

HAPPY COMES AFTER

by

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In dedication to Leon Barnes

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PREFACE

Two facts I learned in my MFA, whose combination is the emphasis of *Happy Comes After*: All poems rely on a structure of some sort to arrive at meaning; sound is a structure.

I believe any poem's underlying structure offers accessibility to meaning that is unique to that combination of poem and structure—this is my acknowledgement sonic structure is not the only means by which language is structured. In fact, for natural English speakers, I imagine sonic structure presents itself only after a few other options have been exhausted. Take, for example, cause-and-effect, or narrative structure: *if this then that*. Causality of events is the tie which binds words, clauses, sentences, poems together. Another example is distributive structure, wherein $A=B$ and $B=C$, therefore $A=C$. Associative structure is common too; were I to write *moo*, likely an image of a cow would arrive in a reader's mind, despite never explicitly mentioning a cow. Further, studies of Biblical Hebrew have revealed a type of syntactical structure unfound in English—sentences arranged from most important word to least, or vice versa, resulting in a linguistic crescendo in which the final word of a sentence is the thing to which all other elements of the sentence point. This brief list neither does justice to poems which rely on many other means to arrive at meaning, nor imagines the types of structure that exist in poems when their language is one with which I am unfamiliar. But, I hope these considerations display a brief truth I've discovered in my efforts to present the poems contained within this collection.

One example of many within this collection which demonstrates these considerations in-the-act could be taken from the opening lines of “Parable of the Sower via MF DOOM,” which read “farmer soil toiled seeds / slick-shaped trees boil foil me”. This is a play on Jesus's famous teaching referred to as “The Parable of the Sower,” a metaphorized story wherein a farmer sews seeds in a variety of places—good soil, bad soil, roadside, rocks—to various ends. Seeds in the

best soil grow healthily, seeds in other places succumb to birds, drought, or weeds; all these things an extended metaphor about Jesus’s teachings. Relying on narrative structure as Jesus does, The Parable of the Sower stretches across nine verses in Luke 13. However, by redirecting this story through a sonic lens in the poem, the idea that a farmer’s seeds are subject to conditions outside the seeds themselves (and to some extent, the farmer; this is one of many facets to the parable) is rerouted to a musical retelling.

More precisely, “farmer soil toiled seeds / slick-shaped trees boil foil me” relies upon a hyper-condensed sonic infrastructure: “farmer” is first introduced to generate a protagonist focus; “soil” permits alliteration and rhyme to overtake the couplet’s remainder; *s* styled alliteration surrounds the line-break (from “soil” to “trees,” and *s* sound appears five times); opening *t* consonants form chiastic enclosure to the alliteration; “soil,” “toil,” “boil,” and “foil” rely on exact rhyme, evoking a single vowel sound across all verbs in the couplet. Just this opening couplet, its content guided by ear, evokes vocal turns core to my poetry philosophy. Sound-play is not limited to one wrench in the poet’s toolbox, it is my choice to make sonic choreography the tentpole of my poetry process. All writers have access to the same letters and words, it is syntax which differentiates us (Li-Young Lee: “Syntax is Identity”). May these poems’ identity—sometimes direct, sometimes subtle, sometimes another—be that they are playful without frivolity (a la Tomaž Šalamun), serious without cynicism, and bounding with sound.

Another truth of the mechanics of sound within “Parable of the Sower via MF DOOM” is found within the title. MF DOOM, a hip-hop artist who passed away in October of 2020, served as its origin point. Much of my dedication to word acrobatics is found in my enjoyment of rap, a medium of music that my collection finds itself engaged with both in this poem and others—Ghostface Killah’s *Supreme Clientele* is named in “Graham’s Number,” keen readers might notice

language bleeding in “Goop,” written on a day Raekwon’s *Only Built 4 Cuban Lynx...* grooved in the background. This is music I enjoy, music that guides my poems as much as literary poetry because rappers are contemporary poets. I know the art form of rap is one of the great articulations of Black class struggle in America, and that is something I never intend to appropriate, whitewash, or take lightly. Further, I know that partaking in something as integral to black culture as hip-hop means I have a responsibility to be actively anti-racist for the community who allows me into an art form that is predominantly theirs—if there is a moment in these poems or my personal life I have failed to do so, it is my failure to make right. I say all this to make note: the great practitioners of sound art, which is my first allegiance, are often great rappers and producers. J Dilla’s chopping/sampling methods, MF DOOM’s concentrated rhyme schemes, and Young Thug’s extreme slant rhyme distortion are notable influences on my sonic textures— these artists and I share a mutual love of sound and expression which serves as a touchstone for my poetics.

To be clear, those touchstones are mechanical—means discovered and invented toward writing poems as poems present themselves to me. These techniques, built upon my dedication to sound structure, intersect with the themes of my work to form poems unique to my voice. These themes are most notably, but not limited to: God, loneliness, and self; sex and romance; joy; family and inheritance. All pairings are intentional.

Of these thematic structures, the one I think most worthy of dissertation is the relationship between God, loneliness, and self. I imagine to reading my poems as a favorable commentary on God would be difficult. This is not by design. In fact, I think anyone who knows me as a person separate from my art would acknowledge I am an announced Christian, one who takes his faith seriously, studies scripture, and is not afraid to have difficult conversations about the role of the Christian church in the past 1700 years of human suffering. I feel an attachment to Jesus and

Jesus's teaching. At the same time, I am capricious. If I give myself enough credit to say I am a smart writer capable of intellectually engaging with my faith and its repercussions, I still must interface with my faith emotionally. Compounding this age of self-Christian discovery is self-function discovery. This realization is almost redundantly plain: as I discover God, myself, and the world, I discover how I interface with God, myself, and everything around me.

Plainly, I spent most of my MFA years feeling very lonely. Lonesomeness takes many forms, too: romantic, theological, social. In poems such as "On Valentine's Night, I Cut My Hand on a Highball Glass," the speaker deals largely with world-engagement, only a slight verbal nod to religiosity in the last line, "thee I baptize." In another poem, "Graham's Number," the connecting question between self-discovery and divine-discover becomes more explicit:

I see more worlds of me than sound for names I look / in good book name
my warts Amos Jonah Judge / respond no never they don't never know
response my question all I / ask: do you know why I feel this feel
filled full of feel / I feel full know never my name no heavier name I have
than thy / so I ask again: what feeling is feeling my name

I do not believe, in the collection's current iteration, the speaker fully arrives at a name for themselves or the world around them. That name, divine or otherwise, is still to be found. In a future iteration—perhaps the version of this collection that is a completed book manuscript—the answer will be more apparent. My intention with these poems in the future is not to find the singular answer to this question of identity and spiritual reconciliation, but to find the next question I must ask. I am not under the impression there is a sound, noun, or word that collects the breadth of what I, the writer, know myself to be. The larger governance of my, the writer's, personhood and spirituality is dependent on obliquely observing the religious constitution of myself through poems. I am messy. To name the divine, to spell my relationship to it, is messier.

