

Invite Cats

poems

Jam Hale

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this is my will and testament.

1. cremate me with this copy of east of eden. i'm tom hamilton.
2. listen to leonard cohen's "old ideas," joanna newsom's "ys," bon iver's "22, a million" and conor oberst's "ruminations" at my funeral. invite cats
3. go to tenth street, the mode and bittercreek for drinks. oh, & neuro patio
4. throw a party in municipal park—ruth, you are in charge of music.
5. read more books, travel often, write letters and poems, do cartwheels, be/swim naked, go for more walks and bike rides, make bouquets with wildflowers, eliminate the gender binary and crush the patriarchy.
6. josh and ruth—look through my poems and see if there are any good ones.
7. smile and laugh and drink wine straight from the box when you think of me. odds are, i loved you!

Jam Hale
April 17, 2017

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FOREWORD

How does one introduce a book of poems published posthumously for a brother? There is a desire to write an elegy or an epigraph, or to connect the themes of the work to the poet's life and death, especially for readers who did not know the beautiful person that was Jam. Attempting to do so, though, would fall flat. A life cannot be summed up, and the death of a young person cannot be understood. At no point would we be satisfied with what is written. The best we can do, any of us, is to read the poems contained here and revel in them. While the range of subjects in these pieces may be limited, they contain the depth and breadth of what it is to be human—family, friends, food, drink, sex, love, death, humor, heartbreak, loneliness, the question of home, cats.

Hundreds of poems were collected in the weeks following Jam's suicide in April. Most of them were recovered from Jam's personal digital files, some from their journals, and others were sent to us by friends. There is no way we can know if these poems were considered finished or ready to share by the author, but we exercised our best judgement in choosing almost one hundred pieces, spanning nearly a decade, that demonstrate Jam's powerful use of language as a tool to work through the intricacies of love and pain. In the same vein of unknowing, the title assigned to each poem represents either a clearly designated poem title or, more often, a file name. The sections in this edition are organized loosely by theme for ease of reading with two longer, recent pieces included in the back.

Poetry exists between words. It expresses what prose cannot; what cannot be explained to another person, but can be shared. It is at the same time extremely personal and universal. Share these poems. Keep them to yourself. Take them with you into the mountains, hot springs, and bars that Jam loved.

Ruth & Joshua Hale
June 2017

Invite Cats

poems

I went to the humane society
today
to see if they sometimes
take in humans
it's in the name

they said I could volunteer
& I told them
“you misunderstood me,
I've lost a person
she hasn't come back
to eat for months
and I'm afraid she never will.”

they told me to leave

I asked if I could see
all the cats up for adoption
first.

Oliver and the mouse

Oliver sits in a chair and he has no wings
it looks unnatural, his body supporting his head,
tiny muscles in his neck
his hands playing with the fabric of his shirt
his lips pursed and suckling the air for a nipple

he says I can be a king if I'd like
and then he says king is the wrong word
a king is never content.

he says I can be happy

I ask him if he liked the songs Ruth sang to him
in the hospital
and he tells me gently, no questions.

his eyes are shimmering
like eyes about to cry
and they shift from gray to bright blue and back again
never wholly one color or the other

Oliver says, *I have never seen a sun
that did not bury his head
in the side of the world when the day is done*
and I recognize it from a song
but I don't say anything

a white mouse moves across the floor
Oliver watches it with infant eyes
a cat follows closely
with no hunger in its steps
but a fearful playfulness attached to each claw

and we can both see small red spots
on the mouse's fur

Oliver tells me he has to go
and I say, my eyes shimmering,
please stay.
he tells me that counts as a question

the mouse fits between the bookshelf and the wall,
too small a space for the cat
who begins to clean his paws
unaware of us

the chair where Oliver is sitting
begins to change from wood to cinder
with no fire licking at its legs
until it is wholly charcoal

as his body, still without wings, disappears
from the collapsing chair
Oliver tells me he loved Ruth's songs

one day all the dogs and cats
will turn on us
and that will be the apocalypse

asleep in our beds,
eaten from toes to noses
they'll leave our brains

these are my thoughts
and these are my cat's thoughts
as he lays there cleaning his paws

underneath silk moon
I'm trying to write like Li Po
we both get drunk and dance
breaking clay jars and spilling wine
breaking bottles and spilling beer
watching birds hop from limb to limb
and take flight without warning
until I see my cat slowly creeping through the grass

my dreams are filled with ghosts of newborns
there is an empty teacup teasing a black cat
nothing is ever truly empty
the cat says to me as he stares into the porcelain
empty is the place between a square and a circle
empty is discovering mathematics
and a good book

there is a collaboration of sensuality in the room
a fireplace where only sentences are used for heat
a girl looking great in denim shorts offers me a cigarette
and explains the significance of the number zero
just look at it in Chinese characters
she says, and the cat nods knowingly

my cat doesn't think about jesus. but he hears all the insects
moving
under the grass where the disciples walked. *smoosh, smash.*
his radar ears know who is in each room.

my cat doesn't ask me about my nephew or Jimmy or Loren.
he understands death better than I do because he doesn't
ponder it.
I could find so many answers if I stopped looking.

my cat doesn't always eat what he kills but brings mice as gifts.
I'm half tempted to cook one up just to show him how grateful
I am.
maybe a satay on a bed of arugula and lemon zest, maybe mouse
wellington.

my cat can be alone for days at a time without getting sad.
I used to think he and I had this in common. I wonder if maybe
he just can't conceive time. he gets everything else.

my cat doesn't let me use him as a pillow unless he is as tired
as me.
but he obliges to curl up on my feet, especially when I'm ready to
get up
ready to pour food into his bowl and bury the mouse he left at my
doorstep.

watching my cat's nose
as I make coffee in the morning,
the floor too cold
reminds me that there are things
unique to us:

profitless wars, purposeless music, unrelenting hate.

we don't have the upper hand here.

watching my cat's nose
as I cook bacon and eggs
and quinoa to cool for lunch
reminds me that we are animals

feasting when the harvest is good
and starving when the harvest is bitten by frost.

but my cat, with his grain-free canned venison dinner
and my too-small paycheck
reminds me that my priorities are right

as I pour my coffee
and watch my cat's nose.

your footsteps on the tarmac
are the apocalypse
your eyes are cyanide
I'm trying to say
your almond-shaped eyes are the end of me

I've never danced so deliberately
in my backyard
the cats watching my craving
as I hold the air
against my body &
in my lungs

we gathered our senses and blackberries
in the back of a dodge durango and
a cleaned out milk jug severed at the head
we kissed our fingertips
and smeared ripe redness onto our faces and chests
we buried ghosts like acorns
to grow into bigger
but much friendlier ghosts

no one has ever feared a tree
with roots still planted firmly
in the earth

I've forgotten your taste
smell, laughter
& not on purpose

something about
a homecoming
old memories dissolve
into the memories I've made
since you left

I've encountered so much laughter
since you disappeared—
so many smells

I've tasted infidelity
but I refused to eat

I am so hungry
how long must I wait
for you to climb into my mouth

I wish you were here
to hear
Ireland Moving
with me

But the sea is wide
and cold—
and I am just a windfall
plum.

