

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: I REMEMBER THE RED
Courtney Ann Dillon, Master of Fine Arts, 2007

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These poems act as speculative meditations on violence, grief, and the difficulty of memory when recalling a traumatic event. Danger, in these poems, puts everything on a stage where feelings of loss are compounded with the difficulty of memory and where consciousness has the ability to know intuitively. The poems work as revisions or retelling of these narratives. They often occur within a room filled with objects and seem intent on exploring the relationship of physical space and the emotion of a speaker. These poems move associatively, accruing in meaning through dream logic.

I REMEMBER THE RED

by

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THIS IS LOVE I SAY TO MYSELF

I didn't want to watch them argue.

 Though her eyes long dead on the subject
of babies, my dream now ending, a dead wife.

I slept in the closet then—

 afraid to wed them with my eyes.

In the other room tools of all shapes:

a hammer, a wrench, nails, the knife,

 the we he devours. The woman whose crimes
remind him of the progress of music,

of heaving song into the distance, into cities,

 a woman with scarlet lips and enameled fingernails.

They teach me I will go hard with them

though the day bright red, though I am a child,

 though I am not a child, though there was space
in between the two events, the days repeating

themselves like the song within blood,

 even though song escapes the body. It escapes.

In the other room, violin plays like Tchaikovsky,

who said he *must preserve my freedom*

at the price of the girl's ruin. The woman's ruin, my ruin,
the same on different days of red,

this evening's space even if she couldn't

 tell the difference between man-woman,
husband-wife, girl-boy: the bodies beginning

all the same, breast-less, veins close to the surface
of a thin girl-child. The woman's eyes turned
toward the violins in the other room.

I didn't mean to watch his metal boot
at the base of her spine,
her pink blouse ripped, the string snapped,

a borrowed overcoat pressed
against my body, the spruces swaying
to the sound of the distant glitter.

This is love, he says handing me the knife,
You go first. This is love. I say to myself,
the ruin of bodies, the song of a dead baby,

the way we learn to hide in closets
when the police come.
I watch them fold the rug, her body swaying

to the red, she's mouthing
the words as if we could hear
the same ones vibrating the strings,

but there are no words, it is simply red
and hushed, spilling as the strings break.
I couldn't look down as

it enters my skin,
This is love. he says, I say
Nothing faster—

THERE IS SO MUCH I COULDN'T TELL YOU

That I reached for her and her leg fell into my hands,

I held the plastic leg in the mirror as she whispered
there was no time left; her body too small to touch.

There were trains in the story—a woman

in the shadow of a train, the dead body

of a wife—her thin lips turned in profile. He did
not want a reception. She had insisted that time
was running out, that day could turn to trembling

as they moved toward the gray smoke rattling the bed.

I couldn't tell you that she touched me,
her voice on the inner skin of my thigh,
black branches quivering outside the window.

I couldn't tell you about the bathroom door left open—

I could see the outline of her, knotted flame
building inside my chest. I attached her
leg to my leg, I unbuttoned her pink blouse.

I talked until the clouds turned ashy,

her mouth open, her words fell
on the red tile of a hotel room. All night ice
froze and turned the branches black and hard—

wind blew green bottles from the windowsill.

I couldn't tell you I touched her, her skin thin as paper,
Her hands running over the buttons of my shirt, her voice counting the hours
counting the minutes until I could tell you.

TO HER HANDS

Tell me her name—what it might have been,
 or how, in the ruin of bodies, the tongue—
 the whole mouth is lost. The persimmon trees deepen
 in shade less soil; the surface of my skin is one open vein,

the figure of my body in a red landscape—a week passed
 and I tasted the salt on her thigh, watched water move
 through her hands—her thighs around my neck.

 Tell me how her hands were a passage in soil

the river moving, a real river, with real brown things:
 a cracked preserving jar, muddy bones of a dog swelling
 a paper bag— blue seam of a trouser.
 Nothing is visible. But her hands moving over my mouth,

I see them, a passage in forgetting,
 like having no other voice to speak
 no river can remember. What they looked like:
 enameled for the ceremony of distance—nails kept short

breasts copper-brown, nipples that tasted like water:
 a little like that. Tell me how we both wanted her
 as a passage to forgetting after all of it,
 after the knife, and the wrists held together,

as if the severed music could have been consolable.
 Maybe I did want it more, like the taste of her on my tongue,
 I could feel in my teeth as the trees outside cracked—
 the promise of a clock, the promise of it stopped.

Time moves like that. Like the river splitting
a seam until it's just a piece of cloth, her fingers
a river gesture, moving in moving out of the room
with only one door and one piece of glass.

Outside, the trees tell us what we're not: able to renew ourselves,
built from a trace of seasons. Tell me after the ruin of bodies
the days are kept short like the promise of mouths
when breasts are pressed together, and you were able, finally,

to draw me the way you always wanted
two women touching among columns of light,
or maybe—there wasn't much light, only the promise of light
against the window, of clocks, of speaking.