To evoke the "constitution" of the writer summons, by extension, the collection's super-structure, or the book's larger organization principles. *Happy Comes After* found home separated

into three smaller combinations, bookends of a unified narrative with a middle section distinct from the larger collection—one might think of Robin Coste Lewis’s *Voyage of the Venus Sable*. The first of these three sections, titled “Forty Corncob Bedframe” (a linguistic twist lifted from “Goop”) contains about two-thirds of the collection’s content, and is a loose internalized registry of a speaker who is alone on Valentine’s night. A linked series in the opening of the collection (titles beginning “On Valentine’s Night”) situate the speaker’s emotional and physical state of being. The final lines of the “On Valentine’s Night the Gym Idles with Ugly Guys Who Love Basketball” read “as full of joy / and vigor as any of us have ever been.” These lines, very near the front of the collection, permit an honest glimpse at whom the speaker can be. Poems such as “Dinner Party with My Wants” and “Boy, Lonely” more fully reveal the psyche of the speaker and how they interact with their feelings.

No poem in “Forty Corncob Bedframe” better encapsulates what the speaker has come to understand of themselves, sex, and the divine than “Erasure of My First Sext with Commentary,” a dual poem: on one hand, an erasure of a sexting exchange, on the other, a theological commentary treating the erasure as a holy text. While not situated as the final poem of the section, I do consider it the poem in which the various tensions in the collection—self and divine, loneliness, romanticism—intersect most explicitly. As stands, the section ends abruptly. “I Wake Up at 2:13 a.m. and No One Else is Home Since I Live Alone” serves as the closing poem, a poem which abandons all themes except loneliness, and poem absent all structure but sound.

The second section, epigraphed by Brenda Hillman, is a lyric sequence distinct from the linked narrative in the first and third sections. The fourteen untitled autobiographical poems which compose “The Little House” are non-linear, though generally all situated in the past. The poems are a stark departure from the sound-centric structure and themes found in “Forty Corncob

Bedframe.” More intensely than anywhere else in the collection, the speaker’s lens shifts toward family, inheritance—functionally, an echo to the past to find answers for present questions. Mechanically, these poems rely on tension created by the cross-pollination of two topics the speaker’s inheritance (be it the south, their family, their lack of inheritance, or The Little House itself) and the blight of the American chestnut tree. It is my intention, via structured narrative poems with “blurbs” or “tickers” at the bottom, for these two stories to exchange their language and create a new one. The first poem in the sequence asks a thesis statement, “What had we?”, which evolves into the more pointed “*The fuck is decay made of?*” by the sequence’s end. For these questions I have only answers which are revealed by the poems themselves, nothing of my own volition.

However, just as “The Little House” section of *Happy Comes After* reaches into the past to answer essential questions about identity, the third section— “What Makes Me Happy” —optimistically peers toward an unspecified future via three poems. “Facewashing at 6:53,” the first poem, is the moment in the collection in which the speaker begins to approach clarity. The language of the collection, always in favor of sound-play, finds itself at long last announcing what it wants: “Up comes the sun once chirping my nose / all around my nose / rosy face my around all kisses blade // kisses on the shoulder kisses / all of most kisses want I”. While questions posed on the speaker’s want are answered, questions about identity still sit out of reach. The poem concludes “just me and my ache // again alone / am I the morning / begs the silent dew” in repose with the section title. What makes the speaker happy is, perhaps, a day renewed—at the very least, the clarity that comes with silence, an antinomy to sound. The last poem in “What Makes Me Happy” relies on the sound experiment at its fullest. Namesake for the collection, “What Makes Me Happy Comes After This” is the poem which I feel collects the thesis into one unit and spits it out for the

reader. “I hope it turns you on” the poem begins, then proceeds into linguistic gymnastics which include

my teeth grit beloved I can for you be / I can I can be I can be I can I /
can I be Applebee’s sip bourbon reams / be I can I for you again tithe twist
tweed / like fat cats stray my blues for you naked a whole ballet / I’d thrash

By the end of this passage, approaching the poem’s conclusion, clarity is arriving to the speaker: meaning is a thing created by the self, for the self, and meaning for this speaker—for me, the poet who is the speaker—takes the form of sound. Words on a page becomes words in the air, the air a new page. Even romance and love become subject to sound, the poem’s end: “panties camping by hamper scanty lathers ruffle / me supple you pocket-noun you forever sound.” *Happy Comes After* reaches its formal conclusion with a speaker existing in flux, much like its author. Has the speaker reached the end of their journey into sound, romance, sexuality, inheritance, and divine? I, the writer, certainly have just begun. What is undeniable about the relationship between myself, the speaker, this collection, and these poems is this: never in my life have I been more equipped to ask or answer whatever question presents itself next—whatever it is, may it make me happy.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents	
Preface.....	6
Abstract.....	15
I – Forty Corncob Bedframe	17
Dinner Party with My Wants	18
On Valentine’s Night the Gym Idles with Ugly Guys Who Love Basketball	19
On Valentine’s Night, I Cut my Hand on a Highball Glass.....	21
How to Pick a Lock.....	22
On Valentine’s Night, I Think About My Crush Instead of God’s Love	24
Boy, Lonely.....	26
Lonelyboy	27
Elegy for a Dead Mechanic I	28
Graham’s Number.....	30
My First Snapchat Premium Scam	31
How to Steal a BMW Radio	34
Parable of the Sower via MF DOOM	35
Elegy for a Dead Mechanic II.....	36
Divine Addresses Me in Dream	37
Goop.....	39
Goop.....	41
Cento of Kanto where POKEMON are POEMS	42
Elegy for a Dead Mechanic III.....	45
Confession Watching Heaven-Goers	48
Erasure of My First Sext with Commentary	50
Wet Dream in Reverse	65
So Sweet the Rain It Would Not Drip Off a Thorn	66
II – The Little House.....	73
III – What Makes me Happy.....	89
Facewashing at 6:53.....	90

In a Sonic Stall I Change My Car Battery and Imagine Falling in Love.....	91
What Makes Me Happy Comes After This.....	92
Notes	94
Addendum with Joy	95

ABSTRACT

“Excuse me, flows just grow through me / Like trees to branches, cliffs to avalanches”—Notorious B.I.G. “The What”

These are my flows, they grow through me.

Happy Comes After

“Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed
be thy name Thy kingdom come, thy will
be done on Earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this
day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead
us not into temptation but deliver us from evil,
for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory
forever and ever”

— Prince, *Controversy*

I – FORTY CORNCOB BEDFRAME

“Then the LORD spoke to Job out of the storm:
‘Brace yourself like a man;
I will question you,
and you shall answer me.’”

— *Job 40:6-7*

DINNER PARTY WITH MY WANTS

I eavesdrop,
caviar molared,
they spiel all
I love. No
crime, alone.
No warrant,
no courting
just catfish
platter, tinsel
crawdads, shoes
cut from quartz
floors. I go
long. I want
long. To get
there, I don't
fucking know.
Somewhere
past God:
my sprawl.

