you want it to be.

This is about keeping yourself straight. Stand straight.
You've made your steps now stand on them. Straight.
What you want is love plain and boring.

So now, you don't want to talk with anyone who knows you.
You do this until everyone who did know you,
including yourself forgets you. And aren't we glamorous?

The way we erase ourselves in other people
to find ourselves in our own body.
The trees are standing straight, your gold high-heels

are standing outside the door, while you're looking
for love under the red plaid squares of your skirt
until this isn't about love and the way most people are.

It's about where we are. The back of the church built on sand and dirt
still surrounded by sand and dirt. The basketball hoop
mounted on its adobe wall where you played all the boys

and won, where you talked to your sisters.
Not your real sisters, but the women who now
don't live near you, asking what you want in these men.

THINGS THAT STAY AT HOME

In this room, by the bed where grandmother died,
his hands were soil-soaked from a day's work.
By the gun she tucked under her pillow,

my uncle wiped his hands with a handkerchief,
the sweat the sun drew out of him was dry.
In this room, by the bed where grandmother died,

the sunset swept through the antique curtains,
across the blue windowsill, the wood floors,
across the pillow (and my hand) that hid her gun.

He took the things I made with popsicle sticks
and red yarn, and put them on her dresser,
in this room, by the bed where she died.

She kept his picture—her only son—tucked
under buttercup print cotton sheets
and her pillow that shaped itself to the gun.

The story he told me, with his soured breath,
about a son and his mother. And my hand slid
underneath her pillow to the gun that she kept
in this room, on this bed where she died.

HANNAH'S ROOM

This is not the time to sleep, it's not the corner
of Hannah's room where you can see her
pink and white striped shirt hanging from the closet
door, where you'd be alone. Where you'd be,

as Kant says, an end, not a means, and whole that way.
Instead you're drinking in the basement of a bar, Asylum,
the yellow pack of American Spirits are on the table,
one cigarette lit in your mouth, in Hannah's mouth.

You're aware of all your parts and how he treats them.
Hannah wants you to quit, but he does it for you
and you've prepared yourself for what he'll never give up,
the name printed on his back, his father already gone,

his body aging with cocaine, he takes you to a place
that was a boiler room, you're in the middle, at his side,
then under him and fighting him for it, fighting for the fear
of losing yourself in it, for what keeps you feeling

and you feel with him as if you're a body spread in different
areas of a city or country and left with what you aren't allowed
to give because the people you love don't want it,
can't take what makes them want to swallow the end

that make you one piece. Hannah wants you to stop
but before you're side by side in bed, she gets you water,
and lets you borrow underwear. He's at the door
and on the phone and won't stop calling.

FLIGHT ANIMAL

You flitter on the delicate line,
where the lake and sky meet.
Your wings become water filled,
your body, the shape of a cross
my mother wears around her neck,
heavy, carved stone.

My hands stretch,
afraid of even the smallest death
to pull, lift, and place you on a rock.
Your wet wings stick to the hot stone,
anchoring you. Better to

sink into water,
you are the feather, the slight breath of air,
the memory hanging in forgotten space,
my passageway into this world,
swaying in and out of currents,
in and out of in between.

FLUTTER

I want to dole out my sex like it's something
they really need. *They* meaning anyone. *Need*
meaning want. *Want* like water during summer.
But it's winter and too cold for butterflies.
There's rain and frost and that's why your wings
are frozen on the sidewalk. A dulled yellow and black.
Why did you do it Butterfly? Couldn't you have waited?

WHAT SHE REMEMBERS

14 years old, and she was working beneath
green and purple neon lights on the cusp
of downtown. The city held her— sidewalks
broke her fall. Friday nights he watched her

read. This week, *To Kill a Mockingbird*.
Her copy worn from hands that had passed
over it before hers. Pages missing— pages ripped.
Her teacher xeroxed replacements, but she preferred

the empty spaces. He didn't let her touch his hair,
he folded his pants and placed them down carefully,
she threw hers on the floor.