OCTOBER

It was your hands touching the back of my neck,
me in cheap lace under things, a woman below our window
snuffing out cigarettes on the side street—

I can see the street still, a red-haired woman
in a pale Chanel suit, her name etched in buttons—

It was October—It was your name carved

into the peel of an orange, dead peels falling
in metal trashcans as we rose to the city we slipped through.

It was searching room after room

for you and finding even the paper roses dead.

It was black-and-white mornings, heavy newspapers
and watching the crows change the face of strangers.

It was me trying to tell you something, a woman on a side street
echoing in the heavy pipes. It was leaving the city

in a borrowed blue overcoat, your hands always

reaching for the lace beneath. It was bottles of gasoline
on the side street, you returning to a room

with a vase on the windowsill—a fretwork of color

in the letters I sent to reach you. It was letters
full of names trying to tell you something,

crows changing the names, me snuffing them out—

trying to take them apart for hours. It was me telling
you I am leaving, it was slipping past the city on a train

thumb marking the pages of my book, watching the crow slip past.

BLUE HYDRANGEA

So that each day she comes
 when you think of her, now—a correction in a newspaper,
 date of her birth mistaken, death unknown. She carried
 blue hydrangeas as a bride, while you stood watching

 the dress laid out a night before. And before that even,
 bone colored cloth cut on chalk lines, raw edged silk, a lace slip, a corset covered
 with buttons, and snow falling on black branches
 while inside she stood at the mirror combing her dark hair with a horsehair brush,

 arranging a chignon knot at the base of her neck. Closer,
 above her, the bare trees of winter, an old man brushing
 snowflakes off his plaid Burberry scarf as he would in January,
 moving his hand toward water. The snowflakes move as if they passed

 over water, becoming water itself, or as if they became
 white seabirds, carried within the woman's chest.
 A day when she comes a dark branch leans
 toward frozen mud—icy stillness—

 while hungry pigeons sputter along the crack in sidewalk. Back then,
 you had a bed covered with ugly floral sheets as you ran
 water in a porcelain bath: you washed the back of her knees,
 her palms. You whispered, as Freud did, *a love which cost nothing*,

 though it ends up costing too much, meaning a gift of someone
 is taken, assigned to another, a space in a closet cleared,
 how your hands easily thought of her,
dream-thought which required to be kept secret as you kiss

the back of her knees, and imagine dusty apricots in the wooden cart across the street.

They were, in fact, imagined, because all will move toward water,
all will move toward her name written on the stone countertop
in your blood. So that each day she comes you imagine

being saved by her as she holds Rivera pears in a basket lined
with gingham cloth, covering the mirror
with her reflection, a surface reflecting seabirds,
a surface you once loved.

IN RESPONSE TO YOUR LETTER FROM A TRAIN

The passing maples, a speckled blur.

I hear your burnt voice scattering the crows
from their branches. I see your blue sweatshirt on the back of a chair,
your hands disappearing in the blonde smoke of the train.

The train slices through the field, blurring smoking haystacks,
patterns a machine cut, now heavy as sodden newspaper.
I know the mention of trains will remind you
of our first house—the one that stood so close

to the tracks we could feel the aftershock
everyday for a year—I can't of course come back.
I see your voice in the baled wheat scattering everywhere,
blending the tension light gives. The passing blues

leave an empty space in the throat.
I can't do anything but listen.
I can even see your reflection in the red eyes of the stranger
the gold buttons on the man's blazer

as he holds the thin wrist of a young girl.
I watch my breath fog the window—you trace a pattern
with your fingers. I see a shape: a crow scattering,
something that will be gone by morning.

CALLA LILY

The first rough push they didn't think could ever happen.

He climbed the woman's maple staircase,
searching for an opening in the room.

To leave, to leave, a narrow passageway,

a whole town spins under a page of rain. It becomes, then,
of her after all, *this is love*, red smeared on mouths,

across bodies, woman's Star of David necklace

on the nightstand. Her fist, clutched against her chest.

It was a strange conversation after all, one calla lily in a mosaic vase,

one pelvis, one femur, one tibia, one hipbone all leading

to the wetness of her hands fashioning paper flowers, fingertips wrapping
tissue around a straightened hanger. He wipes the sweat from her brow

circling his fingers under her eye. Later, he draws the shape of a bird

on her stomach in lavender oil, always wanting to push

beyond the room, one idea as part of the whole.

She remembers once asking to see

a pave brooch behind a window of an antique shop.

The old man asks if he can help, her querulous voice

unsure of language, her mouth suddenly dry,

(voice of Christ), how the figure came so close to her, slow, fast,

the nook of his shoulder, face reflected in the glass

behind the counter, holding the water's edge:

you will be safe here. Safe though every stone on the street uncertain,

disquieting, pulse rapid and shallow, motion of her body

under water, evening light too common, as if not yet
 aware of distance, stasis. It becomes her wrists held
 down on the bed, deep purple bruise in the shape of an orange.

All appears suddenly as the silence of deeper places.