ON VALENTINE'S NIGHT THE GYM IDLES WITH UGLY GUYS WHO LOVE BASKETBALL

Here, among them, I am in my kingdom. I am the crowned
heir, my LeBron 10s porous, the hole in the Air Max

tech has me jumping like I've exploded
off a sinking air mattress. Yes, I am lord
of we fifteen who don't hoop hard enough

to trim our doughy frames into respectable *ooh-ahh*
abs, whose handles are mostly love and only dunk
when Oreos and milk come to shove. I am the monarch,

the sovereign prince of the dish-then-swish,
the most-high of the post and toast, those

whose spin moves are set to "heavy load." My people
and I know what love is, though, we find the open man,
the ball dumped to the dope in the corner, his defender

flatfoot near the weakside block, while the ball
swirls through the air from the shooter's trebuchet
arm, spins two-and-a-half revolutions per second,

hanging in the air like our suspended notions of loneliness.
Before it can hit the rim, as it barely does, one small

guard with his rhombus-shaped nose leaks
for an almost-hosed layup on the other end,
twirls the ball into the nylon bassinet

like a rock in a blender, then struts back on defense,
arms stretched for a low five, as full of joy
and vigor as any of us have ever been.

ON VALENTINE'S NIGHT, I CUT MY HAND ON A HIGHBALL GLASS

knuckles bleed little red and red
red red the sink no survival

there is no survival
that's fair some dirty dish no rinse

my fear be-who-I-am and never fully like me
all which my hands are is me I can share

knoblike me can't feel and people
billion atoms per chip of tooth

my new squeeze death I bury me by palm
all doors hard running hot to sleep I want handprints sud

residue pavement July
why fingers your red pledge

of violence I dodge one name or twenty
thee I baptize

HOW TO PICK A LOCK

I'm running out of caveats but yes, I'm
Christian, long-eroded daily devotion habit
doth detest. Yes, yes, I know what I embed—
world's largest non-profit; conquering, vain

holy-land-to-claim imperialist desisters; end-
time trumpet spitters; Vatican ambiance; vanquish,
forgive, live-right scripture mine. Divine counsel
membership renewed each minor interruption,

belt a good God Damn when a doorknob bruises
my hip. More often than healthy to admit, I think
of human totality. Suffering symbolic
regime change since Ecclesiastes, frayed

bedspread spread again, stamping magnets
on fridge, fringe awareness of anything
not myself. It seems odd to me loving
queer friends would be at odds with loving all,

all I love is all I hold, and what will hold
me, I love back. Exegesis Genesis on,
I don't have. To hell with explaining
how. I love. I love thou I am I AM,

grammatical iambs syntactical
buyouts for hymns long gone—
my mother tongue is wet, wetting
at whim. I beg God know I *did*

mission trips, all I sewed American
white. There was a time, I think,
we “little Christs” got it right: renounce
military, join church; people still eat Caesar

salad 2000 years after Christ; communion wafers
address my dietary needs none; desert fast
forty days, honey locust beard sirloin
in evening light. I realized rules finicky

when trinity-affinity affirmation sprung
from dirt 300 years in; what Augustine thought
he seen isn’t my concern. Maybe I’ll get smited;
maybe hell is a door locked from the inside.

ON VALENTINE'S NIGHT, I THINK ABOUT MY CRUSH INSTEAD OF GOD'S LOVE

damned and salival
I blow your
ear viridian
we sit in hours
count lint
moan a whole
hymnal
thumb skin
stroke else
nothing
babble
me dowry
spring plums
cinnabar
shiver
violet islands
two by
two by
two
by your

scent fields

I tongue

clean

me

you in

my thin

bare

me

ribs

rum

sea

ribs

your ribs

along the light

your ribs

BOY, LONELY

is what a body feels like this
allow myself to lie convinced in bed I lie
slip over my thigh in warm tumbling
trousers toast arrive “too much” *never*
too much to wait it’s Luther Vandross
“*my love*” slinks out the soundmachine
to the dryer I turn it up higher
Oh my pacman patterned pajama pants
a half hour before bed I sneak
what gives I gives every night
I have an average amount of dick
nothing’s wrong with me says the internet
outside the prescription of perphenazine
I’m normal humble six-foot-three
I squat on my toilet I eat my sardines
they’re excellent never sticky like me
I stir fry my pad thai noodles
in my lonelyboy suite we’re different
you rent a bachelor pad I sulk

LONELYBOY

You rent a bachelor pad. I sulk
in my lonelyboy suite. We're different.
I stir fry my pad thai noodles,
they're excellent, never sticky. Like me.
I squat on my toilet. I eat my sardines.
I'm normal, humble, six-foot-three.
outside the prescription of perphenazine
nothing's wrong with me. The internet says
I have an average amount of dick
to give. So what gives? Every night
a half hour before bed I sneak
my PacMan patterned pajama pants
to the dryer. I turn it up higher. "Oh
my love" slinks out the soundmachine.
It's Luther Vandross—it's "*never too
much, never too much*" to wait
for my tumbling trousers to toast,
arrive, slip over my thigh. In their warm
allow myself to lie in bed, lie convinced—
this is what a body feels like.

ELEGY FOR A DEAD MECHANIC I

Hey Pa, real cool how you never
used a scan tool to unfuss a car
acting up, instead put ear near
belts and hand on fans – must be
the intake. Easy until your mid-sixties,
when Beamers swapped to chips
and switches, less gas, less combustion.
You were the last of a kind, opened
the bay doors with sunrise, closed them
at quitting time. I carried the scan tool
for you in its blue bulky case – it wasn't
light. You must have torn your shoulder
off, toting it right and left, shop-house-
shop, morning-noon-night. The middle
trip, lunch: bologna and Gunsmoke, Diet Coke,
“back to wurk,” that slow “urr,” drug
out like a dog in pain. You haven't heard.
We've watched your pets the last
little while, the family and I. We go back
to the house at sunset: give two dogs a walk
and a few scoops from a forty-pound
bag of dog crunch. The junkyard cats
number at least fifteen since you're not
giving them away to every customer
whose child needs a pet – oh you could sell
rain to a pond. I'm nearly fed up wading
cat poop and dead rats. Sometimes
I stroll the dogs behind the shop,
nearly unclip them as a test:

will they still be here when
I come back tomorrow?

GRAHAM'S NUMBER

Past six a number where my grief be somewhere where

I wear castles of sand each sand a world each world phony

where I'm not funny just want and nothing I need raspberry

supreme Surpreme Clientele steeples teetered people

knee bending I can't tell to whom they offer meager affairs each one I

their tired goings job job clackity clack clack a miserable

be the I atomic digits call but awake I fall awoke again flotsam locks wash

by long and delicious may I held be like seed needs release or bee

thieves strip sweet home I see more worlds of me than sound for names I look

in good book name my warts Amos Jonah Judge

respond no never they don't never know response my question all I

ask: do you know why I feel this feel filled full of feel

I feel full know never my name no heavier name I have than thy

so I ask again: what feeling is feeling my name

MY FIRST SNAPCHAT PREMIUM SCAM

I am horny. For forty
smackaroos, how could I
decline? Access unlimited,

hook-ups in-person, someone
to ask how the day was,
with whom to rev my engine

of lust. Everyone shops
sex, or, at least, more people than one
would think. Or, at least,

enough that this work is worth
everyone's time – four
hundred dimes, what else

is thereto buy? Sex
so close to godliness it steals
from the one percent. I'd have

doubted me, my advanced degrees,
would add h0t_g1rls86 back
on snap, my Tinder match. Surely

to heavens, heavens to
Betsy, on the life of Betsy my best
friend's cow, I thought myself

beyond a link unsolicited. Alas,
my deepest flaw deserves
lambast: when tempted, lonely,

left to my own accord,
I might do anything desperately.
My last will and testament

dictates: I am whose credit
line declines at the grocer
not for deficient funds, but because

dinner for two flags fraud.
My aroused expenditure won't clear
the teller, I thought, paused

at my security code, bursting with yearn –
in I put my PIN, then spins
the loading wheel like desire.