Familiar skylines speak
no words
but foreign meadows pen
old poems.

I am a vague pronoun an
empty “it”
I am the place to rest your head—

dearest, please find me sleeping
in this copse
with forgotten songs still warm
on my lips.

on a borrowed swingset
my father told me about god
I was four
and every day after
by my mother
and siblings

we grew up with god
sitting at the dinner table
finishing our broccoli
finishing our casserole
that is, we were—
god ate from the tree of life, or something

at church
we sang songs of penitence
and recompense
all the words ending
in sounds that rhymed with
minced or glimpse or

and somewhere I learned
about writing poetry
and I still
avoid rhyming

when I can

cigarette ash falling in my tea
like Li Po's snowflakes
I'm craving wine
late on a Tuesday in Shanghai
in a convenience store labeled
supermarket
I find out they grow grapes
in China

tell me I am handsome
with your hands
use your breasts to spell out
you are the luckiest
across my pressing thighs
gain momentum
in the bedsheet half-dawn

wake up to our smell

explore.

we are ghosts against this river backdrop
photographs can't handle our movement

make me feel sexy
in the grocery store

comment on the ripe avocados.

make me feel needed
at self-checkout

we can dance the whole way home
and I'll turn you on
dicing a tomato

I'm counting my time in Mondays

I've become a regular at the post office,
liquor store,
library.

nobody recognizes me at the grocery store
anymore.

I discovered I prefer strawberry jam
over strawberry preserves.

It spreads easier
for my one-a-day meal
that doesn't involve a shot glass
& preservation is no longer a thing
with which I concern myself.

two bottle stories

we were two bottles
of wine
into the night
apples falling from the tree
in your backyard
cigarette ash
falling from our fingers
I'll sweep
the patio
in the morning

we were sharing
two bottle stories
& the night
felt increasingly
unqualified
to be sharing its quiet
with your laughter

the kids after tag
line up at the water fountain
and can't get the pressure right

they are hydrating through their noses
and down their shirts

I wonder if this is how we write
opening our hearts as mouths
hoping the words flow in

begging our hands
lit up with pens
that we don't spill too much
or drown in our inspirations

it's simple.

drink whiskey, lots of it
but never too much
at once.

get an easy job
drink at work
master a flask like
French archers mastered
a quiver and bow.
be discreet
as you don't want your bowfingers cut off.

at home, at the park, at the bar:
write poems.
at work, on your bicycle, walking to the grocery:
write poems in your head.

never drink so much
you cannot write poems.

don't think about dying
or if you do,
don't fear it.

remember to eat.
remember to drink water.
it's simple:
drink whiskey, lots of it.

new callouses on my hands and feet
I have been climbing trees
and clinging to stories
my toes tangled in metaphor
and popped by adjectives

it aches, the toll it takes on the body
to find such value in a turn of phrase
neglecting breakfast for a sunrise
I'm spending all my meals
swallowing your words instead

before creation, we wallowed underneath
willow trees and ran our hands
against the treefrog bark
before The Lord
someone said something
about being God
and someone listened
Ivan thinks I use too much symbolism
in my poetry:
I think Ivan doesn't listen to enough Jay-Z

you have to let your head move to the music once in awhile

Ivan knows too many words
and not enough sentences

a lot of writing poetry
is just thinking
surrounded by wordless objects
opening bottles or closed books
feeling the softness of your own skin
feeling the callouses
on your feet and hands
the heat of sitting in one place too long

we forget to sweat
we forget to sway

the courage of an airplane
the compassion of these giant wheels
I am never wholly in one city
my hand is flat against the Great Wall
our voices can't reach over
so we choose our words carefully

we break teacups
on purpose
we believe they are made of ice
we wait for them to melt
& no one can tell us differently

when will we find the quiet
to read to one another
I can read
or write
poetry
or prose
in a nightclub
in a strange city
with electronic music dictating
where and how
I should move my hips

in the quietest corner
bathed in red light
all of the women
blend together
until you appear
in a surreal apparition
on the lock screen
of my phone
and stand out

I called a suicide prevention hotline tonight
for the first time & to be candid: I texted first
I hate talking on the phone
to anyone but my sister

Jen, who capitalized all the right letters, gave stock answers.
I explained my depression & she said:
“Sorry, our system can only handle 140 characters—
can you repeat what came after ‘really wa’?”
I asked her if she was a robot
she said no
she said it was strong of me to reach out
and when I stopped texting
she said
“It looks like now’s not a good time.
Please text in again if you’re in crisis.
We’re here 24/7.”
good thing about robots, they don’t sleep.

& right before I dialed the number to talk to Rose
Rose, who cradled my tears
Rose, who used gender neutral pronouns
for my ex-partner who she had never met
Rose, who really understood how capitalism breeds violence
sexism
racism
depression
Rose, who made me promise to call her when I was in Salinas
as I dialed the last digit of 1(800) 273-8255 to talk to Rose,
Jen texted me and said:
“Hey—we’re always looking to do the best we can.
Did you find this conversation helpful? Y/N”

I wanted to reply

Jen, I'm just looking to do the best I can, too.

the scarf
you knit for my birthday
three months ago
is still at the store
in skeins of burnt orange yarn

we use poetry to predict the future
or create it
we are driven by romance
we are bonded by fear
to walk bravely into the hot night
into the dark room

we measure our courage
by how long we can sit in the quiet
of summer
desireless

or, more-so, desirous
but with steady hands
focused eyes
the lights of the city at our back

I measure intelligence
by the distance between our lips
unsure yet
which end of the spectrum
denotes what

we had a therapy accident
I should say
we had accidental therapy

I laid on your couch
with a bottle of whiskey
between us

we solved distance
you picked up my brain
and set it back
where it should be

thank you
I wanted so badly
to use laughter
again
in my poems

we've made it through
bottles of wine and Bulleit rye
we've talked in poems
and slow danced to fast songs

you held my hand
until Oliver was really dead
you put line breaks in my poems
until he was alive again

my cat sees ghosts of insects
that once sneaked upon our earth
and pounces
and I hear earthworms peaking their heads
(or asses, no one really knows)
through the ground to find little puddles
of rainwater
sitting in the miniature ponds
in the creases of autumn leaves
or maybe I hear the ghosts of insects
that once sneaked upon our earth.

