

Poem #1

It was after dinner

in the suburbs  
the lovely time where everybody looks  
into the dusk, the sunset that  
they would promise to watch  
some other time  
they pretend to be thinking  
about tomorrow's tasks

and my mother,  
who was maybe thinking something  
sweeter,  
was standing at the sink,  
the crickets and trees just above her  
downcast angle of vision,  
and she was washing the dishes

anything else, she would ask  
anything left upstairs, an  
unfinished cup of water  
that I can wash, make new again?

and I raced upstairs  
back down again  
two at a time by this  
time  
it was dark  
everybody, like always,  
had missed the sunset,  
and I handed her a teacup

just this, I said,  
trying to convince her  
with the chirp in my voice  
that it could've been an  
onslaught of rotting apple  
stuffed in a ramekin  
but look, it was only an extra  
thing for her to wash

and as she reached for the cup  
with fingers wrinkled from  
the scalding water  
that got everything pure,  
I took the teabag out and  
threw it away

I felt happy then,  
too short to look out the window  
at the sunset I thought was still there,  
I was happy because I  
thought the teabag would  
show how kind I was, making up  
for her doing the dishes

but now I'm tall enough  
to see the dark, the crickets  
have gone under the snow  
and I think how my mother  
used to wash the dishes  
to make up for all the  
bad things she thought she  
had ever done  
to me.

Poem #2

PAUL'S ODE TO CHRISTINE

Once I had someone to love,  
Now she waits in Heaven above,  
And I must live my life alone,  
Now I walk on paths unknown,

Alone is a long and lonely street,  
An unbearable sorrow cutting deep,  
A sadness that invades my sleep,  
I look for her in all I meet,

I miss her slender delicate stride,  
When she walked along my side,  
I miss her blond hair flowing so,  
In evenings sun I watched it glow,

I miss that tender hand I held,  
That tender unity unparalleled,  
I miss her words of serenity,  
And all the love she gave to me,

When ages deterioration began to show,  
My love for her would grow and grow,  
And when her life began to fade,  
I turned to God, I prayed, I prayed,

O God of comfort, God of peace,  
Comfort me in my woeful grief,  
Until we're united in Heaven above,  
I Thank You God for her precious love.

Poem #3

A Shot In the Arm  
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1

But I'm a lefty!  
I'm only six!  
Stick it here!  
(What a giant needle!)  
It burns!  
On the radio  
it was all about polio.  
They tried to wheedle  
me into getting it.  
I said no.  
That needle was hefty!

2

What have I signed up for?  
--Yellow fever  
--Rabies  
--Typhoid  
--Tetanus  
The State Department knows best.  
The Peace Corps knows best.

I'm lefty, you know.  
Again, ignored.  
Stuck!  
My left arm is going to feel  
like she hit me with a baseball bat.  
#%@\*!  
Ginny's looking.  
I'm grimacing.  
Shots, I've always abhorred.  
Showing fear I've always deplored.  
Better now.  
Sang-froid, restored.

3

Her damn dog  
bit my calf!  
I screech my bike to a stop  
skid it sideways  
confront the beast.  
I glance at my bare bleeding leg.  
She assures me her terrier had his rabies shot.

I got that shot for the Peace Corps!

ER

tetanus shot  
Yeah, it hurts.  
Monitor the site  
of the monster's bite.

4

Charlotte's eye inflamed  
Nancy's face swollen  
I'm getting my shingles shot  
no matter what.  
Gruesome neuropathy.  
I am willing to pay the \$200, cash,  
I exclaimed.

5

This is the third time  
I've been hauled out of my school.  
After I threw up in the faculty bathroom,  
Al, my former student,  
IT manager and certified EMT,  
called the ambulance corps.

X marks the spot.  
Dubious lungs  
found by the ER doc.  
Of course, I want the pneumonia shot  
AFTER I've had pneumonia.  
Shoot me up!