I soon realized I fucked
up. First, one confirmed receipt
for REBUILDLOVE.NET –

Building Love The Right Way – a reminder
next my warranty expired, fourteen
emails on my defaulted home. I sift

insurance claims, maim my pride
and wish it dick. My new card
en route, a fresh email address

spamless and clean, I see my audit
now. Oh, IRS, I wish
it were true – lamplit interrogation

room, bad cop bad cop, spill
my truth: Whatever it is I'll hold,
I hope to stroke gently.

HOW TO STEAL A BMW RADIO

Some new stranger and I in a dentist's parking lot, betrothed
by Bavarian hood ornaments – Why should I love you?

And, yes, new friend, your luck roosts: I know a rope or two
of German engineering – mine all black, 1998, sports

package, odometer stuck at 232016.3 for ten moons,
yours shaded like favorite spoon. What are your odds? I *do*

know how to get *that thing* unplugged: pop this wood-
grain lapping the door panes, plastic snaps synapse

like gumdrop doorknobs two days past new years – screw
here, rivet *here*, smooth and down comes the glove box.

Yes, they make it this difficult on purpose. Unplug blue
from blue, red from red, white from white, *write this down*

no need – radio wires desire themselves. To reassemble
go backwards. Lucky you got me leaving a friend's

across the street. Doctor's note, slipped disk, she can't
lug luggage from car trunk. July noon heat

eaking in her bay window, full water jugs tucked in fridge
back until later days. We drive each other. She tells me

stop falling in love. I won't.

PARABLE OF THE SOWER VIA MF DOOM

farmer soil toiled seeds
slick-shaped trees boil foil me
the earle of twead coils before I swirl
twirl and hurl curly haired girls cruel
toes make kinks furs mink finnick
clink pinks think hard-to-think thinks
who drinks carbonate drinks haven't-had-its
star in naked pageants no wages for pages
my name squiggling bigly pride swallowed
needs no feet big teeth sweet until poll
roll and scroll sleep until baby rock softly
me listen hush and plush like love
with love with sick become thick dumb
approach gumsticks then breathe garlic
swat wasps fishing bob bob rob grave
recommit and flutter morning prayers
swear mumble and shutter close
then IOU letters leave I like betters
addicted to rails guard no casino
big sales rigged my nails chipped
my Chippendales make sense
of spinning tales and chips
crispy thin why know I hardly
pardon me

ELEGY FOR A DEAD MECHANIC II

Hey Pa, it's me again, your shirt
I wore today— a shirt I never saw
you wear, the one with swimming
trout. Once washed to get dead
spiders out. The shirttail
hole low enough to tuck in
and make disappear. My friends
notice, say *it's nice*, say they like
your suspenders, my britches up
held. These nylon straps sort of silly –
they lack tact. I'm not a serious heart
attack. Should you be buried in this
button up, I cannot say. It's one of few
nice shirts you owned, but your work
uniform too iconic, sublime, with green
white stripes, oil stains, same worn
“Leon” etched on your chest.

DIVINE ADDRESSES ME IN DREAM

blow I trumpet archangel

in my person only I AM am I
pinned and licked will I gutter gumdrop
like cornfield gun I consume

blow I trumpet archangel

whose cosmos chandelier swing onto
my I wants to want want
outside-in so living say I when I mean I

blow I trumpet archangel

by cross me more become
coal on first birthed feet
me toes wiggle daybreak

blow I trumpet archangel

forecast forty proof
prove to just tongue my doom
I please I need bleed I

blow I trumpet archangel

me Earth I want
love to fell be needs but need
teaspoon by teaspoon

blow I trumpet archangel

my whys need my want

all is me inside

inside me all silver dense

blow I trumpet archangel

inside all is me

all inside is you

GOOP

All my inside twisted ribs. Listen glistening pissing piston piss-
ant glint, miss misses kisses bliss mist libs. Glory Moses, glory
saffron leaves trillion four. Sit stoop me steeped near tea,

my remembrances kneaded wheat, what wet want wetting whet,
eating what one wants. Asleep, confessed in dream, awake beaming
shrine shine. Hi there, Major Meyer's minor Meijer flier "mine mhyrr,

mage hair finer." Tire iron diner flyer than Ric Flair's flair dare – thick
warts boast he, he boasts like me: higher hire, desperate desire, fire, rhyme,
limes mine. I opine. Cherries short, chilled berries. I suck harpy claw

shimmer, skin thinner than principal Skinner the principle window
winner and widow trimmer. Door-to-door Christian Dior fist giver,
automatic Illmatic soft skin cinematic habit-haver coursing vain

on main. My goop inside my Guggenheim, my insides pools of loopy
poofs. Good fool I am inside intersecting I mix me with me with me
inside, slick but fixed, a forty-corncob bedframe hoarding horny-born

twice-lording cordless hoses. Remember my tea? Jeans Wrangler,
my tangled stars cacophony. Small wren, pickled insides steeped
saffron. Honey, remember? Tea, tea, my me forgive everyone else,

else everyone forgive me, my tea tea, remember? Igloo white
shampoo, hair shamed new, shower tap my foot the blues. Picayune
shewn showtunes. I knew the goop inside me might kneel if I do,

inside goop I wouldn't refuse, reuse. User error errant, tyrant titan told
the whole show "gold plate the front row" else arise the yeast, rised rye
sickle splendor. Sin endeavor: my tea, honey spoon spooled, spool

too cool, saffron like saffron. Money ruled zoo my bed, I dread
unvetted frets, bet unfettered bedwetter fits, remise remissed lies
and reminisce revving race kits. Pornographic letter licks torn,

salvific turducken ambergris. All that makes my insides slick.

GOOP

all at once god would love me
because I shined

CENTO OF KANTO WHERE POKEMON ARE POEMS

Shining golden land of commerce, city
of rainbow dreams: my theories are too complicated

for you. We have failed to curve vicious
tendencies, spirits up to mischief. I came here

of my own free will. You can't be a coward
in the world of POEMS.

All boys leave
home some day, shades of your journey

await! I heard rumors of a child
prodigy. First, what is your name?

Do you like to collect things? Did you
check out the museum? Grand! I like

your style. Who wouldn't want to boast
about their POEMS?