I waited for hours for your voice
against the trees, the hollow suffering of ants
of beetles
a caterpillar approached my index finger
with curiosity, his little ass wagging in the air

for an hour I wrote poems in my head
and drew faces on the tree trunk with my finger
and I danced against the black sky
my cigarette illuminating orange gnats
in the air, the smoke from my mouth disrupting their little clouds

dropping like flies

I opened the bottle of whiskey I brought
for you
and took two sips
I wanted you here sipping with me and before I knew it I was
drunk
sloppy, song drunk
the poems in my head were full of moss and dirt
getting heavier, my poems were bogged down,
were marshland

I danced to songs disinclined to dancing
I was swirling giant circles in the clearing between the two trees
you said we should dress up
my cigarette glowing an open-shutter circle
a diameter equal to my height
it seemed to be getting smaller

I threw the bottle at a butterfly
I told the caterpillar I was sick of waiting, too
and laid down in the cold grass
hoping to wake beside you in the city

dream to be an ant
de-arm
our futures

give us something
worth loving

me, ghost-thin
in the reflection
of the spilt
cocktail

they huddle around

split the difference,
split the tab

I know I am drinking alone!
my ghost buys her own drinks

I was opposed to traps
you were full of them

these insects
scent is, this pheromone

re:
h o m e
p e o n

I watch these ants tangle antennae
communicating better than we do
in our own home.

the bread you baked for me had ants in it
but you were standing there watching me
and so proudly,
and I ate it.

my brother always said we could reduce the world hunger problem by eating bugs.

but then I worried about the world bug shortage
and how our problem shouldn't become theirs
and you told me you were afraid of bees.

and I told you,
my parents used to tell me the story of the rich man
who did everything else for god
but wouldn't give up his money
and it was hell for him for eternity

that seems a little unreasonable, even for god.

does god know what happens in the series finale of Lost?
has he read East of Eden or Man and Superman?

you tell me it is okay for you
to be afraid of bees
you know it is irrational

and you tell me
it is okay for me to be frustrated with a god
in which I don't believe

the bread you baked for me was good
and I learned to love the taste of bugs
and you tried to learn the delicate hum and dance of bees in the
yard

I watch a spider dancing on her web
Grateful for my pack of cigarettes
& bottle of vodka
Her symmetry
Her inherent knowledge of geometry
She is weaving a map of Ladd's Addition

In my childhood
I was crippled by a disease
That could only be diagnosed
After I formed a dogmatic
(& pragmatic)
Opposition & disbelief in medicine:
Mental, Physical, Allopathic, Homeopathic.
She doesn't want to get better.

Our precious spider dissolved her web
She is hiding in some crevice
Waiting until tomorrow
To begin her plight again

Spiders don't suffer mental illness
Regardless of the symptoms we share
Samantha isn't struck at four in the morning
With the uncontrollable urge
To connect with the world

She waits until the sun rises
To fill our world with webs

Samantha doesn't have vodka before coffee
She found a path
Consecrated silk, a path into the sky

Samantha knows how to fly
She surpasses birds in her tiny universe
Never looking outside herself
For the materials she needs to build a home

the trembling insects induce a strange fright, their hollowed carcasses shaking like dull sequins on an erotic dancer's pasties—I'm unsure which I fear more.

the spider who has drained these husks of blood and bile is hiding beneath the orchid, waiting for the faint tremble of her web to signal dinner. she promises she will dispose of her entomological trophies once the study is complete: this hovering graveyard cannot be good for business

arachnid vs. hexapods! patrons, place your bets.

those left standing, count your limbs. I shudder away from her myriad eyes and am left with two shaky legs and a misanthropic fear that every human is a Wandering Spider and I am two limbs short of a trembling insect.

we didn't question the intent of the sun as it set violently
behind the mountains, our feet bruised and gypsied our
hands clasped tripping fumbling over limbs of trees the hour
of our consummation a fabled place we found we are mythical
our bodies finally resting where the water

oh, the water

trickles delicately from the rocks and the water is warm
too warm we shovel cold water from the river we drink
cold beer from the river we dance in the moonlight as
it replaces the light from the sun placidly we are every
atom of this moment

she sings like the cool of the river
the way our feet look distorted underwater
she sings like smoke insulating
the tumblers of whiskey supported
by this thousand year old bar

she hugs like camping
the warmth of the comparison
of the heat of a body
and cold of the early mountain air
she hugs like hot springs in winter

she moves like a dancer
it takes her minutes to sit down
on the red leather barstool
spinning, her fingers feeling
the fluidity of the air

she laughs like a yawning cat
eyes closed, every facet of her
exposed to the safety of our
two glasses of wine & quiet stoop
she laughs knowing she has a place to sleep

in the park submerged
in the flooding of the willamette
lady sees a battlefield of squirrels
and smells the traces of
every dog that has run gleefully
on this grassy highground
pulling at her leash

I spot the tops of
mermaids using the gazebo
for plotting mischief
fish spinning the alphabet dice
suspended by rusted axles
with a bump of their beaks
where young adults fooled around
behind these educational parapets
safe in their midnight terraces
when the water is low

otters riding the slide, hand-in-hand
ducks diving to pick through
the water-logged wood shavings
for crumbs left by clumsy children
that make up the splintered carpet
that will reemerge in the summer

and I see your son
asking gleefully on his swing
to go higher. your arms tiring,
I take a turn.
him, refracted through the water.
like trying to see yourself in a mirror
in a dream

his visage is a centrifugal blur
in the circles of the surface of the pond
where I skip a stone
and find little conclusion
in the denouement of our time together.

we drank enough for breakfast to last us all day and by noon
we had skinned a squirrel tacked its hide to a tree gathered
firewood and PL insisted we saw down the dead tree left
like a skeleton by the wildfire

we sweated whiskey

we set the teeth of our saw in the bark we dug our feet into
the sawdust forming in piles sticking to our sweaty naked backs
Jason filmed the tree falling we cheered like lords of the flies
we ran to the river and dove in gathering freshwater mussels
in our hands and crooks of our elbows and we feasted on
their labial appearance

the surreality of the airport is that
she sensed you hesitating
from 100 miles away

I was too busy
with whiskey and radio wires
I was lost in a sea of Portland

the ocean beckoning my name
Railli calling my name
and my phone
my sister clambering up a totem pole
of cocktails

I was too busy
to remember the fallen tree
where we jumped into the river
where we fell on love

no one buried the dead elk in winter & come spring we were climbing over its skeleton in the morning and tripping over its skeleton at night and clumsily I spilled red wine on your white blouse.