After trying for too long, they stopped,
laid down on the bed and talked until he had to go.

A deep channel of a scar ran across the center
of his palm; she saw it— his hand on the wheel,
as he drove her back to school. She put the book
in her backpack, and it settled among her other papers.

STACCATO

You never leave your voice
 on my answering machine,
it's always the sound of a guitar
 your fingers strumming
old strings, letting me know it's you.

We ran the whole way,
 underground
and about to get to New York only to spend
 4 hours in a chairless apartment,
on an air mattress,
 the humid air pressed against us like a wool blanket.

Outside the station at night they're singing
 oye cayuco
just loud enough that we can't hear
 each other, lying shoulder
to shoulder, so I grab your hand,
 to see if you will pull away. *Pull away—*

though it is never dark in the station, even at 4am,
 even on my birthday,
even though we ran the whole way together
 you couldn't find me
until I was on the bathroom floor, unmoving,
 and you realized

we were something born out of—
 nothing, I say, *leave me alone*, and you call me
Callida, and I call you Friend (by your full
 name) before I pull away, you grab me,
and in this dark room we become our lost things.

LETTER FROM BROOKLYN

I still have your book—The Russian—
I'm keeping it. I've thought,
for some time now, that we should just write letters
for next 10 years until we meet in Kyoto.
Lots of boundaries, no abnormal guilt—
not altogether unlike friendship. I've been listening
to the CD you left me. I find myself silently singing it.
It's a compendium of heartbreaking work—
best listened to with earphones while thinking of genocide
and other such stuff. The Aphex Twin song
(Alberto Balsam), in certain movements, articulates a hope
in a way that words can't. In the Dominican Republic
it felt like you followed me. *Paloma* (a different version) played
on the bus and your name was everywhere . . .
the name of a supermarket? I wanted to call
and I swum swum swum (almost to Cuba).
I'm becoming unhinged and just wanted to write, no drama,
no threat of violence, a quiet reformation,
the most meaningless revolution leaves me wanting
to end up on your stoop, that you might
let me in to sleep. I know you're paralyzed,
predisposed towards the existential
and fail to reconcile the differences.
But what makes you think everyone else isn't?
I'll be in Albuquerque when you're there,
briefly. Brooklyn's warm this summer,
I'm living with my brother & his roommate Greg.
I sleep on the green couch in the living
room. I'm gone most times with two jobs and friends.
I've cut my hair off. All off. Something akin
to "a bored housewife"—my brother's words.
I walk across the bridges, of course
the Brooklyn, but the Manhattan has something:
the industrial blue, the subway cars tearing
by me as I walk, the used, the un-swooned sister of bridges.
I'm going send you something before I leave.
I'm sorry I treat you poorly. Like in the poem you sent,
it's the "little by little" part.
I don't know when I'll write again. I still have my stuff
at your place. Here's my address, just in case:
230 14th St. Brooklyn, NY 11215.

PAUL & *THE LOST NUDES*

Like David Smith, yours are all shapes
and lines, no full figures
sitting on the couch to be sculpted,
just variations of bodies,
like under a bus at Port Authority,
the one you didn't recognize
as your friend walking out after
a night's work didn't look both ways.
You told me you didn't know
it was his body, until the day after
and even then you couldn't reconcile
the images, but it was on
the news and he no longer showed
for work and you realized
this is how people become things
that fit in coffins,
even though I still don't believe
the box held all of Tom or
that he was dressed when he was dressed,
it seemed like he was naked
and restless in there and you couldn't
get people to stop praying
long enough to tell them in the back
of the church in the last row.
I leave the church, not crying,
I'm tired of people crying
and how people crave human touch,
but no one puts their fingers
in my mouth— not even my father.
Not even Hannah curled
beside me home from England.
Not you, my brother,
your fingers in the mouths of other girls.