Listen up: I'm very fussy when it comes to POEMS—
body soft and rubbery, the fluid that oozes

from its mouth isn't drool. Every flap of its wings
creates a dazzling flash of flames. Red and blue,

both are POEMS. POEMS are living
things, they live in forests and caves.

You need to look everywhere to catch
different kinds. Some people value the core

as a gem. Are you satisfied?

A POEM is used much
like a metal sword. I'm an artist,

not a fighter. Avoid fights by not
letting people see you. Please stay quiet

about my crying.

I must have dozed off in the sun, the port
of exquisite sunsets. I look at the sea

to forget, occasionally get sick from eating
bad dreams. What's beyond the horizon? I

see a couple islands, drifts in shallow sea.
The sea, a timid fairy POEM that is rarely seen.

Party's over, the ship will be departing
soon. Guests will mutiny, I fear. But a loss

is a loss. Lost! Lost! Lost!

I'm working myself into a rage. No one
could understand a word that I said. I knew

this was going to take place. I had a vision
of your arrival. That was decades ago. I'm fed up

with waiting. How can you not see the beauty
of our evil? It runs agilely as if on wings. But

I beseech you. There really are believers. Take
our emblem as your trophy. My friends were possessed

too. I forgive you. I can take it.

ELEGY FOR A DEAD MECHANIC III

Your chest's slashing scars
fault-line like. The first surgery
cost your sugary laugh, your hair
faded from snow to flour. Once
you drove a named Mustang,
"The Judge," and was the most
patient mechanic – you'd never cuss
because a bolt hung. I doubt
I ever knew you at all. Save
the first few years, when I rode
your shoulders and copiloted
our cyan convertible, the car
that whisked us to the dam,
top down, fishing poles propped
out. I cast my toy rod with a plastic
fish lure and reeled it back in,
pretending it the Caney Fork
rockfish you wrestled to the bank.
Yes, doing exactly as you, until
I came home and swore
in front of Ma. Say Pa,
how many times did you undergo
the knife? I remember a few:
I sat on the cream tile floor
at Wherever Regional
sorting Valentine's cards
given to me at school, or playing
Gameboy in the bedside chair
at Saint Someone Memorial, while

you gasped pure oxygen
from the breathing apparatus.
I wish I knew you before
triple bypass, 2000,
the one that caught us off
guard, origin of the twelve-inch
scar splitting your sternum.
Would you feel empty or filled
if you saw me speaking
at your funeral? I'm still
stunned by the silence
in the room as your breath
burst through the breathing tube,
a burglar in broad daylight.

Op-Ed

God, iron rod throne, purple glowsticks, hello.
You selfish prick. Tootsie Pop licks well over
twelve thousand. Bloods each reading a
dictum of grief. A teeth in each my teeth
holes, holes in my teeth, whole wails like
lonely oil. Needless pleases, needles and
shame. Knowledge catholic of Pokémon—
I'm Berryman: ferry weary spirits, tend the
dead. Apathy like candy, perphenazine pill,
seraphim, tea. Apathy-like disease. One
maybe prayer, fast of vitamin D. Nintendo
Switch, pastel outfit, Lego brick. So much
shit. Toe-sucking, Albuquerque, more or ten
fears. I know not forgive, God. If who is love
are You then why make Yourself disappear?
Unfound God, if I am who is sired sore into
birth, why? Sassafras, Urkel, heart attack,
whiskey balls. Don't ask. Pixies, pickaxe,
pixel, stone mask. Vats—vast vats, Pharisee
spit. Tall laws, bar-crawls, Carfax, despair.
Black hair long and lovely, God. Is Your hair
well kept? God in me is [continued B4]

nothing. All elements, still nothing. Nothing
Thee and nothing interior. Lonely brings out
such human greed, twisting seats like
stockholders. My letters are my scripture.
God, my little bowl of *u* refills every day.
Rose shrub, small inside me, bloom please.
Here's my brownie from last night. God I fail
to love, why? God, I fail to You. Grieve
panhandler of my gut, arrive a tuxedo of rust.
All here is junkyard: smut, syntax. I fuck for
affection, swig swigs of communion. June
suns will set; suns know but rise. Else in here
be: M3 starters, lungs two, lungs too
breathing, pink hugs, gospel knocked hollow,
chandeliers of dread, sabers, vapors, light
parts, kyrie, carrion, Babylon, my baby rattle.
God do You shake? How God small are Your
beads? Holy few ghosts, hosts to most
gameshows aired 11:30-1. Poinsettias by
field, God. I dare you. Wait for meaning itself
to arrive. Tear-able, terrible, thimble-like
thumb, I ask more few answers than need me:
little god I am, am I little God? Little am I

CONFESSION WATCHING HEAVEN-GOERS

I gnaw God God gnaws

back fountains

in heaven I've heard spill over heaven

goers up ahead dip chins they own

now their own nouns

don't know how small the drop dry the jaw I

pry my prayer out each day I'll die

mouth water filled

because forgive me again again me pray forgive

forgive pray all day I beat

my tongue on mouth roof

all night naked spread I don't ask much just wet

soothe my jaw those

going heaven don't

know— I'm mercy's stage theatre of need

they state business gates open

I need my antics

else my God gnaw spine mouthfuls

I am he who thumb nose

divine

I am he whose chin dry my dry

chin my nose jaw tongue

my water unsatisfied

ERASURE OF MY FIRST SEXT WITH COMMENTARY

¹*Cute*

she says.
I
return,

¹*Cute*: God creates creates creates
creates creates creates images of
God. What poet God are—All my
poems look like me: incomplete.

I give.

²I broke.

Hot
all
distracted— of
course I'll

²*Hot*: to trot; or not; to me; -ter
Than July; cinders & sackcloth;
shit; In Cleveland; Rod; toddy;
Buttered Soul.

beg.

³Fun fact:
during sex

³*Fun fact*: The night I lost my
virginity, I woke up to find all the
art had fallen off my walls.

I'm a firm
believer.

My
mouth

a fucking

 mechanic
can't rest.

³*mechanic*: spark plugs don't plug
sparks—that's what a coil does.

⁴Creativity
and
perseverance.

Let me
return

the break
tonight.
Definitely

do not think about my
mouth.

⁵Can't
woman eat a
world?

You mind business—

Mind me—
⁶I
mind dripping

down

thigh. You'll
have warm

⁴*Creativity and perseverance:* I
image God. I imagine dog, adopting
a senior shih tzu named Charlie, cry
myself to sleep. God sleep when
God weep?

⁴*the break tonight:* the night my
grandfather died, he called my
mother and said *ambulance* instead
of calling 911.

⁴*mouth:* are your final words the
last ones you say or the last ones
someone hears?

⁵*Mind:* Playing Tricks on Me;
boggling; your own business; over
matter; your p's and q's; games;
Mischief; & body; fucked.

blindfold.
⁷You'll have
nothing
but legs

⁸pinned
against your head,
beautiful and red,
fist
⁹full of
promise, of clue-
less
fret.

⁸*beautiful and*: strange to me, the
silence between two people who
talk with their eyes.