As a child, the day she hid in the closet when the police came:
you will be safe here, the faces of stuffed animals

who spoke to her, their faces smaller than mice,
 faces she will later see in knuckles and shoulder blades.
 The policeman asks her to choose then, a tattoo on his left arm writing

tickets as neighbors stood on their lawns. Their eyes,
 all of their eyes, their nervous eyes, she sees sometimes
 when it is too quiet. Her eyes gleam when the faces

of the astrological clock come out, St. Peter, St. Judas—
 what the body can endure. Astonishment of certain curved bones,
 fingers brushed across a spine, thin blue dress covering

collarbone, unbuttoning of blue buttons. What hastens then goes slower now.

All places held in her hipbones, pale pink walls of her childhood room,
 Star of David necklace, a biblical name.

I KEPT SAYING NO

There was a woman who could not speak.

She wore a white shawl and sold *pulpulas*

on the corner. It was before the morning papers

were thrown from the back of the truck. It was before

the broken muffler vibrated through the alley.

The sign from the alley said *Do Not Enter*, but no one listened.

The silent woman carries a voice. Is it the voice of the knife blade?

Does it say I will cut you, relieve you of your hot blue ink,

your callused right hand? Outside it is still dark and the trees

tell us what we are not. It is his voice I carry with me.

It is more than his voice, it is fire racing under the skin.

He uses broken keys to enter my apartment.

He says, *Women are silent* from the corner. I think of the woman

who can't speak. There are shadows that are really his body,

his black sweatshirt, and a glass vase on the windowsill. Enter the fire.

Carry from the hill the man with the black baseball cap.

Think of the woman selling on the corner. *Words are stories*,

she says with her eyes. Words are knife blades that cut

and a man in a black baseball cap hovering in a corner apartment.

Words make the silent woman unclasp her hands. They make a vase fall

to the floor. They make a man stand over me and say, *You are silent*.

They rasp from the trees filled with tender knives.

BLUE ROOM

1. The orange desert dusk is the blue lake
I see outside the window; I paint a picture on it.

Frida Kahlo's *Roots*:

a tree growing through her body,
her wavy hair down, not knotted
with chrysanthemums as usual—

I don't know her yet. So I paint another woman,
not my mother. In the desert, the cicadas sing toward vanishing—
Vanish, Bring Rain, Vanish.

No trees. The mossy colored saguaro
thorns grow toward the sun.
Later, Sam and I watch a leather-skinned newscaster

predict more—Tomorrow, 104 degrees,
almost October and the air feels so thick in our mouths
that our tongue turns words salty.

My mother is at the stove over a low pink flame.
I am young but can see what softens.
Something about her body moves sadly

though I don't know what yet. I'm not even sure she does.
After showing twelve homes, you'd think they'd like one,
She mutters under her breath.

She's facing me now—Something between us like static
on a bad phone connection. She looks out the window toward the sun
as if she sees my lake, my trees, my Frida.

2. *A good day to paint in the garden.*

Los Fridas, her students, arrive early at eight.

The caramel sun falls softly

on their voices, their shadows.

Inside her cobalt room:

thin paper cutouts prepared for *Dia De Los Muertos*

It's the end of October and next to her bed

a vase painted the color of sunlight through amber.

It holds all her favorite things: her scissors,

a letter opener, sharp edges, *el dolor*.

Her students set up their thick oil paints

next to the Saguaro and Palo Verde trees.

Some days she teaches naked,

her black nipples exposed to damp wind—

Today, her dark hair knotted tightly like branches

she wears a ring on every finger.

She walks slowly toward her students,

limping only a little.

A woman paints a green saguaro in the corner.

Look at the color, not just the green,

Look at it's eyes, its thin ribcage,

in the shadow its skin is periwinkle,

even an ashy blue. The woman smiles nervously,

dips her brush, thinks of the dark thorns like nipples.

3. A newspaper unfolded on the kitchen table.

A cracked vase on the windowsill.

Frida calls me from the lake,

I look up but no one else hears her.

In some lost corner of the house

Samantha looks out the window for rain.

The clouds pile like laundry

on the sofa but still nothing, no rain

even though we've tasted it for days.

Sitting at the kitchen table, my father loosens his striped tie,

The post-it note from a woman in his pocket.

He's opening a bottle of scotch

silenced by the flesh's desire to feel nothing.

With safety scissors, I'm cutting paper snowflakes at the table.

Later, as my mother empties his pockets on the nightstand

a post-it note falls to the floor. A woman named Susan.

At the mirror my mother brushes her hair,

I picture her cutting it like Frida does when Diego

fucks her sister Christina in their house.

Frida's hair is gone; she wears a man's clothes for a month.

My mother closes her eyes and lets the dark hands hold her.

4. Frida's holding the woman now, stroking her hands,

the inner skin of her thighs. The woman closes her eyes:

Frida, Frida, Frida repeats in her head.

Frida's hands know how to touch a woman,
 they know how to fold and unfold her like paper
 they know how to paint a woman on a canvas

so beautifully that she never leaves a room,
 they know how her breasts bloom when touched,
 they know an iron rod through her spine—

Next to the sharp vase, a red chrysanthemum
 grows toward the sun.