I searched your eyes for anger but you unbuttoned your shirt and dressed the antlers of the giant skeleton with it

you said it looked like a Halloween prank

you asked me to take your picture by the crime scene

& we stayed topless for days in the woods on the porch in the river you insisted on bringing wine into the hot spring and we took Communion in excess, the blood of Christ ran down our mouths and necks and into the water and when we kissed it tasted like wine but salty, like wine but honeyed and like wine we ran down the length of our bodies there in the mountains we howled
we echoed into the night

I'm getting used to not drinking the water
the sun never sets on the Spanish Empire
we were lost in Madrid
in the dark of early morning

thirsty and only a bottle of wine between us
the lights of the city deciding
who is going to bed
and who is dragging themselves hungover
to work

we skipped the formalities
of hostels
and slept beneath open skies
or bridges
you were shivering
you lost your scarf by the river
and I gave you my half of the blanket
and my arms and chest and our feet were fidgeting

I was warm with the excitement of the planet

we shared secrets in the morning
I was afraid to tell you about my father
you related him to god
 so cleanly
we finished the leftover wine
still afraid to drink the water

I hummed a melody to a song we couldn't remember
and you went up the river, looking for your scarf in the trees

hark

the sun is rising
or something

you are applauding
a dog
for taking a shit

in the grass.

heading east of the Garden of Eden

Humankind! You give me the highest highs
in low mountain valleys, in creek-bed sleepy hollows
where I'll light a campfire and cigarettes
and watch all the embers dissolve at once into the night
(and the Gitche Manitou knows there's no shame in that.)

I'm heading east of the beguiling garden
east of the promises I've promised not to make
to myself or anyone else
east of the potential to mistake *sorry for please*
because holy heaven's gatekeeper knows I'm a fuck-up
but everyone is fucked up when the fat boils down, saying collec-
tively,
"There's no shame in that."

It's the springtime river-sun glimmering on her lips
that makes this trip seem difficult
this trip I've begged from celestial flesh-colored Christs
God, to be torn so evenly
I'm cropped halfway between intimacy with celestial *her*
and intimacy with the road (and the splintering pickguard of my
guitar)
The endless highway speaks to me,
"There's no shame in that."

Humankind! Far away from you, and in the hinterlands,
I can sit against rotted oak and appreciate your
idiosyncratic smiles and movements—
speaking specifically now of *her*
—but when the moment comes, and god! in this segue of sweater
to skin

I find myself scraping bare, surrounded by a nicotine cloud, and
found wanting Allah above! I've been weighed on the scales and
found wanting
and the Tao Te Ching tells me
"There's no shame in that."

I'll be heading east soon
wandering the lonely cobbled alleys of cities still clinging to their
colonial roots
the roots that shot through the ground and through hearts of men
the sacrifices now seemingly in vain
but when the tires leave rotted rubber against Spring's morning
pavement
we'll know nothing is in vain, and as your epiphanic, glimmering
mind clings closely to mine
(I pray through thick clouds of incense to the misunderstood
Buddha)
Ganesha tells me personally

"There's no shame in that."

we became delicate
in the early morning
in a basement
I read the time like braille
on your skin
your gooseflesh told me
it was hours until breakfast

the sun couldn't make it down
the stairs
like we did the night before
slightly stumbling
already exploring each other

pausing under the artwork
hanging above us
I kissed you against the wall
we found each other
wanting

this

the wet heat between us
told me we both knew
how to fill the hours

*gratitude
for r.e. hale*

your smile deafens my depression
a train car filled with azaleas and hollyhock
the poetry in your simple greeting
is the sun that breaks the fog
and takes the chill out of early morning

before we began unpacking your things
i stepped outside for a cigarette
and thanked the god you believe in
for your footsteps on the kitchen floor

my skin burned from the constant sun
it seems like days since I've seen the moon
night is such a welcome vagrant
I gladly give what it asks of me
reflection like the still waters of Lucky Peak
fear like the distant howling at Daniel's plateau
observation like that of Scott the Orphan
and loneliness like the Tenth Street Station

the mildness of this absinthe
is like the constellations
in a way I can't explain

like the impression
of the touch-down of the needle
to your favorite record

the bass turned up
a little too high, and the neighbors call in complaints
my nose is full of licorice and herbs
and my ears are full of this synthetic
backbeat
that keeps my concerns
so far away from the telephone

you are a cancer
and you tell me, a sagittarius,
everything about me
I wonder if you are cheating
and writing these horoscopes
based on our cumulative hours
of conversation

I'm not one to say
the constellations don't bring insight
as I swirl my absinthe
and watch the milky green
cocktail's legs slip slowly down the side of the glass

the thing about wine
is that
it dyes your face a color

mine was getting too cold
in the summer night
I held it between my legs
and made room for your hand

your thumb ran the eclipse
of my glass
your thumb
rested on my leg and your eyes
rested on my eyes

Nate and Kate sit with knitting needles
and instruments and books
on bright horrid beautiful couches
oranges that previously didn't exist
and yellows humankind had tried to forget

Nate and Kate pour me glass after glass
of wine: it becomes bottle after bottle

I had a dream about my father
last night
he was telling me about The Lord
again
and
I listened
again

because of him
not because of The Lord

Oliver was born
without any muscles in his heart.
The doctors said
they were dispersed
to the curiosity in his hands
and the cooing in his lungs.

Oliver was born on the first of April
in a rainforest, in a meadow
on the Oregon coast, in the brine of the Pacific Ocean
at the top of Multnomah Falls.
His diet of salt air and sand dollars
was a phenomenon given through a tiny yellow feeding tube.
The doctors wanted to ask him what it felt like to fly
for eighteen days

but none of us could fathom the breadth
and depth
of Oliver's words
the only translation
could be found in what we understood
about living
when we walked
from Oliver's empty hospital bed.

Oliver was born
with too many muscles in his heart.
It was too strong
for an operation
we sat defenseless
until the doctors had a solution.

“Just wait until he comes back down
from flying so close to the moon;
to the sun.
He is trying to save Icarus
and all we can do is wait.”

We sang songs to Oliver
to the metronomic pumping and beep
of the machines
trying to measure his heartbeat
to keep it alive
they could not keep up
but wouldn't keep trying.

When Oliver returned from the sun
we sat and listened to his story
but we were slow to understand
his strange and powerful language.

He didn't save Icarus;
the heat from the muscles in Oliver's heart
was too much
for those wings made
of wax and feathers.

We opened a window
our room in the hospital
was sweltering.
Oliver's heart, his muscles
were becoming too much
for his tiny corporeal frame.

Oliver's heartbeat was deafening
we could no longer hear
his words.