⁹*full of promise*: the apostles and
first generation of believers thought
Jesus's declaration "I am going
away and am coming back to you"
(*John 14:28*) would fulfill in their
lifetimes. At the late-life passing of
John, *the disciple who Jesus loved*
(who tradition dictates the final
living apostle), the second coming
was all but imminent.

¹⁰*clueless*: of the four gospels, there
are three accounts of Jesus's last
words—"It is finished," "Father,
into your hands I commit my
spirit," and twice "My God, my
God, why have you forsaken me?"

¹⁰*fret*: If the Second Revelation of
Christ had occurred, that's
something people would have
noticed, right?

¹⁰Flipping

my right hand
goes. My left

the death
me. ¹¹I'm
a writer baby.

*I intend
to bring*

you

*back to
life.*

¹²Tell me
what you
like:
*one daddy
two*

¹³*daddy ten
daddy.*

Every
inch and

¹⁰*right hand*: night land; mic stand;
contraband; wrong man; I'd change
if I knew how.

¹¹*I'm a writer*: a fish is a crab;
streetlights the sun; fire, ocean

¹¹*back to life*: According to Mark,
upon finding Jesus's tomb empty
Mary and Mary and Salome fled,
could not speak because they were
afraid.

¹²*daddy two*: my biological father
had bipolar disorder, was buried on
Christmas.

¹²⁻¹³*two daddy*: in his obituary, there
was no mention he had any
children. How anonymous of he.

¹³*inch*: by inch by inch by inch by
inch by inch by inch by inch by
by

nerve

you.

¹⁴Patience

is one

of my strengths.

I'll teach you

what that's

like.

¹⁵Body,

mouth breathing.
My

finger

while we make

face. ¹⁶I pull

hair. Your

moan all sexy.

Past awake

I shall

be, ¹⁷past body,
longer

season

blissed

out and wore,

¹⁵*My finger while we make: cake
finds itself in icing, on nose; war
amputates, but with sufficient
sunshine and water rises into an ash
tree; heat circles circles circles
circles circles knee*

¹⁶*sexy: MF; thing; apoplexy*

¹⁶*I shall be: While “I AM that I
AM” is a common translation of the
Hebrew Divine Name, “YHWH” is
a third-person shift away from
God’s declaration. Literally, as if
God said “tell them ‘HE IS what
HE IS’ sent you” to Moses—
however, Hebrew perspectives and
tenses do not map directly into
English. This means the Divine
Name “Eh-Yah,” or, “I AM,” when
repeated, contains at least these
multitudes: *I AM that I AM, I Will
Be what I Will Be, I AM He Who
Endures**

logs
around the
road, ¹⁸and
morning

I've never figured
to learn.

¹⁹That's
just a few. *It'll*
do.

Nicely
command

me less
sensual

things,

²⁰cursing

whatever I
wring.

big
talker—

talking is
good. ²¹*Follow*
your

want

your
something your

sex. ²²*Damn. I*
guess

I should clarify

¹⁹*It'll do:* diesel fuel legal fool
steeple duel metal moo regal
goo needle blue people flew
weevil gruel easel cruel little
shoe lethal dew least'll do

¹⁹⁻²⁰*sensual things, cursing:* On the
second page of the bible—third in
large print editions—God curses
Adam, Eve, and the Serpent. I'll
bite the ankle of every snake I see.

²¹*your want:* sex

²¹*your sex:* want

I don't have
confidence. I'll love

physically, serve

both

parties.

²²*have confidence. I'll love*
physically: the morning after my I
lost my virginity, my across-the-
wall neighbor was found
unconscious in her apartment.

²³Like nights in

a night bag I can

²⁴get lucky.

Oh Jesus.

I cannot do

fantastical

apologies.

²⁵Like magic
to me the
physical
 strange.

²³*a night bag*: roses posies four-o-
clocks condoms toothbrush towel
(orange) pills (in the dark have the
same function as rattle)

²⁴*Jesus*: see (²⁵*Like magic to me*)

²⁵*Like magic to me*: My best friend
and neighbor once told me she likes
that I still keep my door open to talk
when I'm in a bad mood.

²⁵*the physical strange*: the next day
I rose sour, closed my door with
both lock and chain.

²⁵*the physical*: on the night I lost my
virginity I didn't finish—happens
to the best of us, I've been told.

²⁵*strange*: virginity is just a
Christian construction for policing
women's bodies.

²⁶addiction in
my soul:

pussy,
²⁷oreos,
Bo
Burnham
jokes.

²⁸Hearts,
hollow again

when horny.

²⁶*pussy*: waxed raw; eating; Cat
Dolls; Galore; licking; whipped;
lips

²⁸*hearts*: “The heart is deceitful
above all things and beyond cure. /
Who can understand it?” *Jer. 17:9*

²⁸*hearts*: The Wu-Tang Clan
subtitled their debut album (*36
Chambers*)—each member has a
heart. Each heart has four
chambers. Nine members. Nine
hearts. 36 Chambers.

²⁸*hearts*: in a deck of cards, each
suit represents a different member
of 15th century French social
structure. Diamonds, merchants;
clubs, peasantry; spades, nobility;
hearts, the church.

²⁸*hearts*: “I the LORD search the
heart and test the mind, to give
every man according to his ways,
according to the fruits of his deeds.”
Jer. 17:10

²⁹I proud:

zero
consequences,

half an
identity.

³⁰*The slander*

sounds

like plan.

How else

will you learn

³¹the
hard

stage?

Your plump,

²⁹*half*: way to hell; and half; back;
life; time; an hour; Blood Prince;
dead

³⁰*slander*: is different from libel.
Libel is memorialized—recorded,
written, poemed. Like Exodus,
slander doesn't technically exist.

³¹*the hard stage*: On the day I
should have graduated college, I
delivered the message at my
grandfather's funeral. I read aloud
The Passion Narrative of Matthew.
The degree mailed me, I still
haven't opened.

red every other
³²*inch*

I promise

to eat.

³¹*red every other*: plumber in the
Mario Bros.; side of a Pokeball;
blood cell; depiction of Hell;
picture of a heart

³²*I promise to*: love God, love
others, ~~love myself~~

³³Never
would love tough
a girl. Three
mercies

I will take: every
bit of what
you give, love

³⁴punished
for
squirming,
and a system
that runs
down
different sides
of sound.

³³*mercies*: mercy, mercy me /
things ain't what they used to be

³³*give, love*: poets make words with
love; God makes love with words

³⁴*different sides of sound*: In biblical Hebrew, sentences can be syntaxed so that words reflect order of importance. Some sentences are arranged most important to least, *Love God you I*, some vice versa—*I you God love*. In syntactical subversion, some Biblical authors write their sentences least-to-most, but move the most important word to the beginning: *Love I you God*. This sentence structure most resembles the biblical theme of restoration, return to the garden: The further *I* is from *Love*, the closer *I* is to *Love*.