SISTERS WHO SEE EACH OTHER NAKED

Bathing or getting ready for school. Victoria's late again,
in her room putting on makeup listening to Debussy,

Maria's waiting in the car, pulling out of the driveway
and you're gone listening to a lecture

about lesbian literature and how hands are the most frequent
images. The hand of the woman, the mother,

blue veins peeking through older skin or barely formed hands
unbuttoning backs of dresses, and you think of the clay

under your mother's fingernails and Maria's unwillingness
to dress as a child, even for men, her hair wild and red in pictures,

her hands and mouth open wearing only white underpants.
Victoria now wears only underwear in the house even

when a brother visits, and you're clothed and covered,
placing your book bag in front of your waist,

the back of each shirt high covering certain scars that Lucien refuses
to care about or comments on seeing or feeling

with his fingers on your back. He comes through your window
on certain nights, your palm over his mouth,

he's what you could never do under your father. Maria and Victoria
dressed, in bed and refusing to mention.

AFTER

When your name covered this mouth
Salsa Sabrosa swayed through radio speakers
¡No se vayan! The radio announcer said
fumbling through what she would play next.
The fire began to flicker in the backyard.
Lua jumping everywhere.
Put her back on the leash, you told me,
but my Portuguese was bad, worse than
my broken Spanish. But I knew enough
never to want to hear your voice low,
talking to me the way you talked to your dog—
Stay— your first breath in and the word out
did not translate until the morning,
the sound of you leaving for work
and me all dressed up in sheets.

TIJUANA

Bienvenidos, but
this is not Mexico.
It is solid gold chains placed
against a magnet,
the bus that inches
across the border,
and those eyes that look at you
as if you could tie them to God.
But you are just a gulp of air
in a polluted city,
a broken stop sign, the hallway
that still smells of sex,
looking for the person
you lost in the mass,
the hand that slipped out of
yours and into a crowd—
the way girls stretch out an arm
to sell small plastic bracelets,
or gum. The way people
sometimes dance in the street;
her leg curling around his thigh,
and she leans back so far
almost asking him to let go—
to let her go and fall into
the traffic.

BORDER CROSSING, III

The last time, when the trees turned
the color of rust, was the last time
and I held a piece of your breath in my lungs—
never ashamed of where this mouth
has been, or what it has had to do, except
when you looked at me—
and they scattered, all the leaves, sweeping
our trail away like a language
I have abandoned, never
to relearn you.

I push myself into the closet,
against the clothes and look through the slats
and try to imagine what you wanted,
even though you didn't, your name
in the center of my mouth.

You are the scar
the needle left: the mark on my body
separate from things that are mine—
as in never mine, we, the small things
that came to nothing, but linger as the winter
comes close and cuts this air, leaving
me an early widow with fingerprints you left
on this skin in half-moon shapes.

Do you remember the funeral?

No, not yours, without a body
in the coffin, but that friend, lying
you said he was your brother.

Take these scissors, and I did
and I cut your hair—
your voice was never breath
against my ear. It was a spider web
shivering in a draft,
all its coordinates given away
in these dark mornings as the frost presses
into the windows and the sunrise
presses into thick clouds.

Like the first snowfall and the trees
still dressed in yellows and reds,
we were always ahead of ourselves
painted in the colors of this old woman's
bed, pieces of turquoise flecking off
the headboard, falling into her hair,
the pressure of his hands
still on my hips and you were always gone,

gone, son of an Apache,
coyote— These borders (gone)
will never be crossed.

ONE RED BALLOON

Every time she says, take care of yourself,
in her barely audible voice over the phone,
you can feel her erasing her parts
from your line of vision. Her fingers and palms
that press against the inseam of your pants,
and tug at your hair, her skin that wraps itself
neatly over you and still feels something
like a cold sheet. And the mouth that tears
you open to things you can't give. Every time
she says, take care of yourself, she has left you
with the outline of her shape and you're standing
like a boy who lost the balloon his mother tied
around his wrist. And when it breaks, red falls,
and the string touches the ground.