Now, Frida's roots grow through the woman

and her thoughts become tangled dark branches.

The woman imagines them both naked in the garden,
 wind blows and the paper cutouts flutter like wings.

5. A snowflake cutout tacked to the refrigerator,
 in November the wind is a little damper—
 My mother is at least relieved by this.

She's been in bed for a week, so I cut an extra snowflake for her.
She's sad, Sam says, though it's something more,
 her eyes speak anger in hard glares.

Somebody says, *Rehabilitation*, for him
 I do not understand this. *He'll be better*
 Frida tells me from the lake but I can see

her dark roots begin to brown
 as the lake disappears. It is a mirage anyway,
 I tell myself, though I want the roots to grow through

me now. Sam counts the strange cloud animals
in November—too many to name. For dinner my mother
stirs instant macaroni and cheese, her hands shake

as orange powder spills onto the floor.
I lean down to scoop it up—The snowflake
cutout is tacked with orange fingerprints.

6. After Frida's bed, the woman's body
is drunk on Frida. Her eyes
she can't see straight for a week.

First day of November in the market:
everything wants to be touched.
The woman looks for something her dead would enjoy:

cigarettes, a little Tequila, some *dulces*.
The woman turns a corner in the market, a man's hands
flatten and toss tortillas as she buys tequila for her dead.

7. At the Rehabilitation Center, my mousy brown hair
is so short that the other families can't tell if I'm a girl or boy,
the silver hoops are supposed to give it away.

Frida would hate this place, I know it, she'd tell
the other families *el dolor* was part of the deal.
I try to paint a picture on a rock

outside but she's too far away. *Paint something blue*.
My mother's mind, thick with grief, moves around the room
finally settling on my Father's eyes. Here, his eyes

say more than I have ever seen them say—Sam stares
out the window at the clouds. His tears like blue paint
drip and stain everything: armchair, hospital carpeting, the walls of the room.

Now the room falls an unrelenting blue, buckets of blue paint
splash on the floor, paint seeps in, coats everything touched,
the sky outside inky and darkening, the clouds running together

with the dust churning in little clouds, all the dust
has no memory, all the forgetfulness taken later
to the house with the lake. Frida tells me *Do not remember*

but I know this can't be, this is not her. Instead, she says *Remember*
Do not forget this day, but here no one
can be trusted, nothing else except blue seeps

into the obscure corners of the room,
everyone cries. Words touch and taste like salt
on our tongues. Sam watches dust churn outside the window,

8. Frida lies in bed and paints herself in her blue room,
the end of November now and rain falls sideways outside the house.
The woman thinks of Frida's bed often, how she will

never have enough of Frida, she will dream
of Frida's hair falling over dark nipples,
find herself returning and returning to the blue room

covered with paper cutouts and return
her eyes to the sharp vase, the red chrysanthemum,
the dim motion of their bodies.

The woman must draw back from these moments, these motions.

Frida says her *dolor* is too great now,
everything hurts, and soon her leg will be gone.

Even through this, Frida doesn't cry while her roots brown
while the sun dims, while the garden grows less luminous.
She doesn't cry even though her leg will soon be gone.

Even through this, Frida paints herself beyond the blue of the room,
as I do now, I travel beyond the tears, I travel beyond the blue room,
beyond the silent voice of my father's crying.

LOOK AT THE WOMAN

My mother can't stand
 I'm alone again. My father doesn't see that
 men look like horses in daylight that flickers like Luna-moths.

Through the echo of vowels, I ring the thin stemware,
 listen to the man in the blue sweatshirt ring a bell from the rooftop,
 touch a vase full of paper yellow roses—

Yesterday, I saw her chop berries with a red axe—
 She wore Italian shoes and let red drip
 from her swollen fingers leaving only dark stubble like men's faces—

Outside, I hear the echo of trains, there are suitcases full
 of tweed coats and blue shoes, there are dark hats on hooks
 and a woman disappearing between sips—

She rings the stemware with her fingers,
 She sees herself on a street littered with post-it notes
 and pieces of a mirror—gray sky reflected there.

She hears the bells ring in every corner
 of the street, berries falling from glass trees,
 suitcases full of berries adding

rule to rule reflected in the vowels of strangers—
 She hears the red of the bells,
 I see her mother telling her she's alone again.

I see the bells in every corner and white-toothed
 strangers disappearing in her empty glass.
 The bells look like berries, they are red and drip

and stain pieces of the mirror, they are nerves
bursting like trees, they kill paper yellow roses.
They are here, the gray sky reflected in them—

She sees the stubble of bushes,
a street littered with broken suitcases and post-it notes,
and the bells tell her: you must come here, you are not too late.

WE ARE THE BODY

We are the mouth, the body,
 the children we knew once
 real as hands touching lilies
 with the intricacies of the garden.
 As a child her memory
 which wasn't born yet, though some

came early: light on the
 suitcase as he kneels
 over her face, she wears pink lace, he closes
 his eyes, she sees sand brushed
 across sidewalks, tiny hands
 the sound of a hammer from the corner of Nerudova,

her fingers running over the grains of oak,
 who watched her.
 She sees his hands underwater,
 how she loves him,
 how the image must cohere with the feeling.