WET DREAM IN REVERSE

I climax. I come
and come. I'm a drawstring
on a fiddle. The field is wet
hyacinth. My love fingers,
the wind broad as a candle clawing
after dark. A petal catches rain, walking
the air around us like daylight. Beloved
crawls close and close to me, worms between
her teeth. The mood is near right. The Earth
speaks, it comes for me. I am the only thing. Save
the bees – who swirl and tilt sunbeams to the creek where
maybe Pa is fishing and clouds come down to drink. Those clouds.
They fold and fold and fold and fold. Those clouds. They fold like sheets.

SO SWEET THE RAIN IT WOULD NOT DRIP OFF A THORN

tastes make rhyme

rhymes like petal

knees beheld ash

prophet I sackcloth

eat straw-

-berries sweet mist

winter every enemy

snowflake waves

spring desist

tongueblood

tongue cuts sky

sky tastes

us surrounds sky

lover I

sky ebony drops

felt indigo

light rain like back

scratches

hand smooth

tendersweet

herb like

tender but sweet

not moths

kissed hand

gentle hand

kiss

mist fist

strawberries smell

loverlike

lover woke sunrise

lover nose up curved

lover stood wind

sheer

Pendergrass

prayer breath

LORD I've seen

for others

you've done

such things

I need LORD

one rhyme more

thorns so gentle

rain would not

I Wake Up at 2:13 a.m. and No One Else is Home Since I Live Alone

I the dream

dream me

lonely me

lonely dream

me lips alone dream I

dream alone

I ghost

I woke

in dark

I plug

the dark

now shines

all around me

the sun

the sun

shines all around

me

the sun shines

around

II – THE LITTLE HOUSE

“When I see the grainy surface of a screen before the slides are shown

I have the urge to eat it—”

Brenda Hillman, *Loose Sugar*

On the fridge I am five, my sister
three. Pine needles split perfectly,
sunlight on our teeth. What had we?
Her small cowgirl hat bowing off

pigtail dome, my shirt blasted red
Power Ranger, my arm a simple rope
bridge between her shoulders. Tangerine
and crimson dapped trees rustle

in autumnal breeze, our used slide—
maroon crackled plastic. I think
the swing set seats pinched my back
but no memory have I. All this trampling

outside. Off frame, left side, Uncle Roy's
pride: A living American Chestnut. Wove below,
roots for which Chestnut Mound is named.

Chestnut blight consumes trees bloomed only above ground, roots untouched. A single root

and Lucas, what is your address?

Mrs. Tonya asked during nap time:

“24 Walton Circle, Chestnut Mound, Tennessee
Mound Circle 24, Tennessee Chestnut Walton
Walton Tennessee Circle, Mound 24 Chestnut
Chestnut 24 Circle, Tennessee Walton, Mound
Tennessee Chestnut, 24 Walton Mound Circle
Circle Mound Chestnut, Tennessee Walton 24”

system, survival inclined, births new shoots continuously. These plants die too. Patriarch

Little House and class, my whole world
so small. Cubbies of nothing, pennies.
Moldy, oatmeal packets in the one
pantry shelf I reach. Bedtime

on couch, I gnaw zipper tread
off my Aladdin sleeping bag. Porch
light scratches my eyes. All night
the distant, chained wonders of sundown

held back. When awake, The Book
Den, monosyllabic room, nine square
feet between the wall and dad's chair,
my sister and I Leapfrog, spy.

chestnut tree are rare; the largest Tennessean left hides in Jackson County. To reach it from The

She tells mother *don't*
let that baby go hungry, suggests Little

House, water and power
never turned off. I like a metaphor

that doesn't choose:
teetered grackle on chestnut limb,

wait for wheels
to offer crushed nuts. Drying

buttercup, my first
spring, pressed between Leviticus

verses. My grandmother,
Ma, the blood-hued velveteen curtain

stapled across Momma's
one bedroom, shifted sometimes by west

winds, bleeding
wall concealed.

Little House, you pass a bowl-shaped field, deepening each year. My father tells me a river rips

why

so red the walls

and beans

my mother snapped

so green string in Walmart

bag in drainer in lap

on couch

while I

play bingo myself

on floor

hundreds of feet below the ground. How would he know? To avoid contamination, new chestnut

Ma's Ma, great-

great-grandmother who rolls her own

tobacco. Her

lone crop smoked. Little House's walls

affirm, grime-gripped

wood unscrubbable for Momma. Barn paint

the one shade Momma found,

inside our views were red covered

smokestains. In the closet

base fifty years untouched, Ma's Ma's

sewing scrap.

Bedroom walls cankered. Outside

time stopped

for nothing until Momma nailed found

curtains

like savior hands. Mother's room,

sprouts must be six miles from the nearest blight. One convent, the largest outside native range,

velveteen cowboy

hat patches on my azure blanket.

Again living,

Momma's funeral home décor inheritance.

holds 2500 trees near West Salem, Wisconsin. In 1987, scientists found blight. Chestnut shells

Horse rocking, I rocked atop.
Wooden tune. The Little House
porch, out walked my mother,
two-day-past-birthday helium

balloon in hand. She swigged
the gas, swigged the whole yard,
belted Alvin & The Chipmunks,
said *Son, do you want to?*

are sharp indiscriminate burrs. Inside a chestnut is, often, three nuts, and liner velvet velvet

rocking horse
kudzu cloaked
to this day rear of box
truck on hill I wonder
mane of mop
I wonder
what now soaks

velvet velvet velvet velvet velvet. What is most important to know of chestnut trees: if a rouge

Up top, six inches from roof, I
sleep. No more slope and shoehorn
of porch. My sister and I outgrow
couch and pad. Washing machine

spin the new front light. The Little
House washroom our new cathedral;
in here we fit bunkbed, toy chest,
VCR, Pokémon tapes, tin roof hiss

in summer rain, detergent. New,
red frame in our home ours. Little
blight. Lone great Chestnut
tree out front died.

chestnut falls, plants squarely your prepubescent shoulder, two dozen shrapnel will your mother

If you look at The Little House from the gravel
road running East to West, you'll see it: handles
rotten, long outgrown, little red wheel-
barrow on the porch. Porch supports twirl

their scope-like coils, inward as ampersands,
molded iron; Tree sentinels in yard – pine
needles coat ground, Pokey has nine new
puppies in doghouse. Five make it. Look past

the dead tree with a robin's nest crevice,
past porch, past twin front doors: father
in kitchen kisses girl, stubble rubbing rough
like pity – scratchy love strange to a child.

Momma my new Captain Underpants sticker
then stuck on the stove hood. It reads *kiss*
the cook. Ramen in a small goldenrod pot—
mother keeps wandering hands from burners.

tweeze. Experts speculate up to 250 original chestnuts survived blight. Others say as few as

Laten, who builds

The Little House, for whom I am named

Lucas Laten.

Great-great-grandfather who dream visits

and like him I must

walk. In The Little House living room I

behold the man's

feet. His wood-whittled chair all the chair he

needs. He before me

now sits, and I along his heel trace my thumb,

ask *how far*

must you go to come to me? and from his mangled

buckeye toes flower

a cascade of white moths.

dozens. As many as four billion chestnuts made up America's east forests in 1904, one in every

The fuck is decay made of? Why

everything? Why termites? Why

all the trees out front died? I'm

knots inside. Sick, stripped bark.