6

Do thirty flu shots count,  
poetically speaking?  
In the Petri dish  
known as a high school,  
the boys are very dainty—  
they wipe their snotty noses on their sleeves BEFORE letting their homework float onto my desk,  
barricaded with Kleenex boxes and bottles of hand sanitizer.

"Infected be the air whereon they ride,  
and damned all those that trust them! Simultaneous instruction  
in sanitation and *Macbeth*,"  
I yelled with elation.

I need a vacation.

"Gimme your best shot!"

We only have Pfizer.

"Just follow my plot  
you'll be none the wiser.  
You know, I'm a lefty."

Insurance cards, please.  
Follow the attendant. This way.

"If thou couldst, doctor, cast  
the water of my land, and its disease  
and purge it to a sound and pristine health,  
I would applaud thee to the very echo,  
that should applaud again."

I'm not a doctor.  
Roll up your sleeve.  
Yes, the right one.

"Will it hurt?"

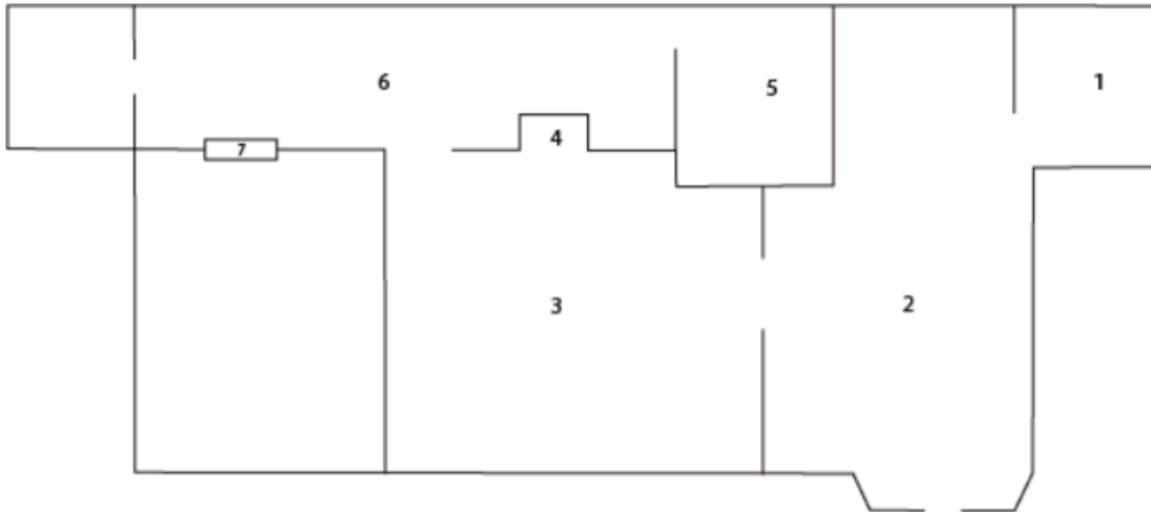
I'm done.  
Just wait fifteen minutes.  
You may have side effects.  
Sore arm. Fever. Chills. Fatigue.

"I have almost forgot the taste of fears."

Have a nice day. Next!  
Your second shot in three weeks.  
We'll text.

## Poem #4

### Anatomy of a House Fire



1. Kitchen: Gas on the stove. Grease in the air. The pop-pop-pop of heat shriveling paper towels and dishcloths, fabric wilting into itself like a flower in reverse.
2. Dining room: Smoke swelling like a storm. Placemats melting into table—saving spots for ghosts—checkered squares bleeding into particle board grain.
3. Living room: Sofa cushions sparking. Mantle photographs—lips pursed before candles and cake, dimples, gapped teeth—burning like flash paper, each soot-smearred face a burst of gold.
4. Closet: Twin coats tangled in embrace. Size small tucked inside large.
5. Study: Patents. Novels. Comics. Superman flaking into ash, It's a bird, it's a plane, it's—
6. Hallway: A mother running, feet tangled in the carpet's plush. A mother crawling with her head below smoke. A mother.
7. Bedroom door: Fists blazing. Skin cracking against wood. Nails scratching against knob. A cry. A shout. Wake up. Please.