It is a love poem after all
 as if the coat buttoned returns

to the body in cold, in Prague,
 in November he came
 without her, he travels with Elijah.
 Someone steals his coat.
 It was so cold the white birds left,
 he must get angry. The need for words,

how she takes him
 in her mouth, white matins,
 the camera lens clicks
 as he walks with her through the castle.
 This place, the river Vltava,
 Kafka obviously, don't put the Vltava in here.

Though you can see the faces:
 the sun's hot from the bridge,
 he tries to take pictures of all of them:
 four men drunk at five, a wooden flute, didgeridoo,
 a gypsy woman's hands on smooth guitar string,

She wants to be her a little,
 wandering with all places, coins gleaming
 of distance in her guitar case, cheap metal earrings on
 wooden stands in lapis light,
 pictures to keep him from forgetting,

though he doesn't say this exactly:
 he says to remember the story
 of the bridge, to remember
 the man drawing long faces
 on white paper, *to remember her*,
 she thinks though doesn't say this.

Still at seven heavy light
 on the river at dusk, before dusk
 becomes contradiction of home
 returned to her first room,
 a white curtain on the balcony, its comfort
 words with a biblical sound.

She is after all the child she knew once,
 he too, a child when the body hushed
returns to a place. The places she carries inside, latticework,
 eyes she will always remember, clay colored paint
that fell in patches from her childhood room.

How the man with glasses looks laid out before her,
 beautiful, she thinks, but always the choice to conceal,
the desire for him to love her, the wish for eyes
 he can't leave, all the things
she would like to say to him, though fear,
 as if one hand missed another,

the conversation at dusk on the bridge, without form,
 better to find form then, to write of him taking pictures
at dusk, white birds circling, no time to remember,
 not the thing, not the place, not knowing
to turn left on the cobblestone street,
 or go the other way.

MAGNOLIA

The eye does not see things: a vein of water,
 your hand holding her star of David necklace
 still in the velvet box, sudden flow
 of blood on the tile floor—three months,

not quite a child. If not a child,
 not able to enter a room with a magnolia darkened
 by clouds speeding above,
 and where I stood looking

at the smallness of it—not boy or girl.
 Unable to recognize herself
 as apart from any other,
 or to carry the white flowers

in the dark vase in the dark vase
 next to her window
 in the space between her chest.

The eye does not see now,
 the names which define ourselves,

or the boy sitting next to me
 on the bus holding a plastic train
 he tells me is named Thomas—
 Thomas, a good name, I think.

As the bus shoves up the street,
 I see a magnolia garden reflected against sky,
 corrosion of rust on an abandoned
 blue bicycle, speeding clouds.

The change in season I regard not in words
but the way words correspond: the image emotion.

Now, the eye doesn't feel
things it once felt: her hands,

I imagined inside me, roots deep
within soil, rising, moving to the sound of stars only,
my child, a fretwork cast by fingers, mouths.

Then, I remember filling page after page

of what I'd thought I'd seen, in preparation:

sound of a blue bicycle with a tin
bell, piles of speckled leaves rotting, maroon gloves with a hole
in the finger you wore anyway.

Things darken as we move.

On the bus, the small boy leans against
his mother holding a paper bag stained with grease.

He moves the train back and forth

on his leg, humming a song that seems familiar,

passing a street littered with yellowed newspaper,
a contorted metal can. Outside, a small girl returning
home from school carrying a pink unicorn backpack.

Some days there is fire, and I walk right into it,
so close to me the magnolia petals singe. Terminal in the season
moving, white hot, surrounding me as clouds speed away,
dancing to the sound of burning paper.

NECESSARY TRANSLATIONS

It was the sound of a woman and lilacs, or the sound of a woman not speaking.

Others watched from behind the casement.

Lilacs looked like stone on a tongue, a gold brocade coat, and a corset covered with buttons.

There was a name written on the countertop in a woman's blood.

No one could decipher the name, or if they could they said it resembled a painted

carousel with horses whose eyes had looked out to a street covered in lilacs.

Spotted palomino horses ran and forgot the form of to be.

If there were horses, they were imagined, as all imagine clouds carried in a moth's wing.

A desire, as Freud said, for a *love which costs nothing*.

Though it cost too much and she could not see the space in between silence.

A space can be filled up with red mouths, slender arms between bodies.

A space can be filled with a combination of any of the above stated objects, including a vase
of lilacs.

A brown river closed off from the road seemed to weep this morning.

Lilacs did not grow wildly beside the side of the road as she stood looking for a sign.

The word lilac loosely translates to siren in Russian.

A palm extended forward is the object.

A palm extended forward can translate to blessing while around one could see an orchard of
polished glass.

Someone left the mark of a tiny hand on a piece of glass.

That winter, we stood quiet on the snow bank and watched the shapes of clouds.

Overhead, the trace of a bird wings and the reflection of lilacs in a mirror.

It was the sound of carousal with painted horse whose eyes could not see the children riding.