DISPLACED THINGS

Her body,
 a knife that opens him,
seems as common as a clothespins
 and he watches her

as he has the crows
 restless in flight,
their wings falling curtains
 against black bodies.
Their call a mock

 falling in heaps
as he walks across the room
 upsetting the dried body
of the butterfly held down

by a prick of a pin
 shaking under glass,
wings shuddering feign escape:
 she sees it as a figure

of her body turning on itself
 in small bruises.
3,000 miles from home—
 and he knows she collects

what cannot survive
 a New England winter
and migrates south to desert.
 The cactus on her windowsill's

the only plant in the house.
 It's hard to kill
even if she leave for months.
 It watches the room

from the shoulders of the soil,
 when she pretends to be sexless.
Her head backing into the pillow.
 He pushes her and by now

they both should be against wanting.
 Her body has been his
and his and his and
 everything she was paid for

or took on for fun. Every
body that traveled over her,
heavy and salty,
every shaking hand,

steadying itself— is her fault.
A place in silent recognitions

all planned and clean
like pants folded
over a hotel chair
for the meeting in 15 minutes.

A place ends with someone
on a plane, you have your snack
and when the flight attendant asks
tell her what you want

to drink. Just water. Water rolling
under wires tight holding
A BROOKLYN BRIDGE,
that's experiencing traffic,

so you can't get into a place unclothed
and beautiful under neon lights.
A stunning bridge,
even when you're hurried.

Not like another bridge,
it's more like the place
that fails to sing
you sweet and comforted.

The place that makes how many bodies
until they're the same?
And, yes, the you is the she
and now she wants

his beggar mouth to close.
They're her legs
around his hips. It's all still hers.
The cactus on the windowsill

and the crows outside
she falls for, black-winged
and mocking, never afraid
to tell her to shut-up,

even if they are in love with her.

He wants to be her brother.

She wants to be fucked and hates
kissing strange men.

She wants him but he's the brother's

body she's up against

breathing through all of it.

At all times

they're in love with her—

all the breathing crows.

And he's watching

all the crows love her.

In bed with him

she thinks of her mother,

the story about the angel

who stood by her bed

while her parents

were in Mexico.

The cross on her rosary

hung down around her neck

(her grandmother sleeping backwards
on the other single bed).

She took his hand,

the angel was a man,

his shirtsleeves smelled of tobacco.

He told her the story

of Russia and being 18.

In Russia he was rich.

He asked her

to write a poem

and send it to him

for Valentine's Day.

Will Alex be her angel?

Smoke Winston Lights

until he smells like the man

by her bed?

Alex doesn't know and she's cross
with the will of a human body—
what she doesn't want anymore,
the will to push herself

on and over things,
but all there is here is sand.
Sand cleaning sand,
on her way to a place

to see Alex who doesn't seem home.
The rocking chair rocks
empty. The kitchen door's open,
he's in the backyard,

lying on his back.
His dog's running
and still has a full set of teeth.
The dog notices her first,

all there is here's sand,
no waves pressing
on the lips of a shore
then receding,

the water's trapped
under earth,
horded by the heat under
the skin of the people
that live here. The sky

acts like an ocean
each cloud the sail
of a boat and while the sailors
were sailing

everywhere became
where they were from.
All this used to be under an ocean
and now it's a place

to watch Alex lying
on his back. The crows
in the sky are still
in love with her.

They're squawking
and don't mind the sun
even when they're wearing black—
she falls for them.

Alex touches the nape of her neck
brushes the sand in it.
There's sand on the border
when they reach A CHIHUAHUA DESERT.

On the bus the children speak
Spanish and are never quiet.
The girls unconscious
of their beauty.

The boys restless
want to be outside
following behind the crows
in the sun every day,

because it's never winter here
even when it's cold.
There're the crows and the children,
a man's bare hip

and an earth that reaches up
over and over again
until we're all swallowed
and whole.