Smooth sappy scour – just another

Little House language: Logged

water, no new looks, the kitchen

woods poking through, snakeskin

glistening on the deep freezer, old

sticker sheenless and green, piles.

Piles and piles, racoon tracks, beans

in the last cabinet still sealed, pictures

picked to leave behind, back room velveteen.

four trees. By 1950, virtually extinct; 2.75 chestnuts died every second, 46 years. An organism

I was smoke-smell
from sparks, five, breaking
rocks on Little House's
concrete porch. Held

overhead then plummeted,
geodes boomthud
into thousands. Lumpy
rock, your secret

quartz. Mother asked
the need. *Something*
I must do, I said. *Something*
I must.

with both reproductive organs is coined "monoecious." A chestnut tree, monoecious, cannot

Little House, from which my mother cannot part.
We return, this time we dump furniture: ancient
basin below the lone alcove in the kitchen,
I tote a tub and can't part heaps, heaps

in each room, heaps heaped to the ceiling
of memory. We leave a painting between two
tubs of winter coats; here it seldom snows. Sorrow
bursting like dead tree bark. *Your great-great-grand*

father— crafted noble somethings now runnt. Trophies
intended for lovers and sons: metal coffee cans,
corncob pipes, enough quilt to sleep one eye
peeled. No more rooms. The dignity of the dead

we must fit in our own corners. Hoarders
upspout the chimney from desperation. Mantle
loaded, barn-red wall to red-barn wall packed.
Door locked. Power on. We leave.

breed itself like, say, a sunflower. Our chestnut tree had all it needed to live, but didn't.

III – WHAT MAKES ME HAPPY

“Excuse me, flows just grow through me
Like trees to branches, cliffs to avalanches”

— Notorious B.I.G., *The What*

FACEWASHING AT 6:53

Up comes the sun once chirping my nose

all around my nose

rosy face my around all kisses blade

kisses on the shoulder kisses

all of most kisses want I

my hunger my flesh reused

between bowls of Boo Berry one spoon

dishes two pivots sink of my leaking

just me and my ache

again alone

am I the morning

begs the silent dew

**IN A SONIC STALL I CHANGE MY CAR BATTERY AND IMAGINE FALLING IN
LOVE**

Like I do: alter alternators,
swap carburetors, catalyze converters:
hoping this day might be
once-in-my-life.

WHAT MAKES ME HAPPY COMES AFTER THIS

I hope it turns you on cinnamon discourse cigars all song
all chorus and even if it's small cheek muscle we count

wall chrysanthemums smoke purse our brains rack lips gnaw
for my love us two too goose necks drink pleat

from the putty of my grief bury one wreath my genitals
unjustified neat soft cashmere drawn I moonlight good

raw wind cuddles make my memorial about anyone
but me god on curtains are my multitudes too few

my love ungrieved god of scrubbed concrete who steps
spotless sole watercolor crimson Dali I'm sorry

ground I burned myself snow daisies you hope
grow my sins only meant to hurt me so cold

in spring once thawed I'll do my time all
of it I enough lock me up box me

roughly walls I'll fuck the clouds inseams in my black
sheets baby little jaspers your teeth brass bolts

starstreak punch mean beloved I beg for moldy means
never gnash as gnashers gnash if only you'd let

my teeth grit beloved I can for you be
I can I can be I can be I can I

can I be Applebee's sip bourbon reams
be I can I for you again tithe twist tweed

like fat cats stray my blues for you naked a whole ballet
I'd thrash I'd wallow like February's long awning

I'd purple and palm wear from prayer
LORD who is I'm sorry

crash and crash and crash my balls in the bathroom
let's nest in walls light as dandruff

panties camping by hamper scanty lathers ruffle
me supple you pocket-noun you forever sound

NOTES

“Hell is a door locked from the inside” (“How to Pick a Lock”) is a theological idea of Karl Barth’s.

How to Steal a BMW Radio is dedicated to Katie McMorris.

“Parable of the Sower via MF DOOM” lifts “Chippendales” as a verbal cue from “Beef Rapp,” while the rhyme scheme which loosely inspired the poem belongs to “Operation Lifesaver aka Mint Test.”

“Goop” lifts sonic qualities from Raekwon’s “Verbal Intercourse.”

“Centō of Kanto where POKEMON are POEMS” is composed of lines found in the script to the original Pokémon Red/Blue American release.

“Elegy of a Dead Mechanic I-III” are written to honor my grandfather, Leon Barnes, whose life was as a mechanic, and whose legacy is as a fisherman.

“Erasure of My First Sext with Commentary” is an erasure of a conversation (a sext, even) written with the full consent and acknowledgment of a partner who chooses to remain anonymous.

“Mercy mercy me / things ain’t what they used to be” (in “Erasure of my First Sext with Commentary”) is the refrain to Marvin Gaye’s title track in *What’s Going On*.

Translation commentary on the Divine Name (found within “Erasure of my First Sext with Commentary”) is researched and repeated from Robert Alter’s *The Hebrew Bible*, this instance from footnotes in Exodus.

The address contained within “The Little House” lyrical sequence is the unfictionalized residence of The Little House; all names presented in the collection are deceased great-great-grandparents.

ADDENDUM WITH JOY

O, the sound of a boy on the phone letting his school crush know,
O, he loves how she totes a small toothbrush on her every trip

to the stripped-down mall. What new joys they unearth with turned corners
on a ten-dollar bill: No, not much, just two cuts of ‘za, duel pulls of trading

cards. Twelve quarters consumed – he watches her snarl at the clearly rigged
claw machine. *O*, now he’s broke, that boy. He was me, clueless as a catfish

with two front teeth. If I could go back I’d tell him being there and being square
are both fine options. He will learn, *O*, to love again and again and again –

what size rock cracks lover’s window, which bouquets beget Benadryl, how many
petty, penniless jigsaws a heart becomes rain walking home in spit-shined Nikes.

Now I saunter for new offense: “Banned for Life” from the Golden Corral
in Cookeville, Tennessee. I overabused the chocolate fountain. Dipped

my eggroll, my steak. Waiter one, clairvoyant and gentle, said “sir,
that’s for deserts.” Guardian two insisted on a code of sensible conduct

by which I must abide, but abide not would I – mixing my pintos proved
the final straw. *Strike Three* roared the dean of Corral #399, out he punts

me, cites “overindulgence via corncob.” But my people, *O, my people*
of America’s finest dining establishment swarm, answer the call, storm

the silky chocolate waterfall. The dean declares martial law. Lasagna
coated floor, soft-serve piles like autumn leaves. For a cascade of sugary

cocoa, frenzied becomes a republic, and the heretic I am strolls on,
chocolate corncob gripped, my bliss Hershey-dipped, my singing called

up from the vocal abyss, *O*, timeless aural joy streamed from my lungs.
O, I plan no agenda. *O*, I may place fifty bucks on a four-team parlay.

O, I may, my fortune to make, I may make my fortune, *O* may I
make that fortune