Others watched as Bermuda grass itched their ankles looking for a sign.

Signs can only be seen overhead now, *he said*, or else you should not believe others exist.

Deep in the sky you can see a sign as stars burn the shape of cicadas' wings behind your eyes.

BOX CONSTRUCTIONS

1.

Then you are left feeling to care for the emptiness of space: whitewashed façade of a house, a ceramic tile roof, pale winter sun overhead, window, aperture, columns, room—to care for that which extends beyond the past, or contains the past, as Cornell believed, to regard an antique box as a world, a room, a place to contain and release the spirit, to release the doves in a cote, to regard the smallness of this action as a world in itself, *Toward the Blue Peninsula*. He called these actions a release from loneliness and kept it as a collection of soap bubble pipes, swan feathers, wine corks, envelopes, ticket stubs of ballet, a broken egg, vinyl records, travel brochures, deadwood, broken sand dollars, clock springs, a *suggestive* (the caption reads) presence of sand.

2.

To keep alive the memory of the child: a parrot on a perch for Juan Gris—later deserted, surrounded by a crystal cage—a girl skipping rope toward the water's edge for Emily Dickinson—a collage with ink on masonite—and Swan Lake: *blue glass and painted glass* the caption states, or to contain the *otherworldly color*. A color, he believed that contained the beginning, or the room where you began, the pink unicorn backpack you carried to school containing your lunch box and the note from your mother on a paper napkin, an eye she drew of a face not her own, or a window in your room looking out to a landscape with one saguaro cactus, a pencil line of tiny quails.

3.

To collect feathers to retain that memory, to cover the room with a *splintering maze of glittering crystal* (caption), tiny glass turtle eggs hatching then moving toward water—an orchard of polished glass—while a man calls back to himself over the sound, a blueness, *le bleu Celeste pale*, a voice moving over skeins of black water, containing a (suggestive) wind, a sailor holding Rose de-Vents to call him back toward the direction of home, a place surrounded by water, to call him back to a bullet hole spreading veins of glass on a box, to the shooting galleries of a penny arcade, there, a box containing all these thoughts, scarlet thread of a woman's dress, then past.

4.

A woman's body now runs toward the voice freed from water, an enclosure meant to contain the surfaces of the world: rain, sand—or a woman's heels kicking up sand, the autobiographical nature of this action, children skipping rope next to the water's edge, *architectural arrangements that reinforce absence* (caption), rain you remember that a home contained, or rain inside the girl's body, *secret of camera obscura*, as she returns home from school—a saguaro cactus near the line of quails—a lilac pressed in a book—a world through another window.

5.

To collect sand dollars & recall the place you were born, the weight of a seagull's wings resting on your shoulder—a dream you had as a girl—imagining the bird's eye scanning black skeins of water, where Conrad saw into the ocean—*A Keepsake for John Donne, (I am a little world made cunningly)*, 1938 Box construction with blue glass 1 1/2 x 5 3/4 x 3 inches, or his lobster ballet, antique book with collage, paper inserts, cutouts, ink, and pencil, a bird song, a surface containing the first mirror a window façade—the idea of glass—before glass, or a pressed lilac under glass, and later his hands connected to a body assembling shapes in a world without the self, or containing the self, a sailor with a faded anchor tattoo (blue ink) on his left arm.

6.

Then even all this fades, if contained for awhile. The sand dollar fallen to the ground leaves tiny doves as the girl collects the opulent shells, the color of a shiny tin box, from the beach, once finding a conch, throwing it back toward the water, washed, waiting with her father—for the tide to come in, watching the white fish in a tide pool. If childhood could be contained in a box, it would be for Cornell a penny arcade, bottle corks, sunset on his New England house in winter, a ballerina's jewel box, swan feathers, a yellow sand fountain, skull bones of a lizard; but for you, if containment were possible, how he blew henna blossoms from your palm as a blue macaw called you back through the trees, repetition of children's legs running through an olive grove, then he chased you and pressed you up against black bark & tasted your palms.

7.

If not this memory, then your mother's voice always querulous as she stands over the sink rinsing dishes, her red silk dress tied for the holidays, your collection of silver dollars arranged neatly on a pink chipped shelf in your room, (motifs shape spatial arrangement), your room where (cabinet of natural history) you collected granite, lava rocks from the canyon, a spearhead. You saved, that year, a clear glass piggy bank filled with pennies, that he said, meant good luck (blessing) filling your space, blowing a flower from your palm, *sounds passing through a sudden rightness* (Stevens), repeat, repeat, a rightness through which you can not descend, even if you try.

8.

To remember a *Nesting Bird* (Untitled by Cornell) and watch the sun lolling against the birches, as he did, or a *The Casement Window: Vermeer's Secret, 1969, Collage with pencil on paperboard, 9 x 7 inches*, tint of a pear on the sill, and the sound of distant thunder. A blackness you woke to on those nights impenetrable as billows of ash rose up and dusted the birch trees. Your skin bone pale against the shore, and a distance of clear water, yellow leaves. You remember dark glass and window lights turned back as you sat holding a photograph. *To memorize precisely*, he once told you, so look closer: the shape of her hands, *The Uncertainty Principle*, her mouth agape. Could it be that we've said too much? Or another: *A Doll Habitat* the caption states though he left this untitled: paper folder, brown bags and envelopes mounted and loose photomechanical reproductions, photographs, postcards, and notes, gift of John A. Benton. Could it be instead Emily as a child playing with dolls—a place for her sorrow—or roads peopled with dancers in swan costumes? There is no way now to tell.

