I.

It rains somewhere, every day
but mostly here. So I’m leaving
(I mean it this time)
for a brassy gaggle of islands, strung along
like fat, white pearls
across the ocean’s rising
falling chest.

Still, there’s something
pleasing about wet concrete
with its chalky palms against my heels
and maybe I could stand to stay—

if only to watch the wet streets
from the windows over an enamel counter
in a shop where someone passed me coffee, saying
you’re welcome to have some.

Someone spoke poetry, taught me things:
How to turn a pen on one finger, how
to let a silence bloom.
II.

Justification: A really great excuse.

So instead we’ll say: planets aligned like kernels of corn, or tonight—the binary whisper of the stars hammers out a blueprint, snapping neutrons into orderly ranks like bullets; atoms and Eve align and all the necessary items appear: Paper cup, lens cap, lost keys.

III.

The window becomes a cookie press for the morning, leaf-marbled and floured white in the bedsheets where you dream and where I lie.

If you asked me what love was, I would have said, Love

*is a furnace where we burn the day’s unfelt smiles and mostly-cloudies, rotten leftovers and picked scabs.*

With your hand on my knee you down a glass of milk in three consecutive gulps and state at me, smiling, as an obsidian silence cools between us.
IV.

The daisies are sullen and threadbare
in their pot by the door
but the window is too drafty, not worth
its useless hour of sun.

I turn a lamp on the pot
and wait.

If no greener,
at least the leaves are warmer and
I wonder—

Turning on every lamp in the room,
I lay on the floor
and wait to unfurl—Instead

the petal of my tongue breaks into flame.

V.

When I woke, the world was white:
an entire winter settled on us in hours,
what should have taken weeks. (months, years?)

The entire world was white—
The arthritic fingers of trees lined
with snow like a spider’s long, trailing silk:
a web wrought between each of the oaks
and warped in every direction.
VI.

January:
The sky is a tin barrel
as hollow as anger or Mondays,
or it is a mummy’s gauze
to muffle the jangling echo
of run-on days
and routine.

VII.

Measure twice, cut once
(or not at all) I write
on everything I own; dregs
of paper flutter from shelves
like soot from pigeons as I rummage
for a pen, a scrap, a word.

I dreamed that someone teased me,
You’re always rifling—

I woke up startled, elbow-deep
in a wide-eyed pile of notes
I’d written and never read aloud.
ONE NIGHT STAND WITH ICARUS

I knew.
And we built it anyway—

a bastard invention of candle-nubs and broken crayons,
shavings of a gibbous moon (one cool and familiar enough
to be an old lover—it fit like an apple in one palm
while the other wound a tired, slanting knife behind its peel.)

Over the clanging of bolts, Icarus and I
laughed darkly—bound in the queasy rigging
he called his destiny. (That is,
the fraying nylon and plastic hooks
he slid and knotted around my hips.)

Wings, rudder and all, it was a mess:
a surly contraption of chicken wire
and loneliness, truths we’d stretched taught
over the few knobby things we had in common.

I knew.
But in my most honest moments (Lying
on the shattered earth, watching my own breath
dip faintly into the clay-red dust), I thought less of Icarus

than of sky. (Because, all said, it too
was empty and barbaric—intoxicating
in the way its blue fingers traced me,
naming: clavicle, scapula, allula.)
SHAMOKIN, PENNSYLVANIA

March 31, 2008

What we’ve found here:
the scaly buttoned face of a Victorian storefront;
the overturned treadmill; the jade-striped umbrella
glowing answers from mouseholes;

a snakeskin of stenciled ceiling
with its diamondback tiles;
patterns of thistle and aster flowers—

how each winging here of a starling trembles
in the timbre of a small apocalypse;

how there are things
everywhere; a thimble
in a heap of newspaper,
open-mouthed.

And a few miles further the coal
is revoking all its promises, churning the graves
in coils of steam underground, the hot breath
of fair’s fair winding from the iron pipes
through heaps of tires and stove-lids,
the cinder blocks that forgot their loyalties—
Circadia

The street lamps broadcast October
   with their yellow orbs so the trees’ low leaves
   look betrayed & flap blindly
   to shake the blistering wind. She
   can feel the rain, even under the brim
   of her borrowed hat.

When she reaches the dark apartment
   he’s still working, crouched
   in a splinter of desk light, breathing
   eraser crumbs from under
   his elbows, wearing his shoulders
   on his back like a shawl & bound forward.

   Like one of those plants
   that senses touch & folds away, nearly crying,
   he is a folded-back
   book cover, a snail shell, a trajectory
   that’s broken orbit with older brothers’ screw-ups;
   he’s gaining speed this far from home
   & only knows the gravity of the figure

now standing in the doorway:
   the scent of cold & wet pavement, her
   muddy shoes. She hopes he’ll wait to look up;
   she’d rather watch
   him there, curled over
   a page of equations, his eyes
   skipping like the gray backs of spring &
   robins. She’s thinking
how spring’s a long way off though, & time
   has been passing so slowly—
It’s this eternal cold. Not the way he says
oh-by-the-way midsentence; it’s the days
as discrete as pills punched through foil, cycles
doubling over on each other, knotting up
with the nuances of this private life:

him straightening the keyboard every night before bed
because it’s where she sits
& the way water glasses
ghost themselves around the apartment
while she’s out: half-full, now on the counter, now
on the dresser, now empty.

The way two masses drift together in space
is inevitable—the two halves of a semicolon invariably
blurred in her messy writing.

When sleep settles,
it’s a smokescreen in their to-do list,
a Pompeiian sleep, though temporary, that sifts over them,
unsuspecting knot of limbs & threaded fingers.

The ginkgo wavers outside, & morning
always comes. The singularity of night evaporates,
shadows sift off, green & yellow leaves lose
their disguise in the early hours;
from monochrome to binary, finally the edges
of leaves & undersides sharpen again in the tipping sunlight,
tiny flags of a semaphore opera
now tapping against the windows for applause.
Marfan

*Marfan syndrome is a genetic disorder that produces weak connective tissues; patients show uncontrolled growth and complications of the skeletal, muscular, nervous, and other systems.*

It was night and the sand cried out.
I could hear the earth moving; tendons that held rock to rock buckling, trenches splitting the ocean in their wake.

On the pier, air curdled in my lungs;
the salt and jellyfish and claws surged and fussied in a tide-line on my sternum.

Day after day, unnoticeable
the continents peel apart, organs tearing with their growth…

When the surf slunk back to the shore from its otherworld it scratched out cold battle lines on the sand,
hissed in the sheet-sound of a tourniquet,
throw up razor clams at my feet.

And—how is it
we were children here? With the driftwood I found the small pyres we built on the sand and left, sea-glass votives to glorify the litter.

But there is no room for any god to enter here. The breakers mince the shells to bone powder, and with each trough, the gravity swells enough to shear the earth from your ribs.
This one I crumpled for
the lonely nightstand.

From the hill, the steeples
and gravestones of this valley
scrape themselves clear of the fog,

they sprawl across layers of cloud,
bob like the rubble of a shipwreck,

but I can only write this love poem,
a thousand times.

There are places here
I know where you stood—
could nearly exhale into the sidewalk, into
the shape of your footprints,
measuring each distance with the tips of my fingers
from this small anthill, this leaf,
this pebble.

Passing through the places you walked
I feel your outline still hanging in the air,
darkening me momentarily like crossed shadows,
yanking me out

of my translucence.

From the window, there is a film of fog
across the cars that float by, listlessly, and the headlights
are so many panes of class
away.

Evening again—And the usual rain arrives
in the frequency of your voice.