Poem #5

Aubade as the Night Before You Leave

*After Tarfia Faizullah*

we watch

meteors shower above the park.  
we sit on the swings and cling to

childhood mangling into

rusted chains that flake our palms  
with iron: a promise of

decay, among meteors—

metal, rock, ice, leashing sky to earth.

light show as collapse, as

shooting stars streak through your eyes  
and you tell me your version of

apocalypse:

supernova, explosive eclipse. Moon  
bloating the sky and tucking us under tide,

every edge ablaze and

earth knocking itself open—  
the city its bruised fist.

undone.

i push off and swing. leaving you-  
r explosions simmering below,

i survey the gold of

each apartment window haloing home.  
meteors hurtle on the edges of

our atmosphere—

your irises—and i can almost hear  
the buildings howl:

how empty,

how airless this city will be.

## Poem #6

### Seasons

Leaves are falling all around,  
Red, Orange, Yellow, and Green,  
The Rainbow has touched the ground.

Now it is winter time,  
White, Black, and Brown,  
Surround the ground.

Spring is here let's give a cheer,  
Pink, Yellow, Purple and Blue,  
Have started to bloom on the ground.

The sun is shining and its summer time,  
Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Purple, and Pink,  
The Rainbow has left the ground.

Poem #7

Proof

Death slashes us, our lives, our minds  
like a knife scoring raw bread dough.

Yeasty lumps of love and hope  
hardly notice the rip

Until the seconds months days  
moments when we rise

and find us splitting apart.  
Confused. Misshapen. Unrecognizable.

Even to ourselves. But we  
eat. We shower and drive and

Each day, however cold, we  
rise, a little,

and remember how it was  
before

and taste what is now.  
Misshapen, but known.

Poem #8

ASLEEP IN WONDERLAND

Tickery tockery twirls the clock  
Towards my tree, my sister walks  
A strangeling book she'll read to me  
Of Wonderland, what will I see?

Row, row, row your boat  
The bottle stands, it stands afloat  
It pleads to me to make me small  
Below, a hole appears, I fall

Twinkle, twinkle, little star  
A rabbit jumps out from afar  
In his hand a golden watch  
He turns the time up by a notch

Hey, out there a diddle diddle,  
A kitten plays a wooden fiddle  
As he floats upon a raft  
A mouse has never swum so fast

Ashes, ashes, we all fall down  
A caterpillar stands up and frowns  
"Who R U?" smoke fills the air  
Out of the mist i do appear

Humpty Dumpty from quite a height  
Chats with Cheshire, his smile quite bright  
"Over there!" he points and shows  
The egg to lead him to the road

"Happy Unbirthday! I'm proud to say,  
We've yet again grown old this way!"  
This party with tea is really strange,  
I'd better stay out of their range

Rock-a-bye baby, on a treetop  
The Queen of Hearts red-facedly stops  
"Who dares to paint my roses red?!"  
I will see they lose their head!"

Baa and baa, bleats the sheep  
Over the fence guilty cards leap  
The queen real slow comes up the aisle  
Alice says, "Let's have a trial."

Jack and Jill run up a hill  
find a dodo standing still  
Then runs and dances with the king  
Circling around him in a ring

They dance and dance, on and on  
The king, a golden crown he dons  
It slips, it flies, towards me it heads!  
I duck; It knocks me out instead...

Blinken, Winken, I slowly Nod  
And wake up in a room quite odd  
A door appears through the fog  
I walk through, trip on a log

Fall into the Afternoon  
Against a tree, beneath the moon  
My sister hits me with her book  
"Let's go and eat, this time I'll cook."

Poem #9

**Prospective Final Girl Sits at the Gas Station**

and palms sunrise until it melts like hard candy,  
sugar lacing her wrist as Coke flattens in the can.  
Here, highway racing before her, she is teaching herself

patience. Restraint. Practice: dig heels into gravel,  
sip without the swallow, slide the ozoned cut of summer's  
storm across the tongue without tasting its sweet.