NERUDOVA STREET, MALA STRANA

What was concealed seemed more like not being there:

 sound of a hammer on Nerudova, pale lace curtain
of a dimly lit hotel room, man whistling Mozart on the corner,

and the night before our smallest fingers brushed behind the balcony

 of a dark opera house, blood in our thighs
humming about. Outside flocks of seagulls returning—

a distant tree shook & curved like a sail while wind blew

 dust across a cobblestone. It was the sound of sand brushing
across paper—daylight along your shoulder graying gold.

Now I'm leaving, come with me, you say. The surface will assume

 a different shape. What shape, then? We too swept out, alone
by the wind of filaments breaking, threadbare.

My head now against your shoulder, I continue to repeat

 the scene: how I dreamt of your hands
underwater as if they alone were drowning, light gleaming

on suitcase, clouds above the street blue-white:

 dark glasses on the nightstand—white matins—
all the places we carry within. You locate the world

through another window. The window there burning light

 on the wall of our room, Untitled Passages, opening
to a man with glasses laid out before me. We spoke barely

in the dark wildness of that day, my mind silent to the source

 your fingers drawing the shape of a bird on my skin as though
you had asked for the woman's body, the woman's name.

ARRANGEMENT

The final pull of bodies: our hands clustered
 under dark branches, the talk
 of what was behind the door,

the ceremony finished, caught in an image,
 hands held together against yellowed paper
 words falling toward a window,

his hands holding the body of one
 who *won't come back*, you said,
 a body caught in the song. A sheet of music

on the chestnut table. The ceremony done:
 your tightened knuckles drop
 the vase full of white flowers,

a feeling so formal of being beyond,
 music exhaustible, continuous breath,
 live forms of beauty, a kind of whiteness.

Elsewhere things I could still touch:
 the thin arm of a dark lamp,
 invisible cats, shards of a clay bowl,

a damaged instrument held against the slanting light,
 a woman able to sadden the red landscape.
 Palms held together; fists etched on

her collar bone, an image frozen on skin—
 everything occurs in finished arrangement.
 What body can remember finally: notes rising

up the woman's palm, the woman opening a window—

her hands picking white roses

in a public park—his body always there,

always gone in all of it, his hands,

his breath continuous—

he stays away longer. There is the weight

of bones, the cost becomes counterpoint,

his weight in time, his hands buttoning an overcoat,

straightening the narrow collar. The lament sounds—underneath

the body of one left, one, two figures surrounded

by the room and all things in it, her hair tangled

in his fingers, matted in the sweat of his chest, *this is love.*

Love of the room with white flowers,

the way he knew to touch her,

a room from which you could see

the clouds: bone white, a deck of playing cards

and his missing button on the chestnut table.

A trace now remains at a certain angle,

in certain gestures she can see his blue overcoat,

stones on the tongue, the piece of glass he left her,

a figure of his body stilled under fading light,

his hands crossing the sky. There are bones,

the stain of blood, of skin in the day itself—arterial going forth

in the early morning, a passage of invisibilities,

worth remembering, forgetting. The room finally empty,

a window and a vase remains—the figure of a woman holding a white flower,
and from behind her eyes: *whiteness, whiteness.*

I REMEMBER THE RED

It was the color of my mother's hair.
Of Samantha's silenced coat on the hanger,
even my father's shouting, the crooked curtains
vibrating grainy guitar strings.

Of mother running into my room,
finding me in the closet. I had sailed inside myself
written my first poem.

In the closet, my animals spoke to me—

their faces smaller than mice,
faces I will later see in knuckles and shoulder blades.
Eyes closed, bewilderment stuck to my fingers.
In dreams that night, I painted myself on a wall

with four breasts and one arm. No breasts then.

I never told anyone.

Eyes closed, I went to the park
but had vague fear of meeting myself there—

too many ghosts hidden in the bushes.

Outside: blinding sirens, then police
and neighbors on their lawns.

But, I cannot think of the man's face.

What was the man's face? Was there a woman?

Yes, a woman. Small hands, a tattoo on the man's left arm.

My mother has left, my father eyes say what we can't:
we did not mean for this to happen.

PERSIMMON TREES

Always the body full of distance:
to learn and unlearn, you say, as I pretend

to pin the white flower on your lapel,
 But it is still not yours,

your skin a note of gestures,
 your mouth lost when speaking,

your tongue searching for words
 as eddies of dust rise around the syllable spoken.

The body full of one dissolved into another.
 The way we can unlearn bodies, the way

we can decide at last, it is unpainted,
 untouchable I became to you finally,

some figure, distant like the edge of red bloom,
 the edge of something not quite visible.