We watched
on the nineteenth day of April
as Oliver flew
from his tiny bed, wire and tubes
falling from his body
Oliver, without wings,
the nineteenth day of April
the day his heartbeat left

and Icarus fell into the sea.

all the tiny birds
hover by the feeder
their language as beautiful and strange
as ours
we communicate with our bodies
our tiny wings, our humongous feet
we know we're bred to walk
this earth
flying comes later

when does the quiet start?
I'm not speaking of that which
we seek before sleep
I mean the quiet that keeps our eyes
unlocked

the nonsounds of holding hands
the placidity of your eyes,
the pause in conversation when I realize I have been rambling
seeking to impress you with words
and we both just watch each other's
lips beginning to form
and maybe that is when the quiet starts
when we are both fumbling
for something to say
and wordless, we kiss

the downpour of quiet
the thunderstorm of silence
when you take my hand
and hold it against your cheek

there is a song in your laughter
I've studied jeketelling for decades
for my one chance
at drawing that melody
from your lungs

nighttime comes like a lonely bird
her wings are clipped but her song is heard
wishing only to whisper to me
it keeps me awake in the swollen hour
I hear your voice and pick your flowers
knowing just how long they'll keep

smother me
see how long I can hold my breath
I'll push you off
when I'm ready

fill your promises
with photographs and whiskey
a touch on the shoulder when my skin itches
for yours

kiss me in the morning
get on top
put my hand between your legs
feed me your words
with question mark digestifs
I'm longing to tell you about my day

when I'm ready

forget my birthday
on a Tuesday
throw me a shower
draw me a bath and climb in
we'll see how long
we can hold our breaths

outside the nursing home

i killed myself loving you
i'm bumbling and bright-eyed
bright like a stone wet with saliva

it is freezing rain
and the carousel is lit up
easy susan giving head
behind the glowing
roan void of genitalia
incapable of arousal,
carved from hard wood

god decided on the mechanics
of anatomy
without consultation
(forgetting a handful
of fleshy details)

god hates the flesh he created.

redact it, then—
quit making excuses

all powerful?
you selfish fucker

my fingers, hot between her legs
she has both hands on my forearm
pushing me deeper in,
biting my earlobe

hard like carved wood,
I'm thinking about
the special kind of asshole
god has to be.

we developed
as newborns

our womb: your bedsheets

I am embryonic
&
we are starlings

I am ready to leave
this city

darling, is this love?

I've become an uncle
four times
I am three times an uncle
sometimes life writes equations
with subtraction marks

with yellow feeding tubes
and disposable face masks
maybe if we'd breathed in
more of his germs
and given him ours

the suffering would have balanced
a little

We have two sides:
we carry our flesh on skeletons
awkwardly at times, confidently at times
with hubris, at times.
We carry our souls on tall poles
distant from the earth
but not so far away
that we lose sight.

lose yrself to dance

james brown caught me naked in our living room
you away for work, me not-dancing
the way white people do, clumsily moving arms
and legs & leaving lipstick on my own collar
my tongue craving your skin as I pull the sweat
of summer afternoons through my hair
and hold myself like an early morning erection

i want a body that doesn't need to eat or sleep
maybe i don't want a body at all
just a mouth for cigarettes and whiskey
feet for dancing and hiking and boarding airplanes
do i get a discount on airfare
if i fit in the overhead compartment?

i'm over my heart
i'm a donor: take my organs
i'm sorry for how i treated them
i was focusing on ephemera

you aren't thinking about dying
we don't want to think about dying
you are spinning round and round
your hair in any still frame a halo
your wings are hollow bones
your tail feathers are the song
spilling from your lips, your lisp
is the thing that keeps me coming back

I've never heard words until now
imagine your teeth clenched
see polkadots of lens flare over your smile
be careful when the smoke machine turns on

don't waste this drink
whiskey isn't scarce
but we treat it like love
your lips smudged against the glass
your grimace at the tannins
your grimace reflects in the sweat
forming in beads against your glass
and on our shoulders and foreheads

we pedal our bikes to the top of the closest mountain
and listen for the kick drum and breaking glasses
somewhere else in the city

this isn't an exodus, this isn't an epiphany
but the skyline looks much clearer
from this place on your shoulders
reaching for a single star

in the basement across the street
Loren howled into the computer microphone
unable to see the moon
for concrete and carpet and clouds

I've been wearing this shirt for days
sleeping naked in hot Bangkok nights
and putting on the same clothes
it is impossible to feel clean here
it is impossible to care
I'm always drinking coffee or beer
my hands are never empty
in this city punctuated with motorcycles
and men trying to sell me suits
there is a tailor for every tourist
but I've grown accustomed to these sleeves
rolled up and these buttons
undone over my chest

drunk off bottles of Chang and roasted scorpion
I'm imbibing on the smells of
Thai food and the tap tap tapping
of the man in his fedora
fixing his bicycle so he can go on
selling tiny porcelain elephants
or Harley Davidson cigarette cases
I'm constantly shaking my head
I'm constantly offered wares

lady
listen
we are lingering
loosely, a bookworm paradise
untacking, unkempt
and taking a chance
but we lost our fortunes
months ago

so what are we betting?
what are we banking on?
luck is
a handful of coins
on thumbs
waiting

not a woman
hailing a taxi

softball, Tuesday

up past our bedtimes
the only lights
are stadium lights
and you are waiting for a phone call
drunk on whiskey
and the love of the game

this they'll say,
when we find you
looking down from the windowsill
watching the street awaken

this they'll say,
we'll be watching
up into your window
letting our cigarettes burn
then die

this you'll say,
my tea's gone bitter
as I watched you watching
I let the leaves sit
too long

this they'll say,
we've work to do
digging holes, raising beams
in the cool of autumn

this you'll say,
I've sage to pick
and dry, but for this they'll stay
watching
as my kettle boils again

The pollution makes me want cigarettes
like some kind of control over pollution.
My music, in its quiet moments,
is punctuated by Chinese radio
played at a table of men chain-smoking
and barely drinking.

I seek a different ratio.

I seek a world lost in the woods:
not my father's war.
A world where cellos are weapons
and percussion, say, brush-rolled symbols,
are battle cries.
I seek a world where we settle our quarrels
with jazz
where a stand-up bass appears
fierce like a German Panzer.
I, II, III, IV:
artillery means the patience
to sit through a trumpet solo
and defeat means
standing up in the middle of it,
saying loudly,
"I need to use the bathroom."

The pollution of a smoky barroom
is something I'd like to see
at my wake.
My bodyweight equal—
pounds to litres
—to the volume of whiskey consumed.

That is, I'd like to see my father drunk at my wake.

I seek a different ratio.

I dreamed I had a Vietnamese girlfriend
we were on a train in east China
where they sell cigarettes and baijiu
on the snack cart—that much was pulled
from real life.