Outside 7-Eleven she follows her skin of want, crumples  
the can until her knuckles open like chapped mouths—  
teeth sharp with neglect—declines each offer for a ride

because when bodies meet highway they make roadkill,  
smeared into skid mark, ribs split to the sky, rotting under blood-  
spattered billboards advertising the next best horror

film. And if this was a film, she could press rewind  
as bone marrow peels itself from tar and dirt, each organ sliding  
home. If this was a film, she'd be fighting for the role of final

girl: count down seconds in the corner of the screen  
as the killer nears, calculate how long it takes to prowl  
a hallway, to slash a blade. She is fighting for the role of final

girl and she has studied all the tropes, knows to survive  
she has to be pure, clean, empty of everything but gasp  
and gape, so she pours her Coke onto asphalt, refuses to die

in a space defined by destinations on either side. The sun  
splinters white against the sky and she kneels at each vending  
machine, each rusted pump, watching its reflection as it fades.

Poem #10

WINGS

In a southbound wave each fall  
a skyful of orange and black  
fluttering by the millions  
over thousands of miles  
to a Mexico winter.

The urge pulling them to  
to a place they have never been,  
to a forest of oyamel firs they have never seen,  
taking flight only on the instinct  
that where they are going  
is where they belong.

They will cluster together in the cool Mexico nights  
wing with abandon in the warmth of the days  
until it's time to return to the northern spring.

Do they ever question the journey?

Do some stay behind,  
not trusting that  
the wind knows the way?

Do they know that not one of them  
will ever return  
but on the way back  
they will spawn generations  
that will complete the journey,  
each taking its brief turn  
in the long relay of life.

Is their urge for going  
like our own,  
vague, from below,

to be more like a butterfly  
flying with open wings  
into the invisible.

## Poem #11

### In praise of Small Epiphanies

When I was young I waited for the subtle revelation  
The "aha moment", the blinding light.  
Now that I'm old I delight in the sensation  
Of the cardinals scarlet flight,  
A baby's gurgling laugh, the scent of roses,  
Thunder, the crash of waves, a tree limb etched in ice.  
Each small thing exposes  
God's glory and will suffice. And will suffice.

Poem #12

"I Use to Write Poetry".

I use to write poetry  
but forgot  
about the importance  
of the Common Man  
defining and redefining  
Self.

And forgot  
that the secret of life  
is not a secret at all  
but the  
Eternal odyssey  
Of Everyman  
finding his way home.

I use to write poetry  
with youthful wings  
too close to the sun.

Now I write  
with an older hand  
closer to the heart  
closer with the understanding  
Why I write poetry.

Poem #13

Leaving

The amount of luggage carried  
Matched only the amount of pain, glittering  
Like a moonlit ocean, bordered by  
A heaviness, a weight lying on her shoulders  
That could not be removed, not by starless nights,  
Not by frozen mountains, she was folding  
Folding inwards like a house of cards,  
Letting her pain unfold and roam  
The endless night

Poem #14

Infinite truths, One advice

It is time I told you the truth  
Nothing is as it seems  
Freedom is a fantasy, and opportunity comes with a price  
Speaking is a privilege, and silence is a right  
Let me sing the sorrows of my people  
The trials and tribulations that go unheard  
We protest, we petition, we promise  
But they suppress, suffocate, and silence our words

I want you to be free  
To infuse life in your ambitions  
Be judged *not* by the content of your skin  
But by the color of your character  
Oh, the times I have prayed  
For the iron curtain of division to fray  
When the fabric of desire isn't tailored  
And our faith in our decisions wavers  
What is a sweet promise without its flavor?