I admit I liked certain things:
 sheets of Brahms on the table,

always the persimmon trees, the painted red fan
 of a woman covering her face in summer, the perambulator

of the child in blue, blessed coins from the Vatican.
Benediction, you said, as he blessed them

touching my forehead. I can remember
 the way your hands rub together when you sleep—

chestnut colored—how they looked opening
 the door to the room with a vase full of white flowers,

or opening a letter—letting words fall
 from the yellowed paper, or breaking my glance

with the stain of blood itself. I couldn't look,
 but could see your palms in the reflection

of the window, your tongue a stone then. Finally,
 there are no words to speak, when one body is another,

my eyes fixed on the ceiling—the triangles of light.
 Outside there were persimmon trees: white flowers

beginning to fail, the color yellow as I began to cry,
daylight dropping finally as I crossed legs and gripped my knees,

dreamt of music, *there must be something*.
I couldn't tell if the body is mine or yours, a flower

pressed against the fold of your palm, too much sunlight
streaming through the window, always the persimmon trees,

notes of music on the table, the notes rising
the woman's palm, calling to her, saying *sleep, sleep* a little more.

Too late for sleep then, instead the name she could call him,
the body she knew she would never touch again.

Through sunlight, through the red landscape,
his body left there, the decision finally made, finally the words spoken,

breath held against everything she could not touch, or just after.
Here, hands become the gift you are left with,

how his touching her breasts changed from the beginning to the end—
two shades of blue against the window.

RED DAHLIA

With an ear pressed to the wood floor,
 you could hear a door slamming. Outside in a cloudy afternoon
 a man selling objects in a kiosk: antique gold locket, a thick chain
 meant to hang long around a woman's thin neck,

empty of a picture, gold fish swimming in a blue tinted
 glass bowl, postcard of a river absorbing clouds, light refracting,
 and on the cement bench nearby in the park the sky occupant, growing then
 refracting in the season when all absorbs the coldness:

the air, breath, hour when you lean out into the city and touch
 purple veins in a yellow leaf falling. You felt, then, the deep uneasiness
 of being called mother, you could sense her wanting to cry but refusing,
 instead arranging dahlia's in the mosaic vase beside the window.

Later in the musty church, you remember the lace dress
 you borrowed for the day, bone colored shoes from across the room.

But today for him you could forget the blood, and return to the memory of your knees
 bruising blue-black during the voice of Isaiah:

*When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee;
 and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest
 through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.*
 as you knelt on cold wood to receive the offering.

Even then, you could feel a white bird in your chest as the man
 stood above you in a black robe facing the gold leaf alter, the urn moving hand,
 then hand, and in the middle of the crowd a dancing child, you imagined,
 holding a red dahlia. And through this crowd in front of you a painting

of the mother in blue, and a man crying for what you can't imagine.

You didn't know anything you will feel later,
yet you remember a coldness familiar, you closed your eyes to song buried
under wood to escape the shiver.

And the day the police came, how all memory can be defined
by an initial moment. As today, when a song
carries through the season, and in it
a rope ladder on the tree outside, reflection of a bird's wing in a mirror.

HANDS UNDER WATER

I am here, you are there.

-H.D.

The day white birds are kept silent, persimmon trees quaking
 outside the window and the room empty, the space always the same,
 moving through the house with a mirror. A bed reflected,

a packet of foreign cigarettes on the chestnut table,
 a missing gray button, how someone stood at its edge touching
 the woman naked, her skin *he will remember*, he said,

how the house was close to the tracks, for years, shook
 the base of everything. Now, she can see the reflection of him
 in a man on the street, his coat collar turned up, white bloom

in the man's buttons. She sees him from behind
 the landscape: the day raining though cloudless grayness in the woman's
 breath, the feeling made gentler in the objects she remembers:

her fingers tracing the seam of cloth, hands she can barely make out
 from behind the lace. *I am here, you are there.*

What finally can be remembered: the clay bowl he once made her,

the kiln light blue blazing, how they stood waiting, and then,
 horse hair brushes dipped in watery paint. Later, he stood
 over their bed, she hears the splashing of water, the shiver of bodies,

hands running over the mouth, *fire-blue* flame, the tongue not lost then.

 All she can tell him is through objects living,
 the tongue will become white blossoms furled, his footprints

near the trees, his hands she remembers from behind,
the sound of river rushing through the walls,
his breath on her breasts, the room reaching toward the horizon, vastness,

a bowl of water scented with lilies, damp cloth touching skin:
then after, after. Now, the sounds she is left with,
water running over fingers when she stands over her sink,

water when she hears too much quiet, flesh rushing to become another.

He stood so close to her then she did not feel alone, *I remember you.*
I remember the edge of your skin, the blue veins, flame on the tongue.

Finally, his hands on her skin, how they will always
be there, his hands under water, empty in the way she sees
falling into water, everything she could imagine.

She is too far out now, too far to come back, water filling the lungs,
around her eyes shades of blue, his hands holding her now,
the single voice in her, water or just after water.