Rescued from her oppressive father
we were fleeing his chariots in a
locomotive fury, powered by coal
and even China isn't that antiquated:
electricity here howls.

When we stopped in Nanjing, she asked
to get off. Even in my dreaming state
I have got to fight to keep things close.
We wandered the streets of the South Capitol
sipping baijiu until morning.

underneath that umbrella shell
I can only see the red of your lips
and whites of your teeth
what color are your eyes?
do you close them when you laugh?
what kind of jewelry do you keep in your ears?

it isn't raining and your legs show
you aren't afraid of the sun
maybe it's bad luck to close your umbrella
while I have these questions

are your eyes focused on your book?
the hotel eden by ron carlson
or are you watching the feet of passers-by
as your fingerprints play with each other?
are you nervous?

your feet sit calmly in your roman sandals
maybe you are a secret agent
or femme fatale
maybe I'm your next mark
would you use piano wire or poison?
you seem like a digitalis kind of girl
it's too hot for these foxgloves

do you go swimming at night?
do you need people around for adventure?
do you have days
or even hours
where you have nothing to do?
if you close your eyes when you laugh
do you keep them open while you are crying?

in the thirty seconds it takes me to order a beer
you disappear
and I am sure you are a spy
lifted up by a silent helicopter
still with that umbrella shielding your face
you fire a poison dart from the ferrule

maybe I'll see you here again
but you'll be in a burqa
closing your eyes while you laugh

we, like the ghosts before us,
struggle with alcohol & jealousy.

we don't dread the earth-labor
the tilling or digging or planting.

we dread coming home
grateful for bars,

when we should be grateful
for lover's arms.

when we realized which hinges we hang from
the slotted shade of the willow tree
looked much better
than our venetian blinds

a horse and buggy is fed
by the grass it tramples
there are still rivers where
you can drink the water
there are still stomachs
that let it through

we haven't kissed in decades and your lips are a saccharine buildup. the mets are playing the phillies or the medicine is next to the fingernail clippers, we've lost all chances at talking and you spit chewed gum into the trash and I watch. the cold of winter makes me think of where we sweat and why bread grows mold and how on

some days, eight whiskeys in

I'll cut out the blue-white circles and spread butter. these days we cut out the blue-white flame and I'll be more stubborn than you:

I can stay cold for days. I can imagine Jimmy's death in the avalanche and know I'm not as cold as my numb hands tell me and I realize I am as cold as my hands tell me.

I've been coming
to memories of you
since you left this city

I've been going
to work, the river, home
swimming in the calendar
dying on Tuesdays
waking on Saturdays

borrowing cars for
drives through the foothills
demanding beauty
from the sagebrush
and lazy cattle

I stopped being sad
on a Thursday
for once
I've been hugging
everyone I can get my arms around

no one feels like you
no one laughs like you

I quit my job
on a Friday
I wanted to feel in control of something

what they say about

we met on paper
under a night filled with your blues
we danced to notorious lightning
we stayed dry

what they say about anticipation is true
and what they say about riding your bike
with whiskey in your bag
into the mountains
is true

I saw a coyote, an enemy of horses, creeping through the Sourdough Lodge parking lot where I am sleeping. I imagine these Christmas lights stay up all year long. Humans crave the symbolism of love and money that drive them: right now they are just keeping me from sleep. I'd hike into the mountains and set my tent but the coyote made is pretty clear that I should stay near the coffee and hot springs where I belong. I rarely believe I belong anywhere. And I crave to be more like that slinking half-wolf, returning every night to some burrow in the cold hills.

since I lost you in the mountains—
scarred with autumn and a penchant for conifers
—I've scoured every bar for us, inheriting whiskeys
hoping to stumble into your laughter

we awoke in the mountains it was blue
everywhere
the snow was in our cabin
the snow was preformed into balls
inviting us to act eleven
again
we held ourselves back
we held each other
in this place without food and
someone made coffee
and left

beyond the first trees dogs bayed
at a deer carcass, such a generous breed
we found crackers
we were without shoes
so we played the ground was lava
eleven again
you pulled a single serving of strawberry freezer jam
from behind my ear
and I made your hesitancy
disappear as we hopped from nightstand
to countertop
the snow was lava, our socks still dry

we took our game seriously and
after exhausting every surface in our small cabin
we climbed back onto the bed
full of cracker crumbs and we made dinner
of each other we ate our fill
in the blue light we awoke
in the mountains

there is trail
through the foothills
and I am convinced it turns and overlaps
to spell your name in cursive

I need a helicopter to
see you written out
across the valley
to take me to you

I will take the wrong turn twice
to cross the t in your name

to the ground
I've already conquered that once

flying is the only
thing that keeps us
from settling

your eyes can't compete
with this neon

there is a hill by a field one half mile from here
we could lay down
climb
somersault
 in the wet grass
stand like gods above the ants
and when we're gone
they'll say:

weren't those curious deities
almost palindromes
just whispers
Calixta made a greater first impression

I wanted to climb away with you
to hide in the stars

there is a baying in the distance
and we haven't left the bar

don't walk down that alley alone

there is a grotesque crooning
in the distance

with which we'll never
 be able
to compete

take my shoulders for granted
take my arms and thighs for granted
listen more carefully to the sounds our bodies make
the creaking, the moaning, the reminding

that
we don't have many mountains left in us

all we can do is dance when the room is quiet

you never asked for a bodyguard
you asked for a kiss

I was left alone too long

believe me, the constant wanting is
a broken circle
 it is two half-circles
the relief of a quiet room
the struggle of your feet moving too slowly
on the sidewalk

I never asked for a bodyguard

I found my answer in the film-soft red light
of the bar bathroom
watching myself in the sink mirror
hands cupped of holy water, lips glistening from your gloss
you asked for a kiss

&

I washed it from my face
your lips are built from a dream
your lips are a nightmare

we can't leave yet
there are terrifying people in masks, their faces
identical underneath
with knives in their boots

our lives hidden in books

we joked about being invincible
but

we aren't.