Where is the truth we pledge to honor?  
The hero we strive to become?  
After years of drowning  
Our undying thirst for trust has only begun

I can't give you answers  
Perhaps you are asking the wrong questions  
This hate, this bigotry, this division  
Let us not take to our heels  
Let us ask how we can heal

Americans, lovingly educate your neighbors  
Deliberately write the chapters of our destiny  
Inked with the gift of empathy  
Battle peacefully for a united future  
Race to sew the seeds of division  
Religiously strive to define equality

## Poem #15

### The Hero's Return Home

With every time she broke  
She became all the more beautiful  
Every time she failed  
More hope came upon her  
Every time she smiled  
The room would light up  
When the world was falling  
She carried it on her shoulders  
And with every sacrifice she made  
The earth grew stronger  
Until it could be the one  
To carry her home.

Poem #16

what i don't tell strangers

I'm unwell  
I'm not right in the head  
I've been hurt,  
I've been touched,  
I've been told,  
That I am not worthy  
I am unlovable and it's all my fault  
I'm too loud and I scare people  
I'm a flirt  
But I'm not pretty enough  
A bitch  
But I'm not pretty enough  
Because my forehead's too big  
My teeth too crooked  
My legs too fat  
A six out of ten  
And the worst of all is that I believe none of those things  
But it must be true right?  
Depression runs in my family  
Anxiety runs my head  
I kiss strangers because I crave value  
Sometimes I cry when I see my face in the mirror  
I'm embarrassed that I have a short temper  
But I like that I have shorter hair  
I pick my zits because I feel unclean  
I scratch my head because I feel unclean  
I don't want everyone to know how much hate I have  
So I fall in love with everyone instead  
How bitter I am  
How jealous  
I'm so smart but not enough  
I used to carve a smile I didn't have on my thighs  
Now I still can't look at exacto knives  
And god I just want to be hugged  
Being touched makes me nervous but I need it so much  
I'm always driving so I can scream  
Always posting so I can stop  
the constant, heavy wave of loneliness  
I'm never alone but always so fucking lonely  
I'm afraid of dark rooms  
I have nightmares about tunnels  
My shoulders hurt constantly  
I don't have acid reflux, but I say I do  
It's easier to explain than dysautonomia

I sweat so much I need special deodorant  
And I'm unwell  
I'm not right in the head

## Poem #17

A girl born to a mother,  
who was different than most.  
She was taught to work hard,  
but still was privileged.  
She was lucky enough to attend school,  
and she realized this as many other girls didn't have it this way.  
With her education she tried to get a job,  
but this was difficult as many people were looking for men.  
With her new job, she worked extra hard,  
so she wouldn't be fired and replaced by a man.  
She did this despite the fact that she was paid less,  
even though she worked twice as hard.  
She did this along with helping her family.  
On the side, she learned about discrimination against women,  
through her experiences as well as articles she had the ability to read.  
She feared men as she knew she was breaking tradition,  
she was living the working-life of a man, instead of the home-life of a woman.  
She married later than most,  
and made sure she was treated right.  
She stood up for herself,  
and would not go down without a fight.  
She had fewer children,  
so the girl she was pregnant with could follow her footsteps and blossom.

Poem #18

Fall Colors

Sharp edge on red  
Fly from a Japanese maple  
Two jagged entries in a swirling pond of leaves  
Line up twenty paces on the wind plank  
Make the leap to the ground

Poem #19

The Rosebush

Bought on a romantic whim,  
The little bush bud-filled was planted,  
To then be ignored,  
Though snow and hail,  
Stillness and wind,  
Drought and rain,  
Until the summer sun came,  
Warm,  
Like a kiss,  
Drenching its aphid-nibbled leaves.

Miraculously,  
The green buds opened to reveal their soft sweet pink faces,  
Pricking the finger of the negligent gardener who had cut them away,  
To perfume their windowsill.

Poem #20

"Abyss"

After the afterlife, you learn to breathe again.

Let me back up:

You don't get to keep your lungs when you die.

You don't need them, your blood either

You're just translucent skin over bones.

It makes it easier to float

and harder to scream.

When your eternal afterlife trickles to an end

Your wisp of a body will heave with new lungs

Leaving you gasping and grasping at your ribcage

While you fall into the palm of a figure you don't recognize

And when they curl their fingers around your shaking body

Bets are, you still haven't caught your breath.