I went looking for black bears
in the woods of the pacific coast
the windblown trees seemed
to be running from the ocean

I cinched my coat: the bushes wet with rain,
the air with brine, my lips with whiskey
when I finally stumbled upon your burrow

I smoked my half pack of cigarettes
and laid down to hibernate
in our empty bed

I met god by Williams Creek
where it feeds the Applegate River
there was a dead skunk
under the waterfall

I said goodbye to god
by the ocean—
my mom sends me pictures of the sunsets
over the water
as proof that god
hasn't said goodbye to me

there is something about god:
it only exists in a fluid state

a giant crow plucked at crab legs
its body comical in length
surrounded by broken sand dollars
and bits of trash
I chuckled at its size
until it broke into two
and each gull
flew away in opposite directions

I learned something about perspective

my parents live in the same house
never close enough
to be confused as one
they get along well
in separate rooms

when the rain falls in Boise
it comes all at once
this is how it rained
for seven days
when god realized he fucked up—
and wanted a do-over

when it rains on the Oregon coast
it lasts for decades,
a lifetime without sun
and yet people never fear
the floodwaters

I watched a seagull limping
and pause, leaning on her one good leg
cockeyed like a drunk
putting her weight on a bar top
with every flutterflight
I watched her wince with every landing
her sisters gloated in their happy trot
across the parking lot

a woman pulling oyster crackers from her pocket
wasn't using her right arm
tearing the tiny packages open
with her teeth and the little hexagons
exploding like fireworks onto the sand that blows
endlessly from the beach up into the town of Pacific City
is it optimism or dreadful foresight that names these places?

who sweeps the sand
back to the driftwood and rotting crabshells?
perhaps god, humans only use brooms
to clean up their own trash
so they can bag it up and truck it out
to where they have decided trash should be

I watched a seagull limping
fat on oyster crackers and sand
instead of raw oysters and crab meat
and I wanted so badly to be her
instead of one of these sweeping humans

there is hostel at the bottom of the ocean
where the sea creatures—
the ones we don't know about
—go to drink local beer
and sharks aren't allowed
it isn't because they won't swim that deep
they are called sharks for a reason
and there is a pool table
in the hostel on the ocean floor.

a season of sidewalks dressed in dead leaves
oh, what a rhythm when we walk side by side!
we've made plans for when the lilacs bloom
one winter away, but promises lose feet to frostbite.
I hunger for your warm skin, nutrition for your fingertips,
starving now on ocean-cold sand & oyster shells.

autumn has become a midsummer night's monologue—
why, though, when we play such a crippling duet?

II

KITTEN

You left
The door
c r a c k e d o p e n
On your way out

You filled the room
With your TOO cold

I don't want to live in a world
That allows you to feel
The way you do

TOO

III

KITTEN

When do I become
Someone

Worth interrogating?

Dig deep
Into these locks

This scalp is aching
For the strength of your fingertips

The fists that you form

In the tresses
Of our fragrance

I

am

buried inside of you
Your heated breathing-out
And your chilling inhalation
Against my chest

I crumble at the impression
You've made
The blood-blisters and teeth-marks

The explanations to

Who?

When I take off my shirt
To jump in the river
Where your sun accidentally called me

“dad”

Why we stayed together
How we stayed together

We didn't.

IV

KITTEN

the hospital begs
four
bags of of of of
LOST MINDS

(blood)

5.

we are writing a shitty haiku

IV ...
(VII?)

in the dirt

in a windstorm

V.

v

kitten

I watch a kid
Make a V with his

POINTERFINGER t o n g u e MIDDLEFINGER

At a woman
Trying to buy a newspaper

Perhaps

She is just looking

IV the crossword
(the way we used to look for)

5 ACROSS:

_ E A T H

(with)

5 DOWN:

_ I G N I T Y

we are only missing

I

I

I

(two?) letter(s)

[(D)
an IV, we are dehydrated
& losing blood]

...

Desire beauty
Don't be surprised when
Don't be _ _ _ _ _

A

L

I

VVV

E

(when)

I, II, III, IV, Very much
have this habit
of finishing the crossword
IV ... (without) you.

VI

KITTEN

I'm clenching teeth
Thinking
6 (VI) is such a prettier number
Than V (5)

5 (V)

Vulva
Venus
Vagina

I changed my mind—
V is the prettiest number

I hope I can make it
To SEVEN
IVI
VII

ali, kelly, kathy, Tay,

Lore is a crumbling ideology
the idea
that we need to keep any of these
STORIES

store these ideas
like crumpled receipts in your pocket

RECEIVE
the love that is evolving around you

- (75 words)

VII

(katherine)

i made it

I II III MADE IT
(IV V VI)

VII
IVI

along the ivy
crawling up your body
your legs like eiffel towers
your breasts
like punctuation
stopping everything
IN ITS TRACTS

i track
your words, lips, LIPS, lotion

(i surViVed)

Seattle, Washington & Yachats, Oregon

It's the ephemera that drew my attention
How a gin & tonic looks pale turquoise
In evening light—
A perfect marriage of
The concomitant blue bulb at the strike of a sulphur match and
The flash of green on the horizon
As the sun sets over the Pacific

Silver City, Idaho or Bear Valley Springs, California

I can spend hours hand feeding a horse
Watching her strong jaw
As I massage her neck
Those muscles
Her lips inspect the palm of my hand
For more apple, celery, green beans
The sound of her giant teeth chomping baby carrots
Could put me to sleep
The breath from her nostrils
Is sibling to the comfort of a hot spring in winter

It wasn't until years later that I learned
Some suckling horses are called
Green beans

Trail Creek, Idaho

It wasn't until years later that I could look at a hot spring
Without filling up on a sense of loss
(or)
WHISKEY

I'm saving all my broccoli stalks and trimmings of asparagus
For the horses
I'm dirtying dishes just to have something to wash
A few dashes of tabasco

I'm not eating much these days

I will wash my glass
Between each drink
I'll wash my glass a dozen times a night
When my hands are soapy and wet
At least
They are occupied with an empty glass

This is why I'll never quit smoking
This is why I'll wash down crumbs of tobacco
(stuck to my lips like burrs on horsehide)
With one more glass of whiskey.
Rinse.
Repeat.

Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho

IT IS A SEASON OF FLASHBACKS

A real blockbuster

It is a season of mornings

of ghosts

Whispering words like

LUPINE

&

SALMONBERRIES

These ghosts are terrible

At keeping their voices down

Yelling words like **Denver, Colorado** & tequila & a recurring
presence in your sex dreams years before we undressed together
&

EPHEMERAL

The Riverbank at Municipal Park

A flower crown, public nudity wet with baby oil
And a tartness on the tongue of
A dead rat ANOTHER DEAD RAT
Burial at sea: an old cigar box and two half-dollars
For the ferryman

First Intermission:

Shanghai, China

I'm not a dancer until I've had too much to drink and
I'm not a drinker until I'm listening intently to the sound
of the wine glass clinking against your ring and I want
to hold your hand again from across the ocean we are
separated only by water & as we know I am no swimmer
you cannot roll cigarettes while swimming you cannot
light cigarettes while swimming I will walk to you
on the water and Jesus oh what is wine without water
oh Jesus turn this sea to Malbec and let us swim to the
middle of the pacific our skin dyed plum purple our hands fighting
our fingers interlocking our sea-legs naked and rejoicing
in the warmth of waking up twisted in sheets

Which reminds me
of a poem I wrote
on the custom stationary
at the Modern Hotel:
(Boise, Idaho)

Cleaning up the mess

Of our sex
Can last all day

Not so much cleaning
But clinging
To sheets wet with our sweat

We've been ignoring alarms
For hours
Ours is an alarming resolve

To stay in bed.

Which brings us back to
THESE HORSES: Greenville, Maine
Ice so thick you can drive a truck
Across the lake
A penchant for adventure
That can only be borne
From the boredom of a small town
We total snowmobiles on fence posts
Like Don Quixote riding Rocinante
Tilting at windmills
The hooves of horses
Never need a parking spot
They never fumble for quarters
Outside your apartment downtown

I envy them:
They know of neither love nor money

SWALLOW YOUR TONGUE, she says
Put that bit in your mouth.
I feel like I haven't spoken for days
I won't suffer the limbo of your friendship
I will put the bit into my mouth.

Thailand

Our hips will get acquainted
Our shoulders, old friends
On Halloween night we eat scorpion and grasshopper
Off wooden skewers. We
dress up and
Undress

I'll find your tattoos
With my hands
In the bedsheet dawn
I've left mine
Out in the open
I'm inclined to surrender
My forearms to you

There is a shrine on the rooftop of this hostel
Glittering, gilded
Sun-bleached and peeling
There is a shrine to you

In the absence

Of whiskey on my lips

(I'll never make that mistake again.)

AND THIS

Is where it gets serious

Boise, Idaho

You loved me until I fell for you
This is what I love so much about these goddamn horses
They recognize value
But aren't crippled by economy

They treasure their foals: colt and filly
But never have to suffer love

Money and love were made by men
Not God.
Revealed by language
Not Science.
Practiced by humans
Not
These horses.

Boise, Idaho

There is purple hidden in your tresses
Indistinguishable to someone
Who hasn't had their fingers
Tangled in your hair
While you beg me to pull it
While you yell
"COME HARD!"
And ask me as we drift off to sleep
And again
In the early morning
"Did you come hard enough?"

We came, and you left hard enough.

Bay City, Oregon & Chengdu, China

We look past these summer outfits
And into our histories: I am in China again
Standing on the overpass where I named stars
Cradling baijiu with pressed lips

Teach me more about memory
Slather your philosophies on me like hot wax

I writhe, you bind my hands with promises
As you tiptoe backward from the room

Second Intermission:

Bonneville, Idaho

no one buried the dead elk in winter & come spring we were
climbing
over its skeleton in the morning and tripping over its skeleton
at night and clumsily I spilled red wine on your white blouse.
I searched your eyes for anger but you unbuttoned your shirt
and dressed the antlers of the giant skeleton with it

you said it looked like a Halloween prank

you asked me to take your picture by the crime scene

we stayed topless for days in the woods on the porch in the river
you insisted on bringing wine into the hotspring and we took
Communion in excess, the blood of Christ ran down our mouths
and necks and into the water and when we kissed it tasted like
wine

but salty, like wine but honeyed and like wine we ran down the
length
of our bodies there in the mountains we howled

the night we echoed into

AND NOW

I am in the state I was born
But never lived

Salinas, California

Named for the salt marshes
I steal a stalk of Brussels sprouts

From Lemonade Springs Farm

Whose sign reads:

EGGS

PRODUCE

MEAT

Eggs produce many things:

You. Me. Hollandaise. Salmonella.

Three nieces. One dead nephew.

I cook these tiny cabbages over stolen wood &

fall asleep watching a crow dig

Insects out of the earth

Thinking about the morning I woke up

With blood in my pubic hair

And a sigh of relief

I woke you up, saying,

We don't need that pregnancy test

But I am still going to the store

For avocados

Do you need anything?

In **Bear Valley Springs, California**

I am feeding horses

And asking them questions

As though we are on a date

Do you have a favorite song

Or

Time of day

Or

Do you believe in ghosts?

Have you ever been pregnant?

Tonight is playing out like a Leonard Cohen album or

Reading like the label of an overpriced bottle of wine
soft and melancholic
with notes of optimism and empathy

In **The Middle Of Nowhere, Ohio**

I catch fireflies in a mason jar
To light our way back to the motor home.

In **Boston** I find

Horses punished, yoked to carts of tourists
In Boston I am hit in the face
With a bottle of whiskey
For looking too Irish
The swelling and the irony is killing me

In **New York** I see no horses

But I think of all the poets
Yoked to the hearts of tourists
I smell money and love
Entwined at Hunts Point:

The spectacle of red light districts
That mash-up of bones and sex
The tangibility of money and love,
Humankind's fiercest creations

I climb into the bed of my RV
Unable to sleep.

Your Bedroom, Boise Idaho

I miss the concurrence
Of waking beside you
The glow of your teeth marks

In the hot skin of my chest
As the sun
Casts its soft light
Through your slotted blinds

I miss the smell
Of your wet
In my pubic hair

I unzip to pee
At work

Like Brautigan's surprise
On the toilet bowl

I become aroused
In the cold bathroom
Begging my memories
For a hint
A scent
Of what dissolved
In the backwash of your juices
Flooding my mouth

I am drowning

I use your underwear to wipe my lips clean
I use my tongue
Against your lips & clitoris
To whet my lips again

We are at war

Yosemite National Park

I watch Death creep through
The parking lot of the Cedar Creek Lodge
Sitting outside my room:
The rotary dial cord stretched taut
To the door
So I can smoke and listen to that fruitless ringing
Simultaneously

These Christmas lights must stay up all year long
The fucking people here—
John Muir is rolling over in his grave.
Humans crave the
Ghosts & illusion
Of adventure
But fall asleep fat with love and money.

Death sees me and nods.
We make an agreement:
"We'll both stay where we belong."
I rarely believe I belong anywhere.

"I'm sorry!" I yell.
They turn their head and nod again, exhaling.
Your scent wafts across the parking lot
There is a hint of blood in the air
Different from the rumination of carrots and apples
In the hot breath of these horses
But with a familiar sweetness

"You belong in the pasture," Death rasps.
I nod, they disappear into the fog
And I dial the number again.
Someone on the other end of the line
Picks up.

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*dates reflect when the files were last edited on Jam's personal documents, not necessarily when the poems were composed

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jam Hale (Benjamin Allen Hale) was born in rural California in the winter of 1987 to a pastor and a homeschool teacher. After moving around, Jam spent most of their adult life in Boise, Idaho cultivating many friendships working as a coffee barista and bartender downtown, reading poems and stories at local literary events such as Death Rattle Writers Festival, Storyfort at Treefort Music Fest, and theBOISEAN. A tree on the bank of the Boise River is dedicated as a place for friends to gather and remember the joy and poetry that Jam brought into so many lives.