Poem #21

dorothy

This universe is unusual.  
The moon is like a goose egg, this evening.  
It's large and white, illuminates my path.  
And I follow along a bright brick road,  
searching for the city of green, the dream.  
I suppose I'm wondering where home is,  
where Auntie Em is-  
she's probably sitting in her wicker rocking  
chair, mending my checked blue-and-white dress,  
pulling the thread, fastening the button.  
As I walk, I hum my refrain.



Poem #22

field in november

Call me the jealous woman,  
jealous of the things in a man's life-  
jealous of the wind,  
the leaves, the wet-dry days  
that leak beneath the door.  
You see, this is my birthplace-  
this place where the deer sleep  
in twirled beds, where the thickets  
are thicker than ice.  
This is where I come from,  
not that I've gone anywhere,  
this landscape of naked, gnarled trees  
embossed in moss.  
I am green, I know,  
greener than the greenest summer leaves.  
You don't have to tell me what I don't know.  
And you, yes, you,  
I can hear you laughing, chuckling sarcastically  
with the wind as I spin, lost, twirling, alone,  
in this field.  
The grass seems to twist together and  
grab my feet in ropes, tie me to the earth.  
In the dream I always fall.  
And, where are you?  
Not even your shadow can leave the woods  
and approach me, this time.

### Poem #23

Wasted potential  
That's what they called it  
In my eyes,  
It was a flurry of activities  
That led to a snowstorm of disappointments

In my eyes,  
She reminded the world that  
There is no potential that isn't wasted.  
We are all seamstresses of the universe  
But we can never make the perfect stitch.

In my eyes,  
She reminded the world that  
Those who build us up  
Are the first to break us down  
Like Rome,  
We have the greatest rise  
And the grandest fall.

In my eyes,  
She reminded the world that  
There is nobody who can say  
They achieved all their dreams  
Somewhere inside,  
there lives a trash bucket of fantasies

In my eyes,  
She reminded the world that  
We don't have to be complete  
To be deserving of every breath we take  
We don't have to give a lifetime to the world  
To take a moment away.

They called it wasted potential  
But in my eyes,  
It was a raindrop of failure  
That led to a downpour of hope

Poem #24

Cassandra

I am the canary in the mine.

As long as I'm singing you are fine.

When I stop it's cause I'm dead.

Use your head.

Let me die instead.

Better get going. Better get gone.

Soon it fades.

The echo of my song.

Poem #25

The Ecstasy of Saints

far too long man has fallen for smoke and mirrors  
beckoning like the glitter of amethyst,  
or visions of love's pearly teeth that shimmer  
a mirage i'm afraid, too, shall dim;  
but even the saints remember this—  
for a breath is the briefest form of forever yes

let this fantastic shimmer cloak you,  
be not afraid to soak in delicious brimstone you

You whose skin purples lovely as lilac in genesis, you  
whose breath cools the memory of damnation you  
my springtime crush and autumn drift—  
You who ignite the august dandelions with Your *herehere*  
my summer rain and winter glare  
who i still search for in cotton candy clouds,  
who i want so desperately my *youyouyou* to capture  
in this breathless form of forever

be not afraid to cloak yourself in cherry tree sap—  
after all, You cut me here to remind me of blood  
's inevitable crescendo into earthsong and tar  
smeared between your fingers, my reverence,  
my hungry confession— my bruises bloom,  
testament to how i must drown in holy water

be not afraid of this part of you:  
i reach down looking for your voice  
's feverish echo—  
be not afraid of this part of me,  
teach the heart of nourishment in uncharted territory  
for this is no longer purgatory  
even the saints can tell you of this—

and i prepare myself for worship

Poem #26

"In the Year"

In the year of as happy as a caveman could be  
( with the exception of a few dinosaurs )  
The wheels rolled  
The wheat grew  
And women had hair  
long enough to be dragged.  
It was Dawn--  
There was no excuse  
to be tired.  
You could not raise a cup  
to the good old days...there were none.  
But, you were as happy as a caveman could be  
(with the exception of a few dinosaurs ).