

# audax-

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BA in Literature, American University, 2015

A thesis presented to the  
Graduate Faculty of the University of Virginia  
in candidacy for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing

Department of English

University of Virginia  
April, 2018

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“Yes ...” that peculiar  
affirmative. “Yes ...”

-Elizabeth Bishop

## Origin

*It's just something people say in the low country*  
when I asked why  
my mother's father  
called a girl a blade. I knew how the cry

escaping my mouth  
looked up close, crowning the dark  
and silky place where I knelt

or bounded away at will. This was not that.  
After I didn't do what I would do anyways,  
I woke up

in a house I didn't own, curled  
into myself like a corsage or the hand  
clutching it.

I described that first summer as soft  
when it was not, I'm sorry.

Some things can't be helped like the weather  
one's voice takes on in fear...

Summer was soft  
where I sharpened and entered it;  
and when I said

*establish the work of our hands upon us*, I gestured:  
you cloud the sky, I'll be the hands.

I would do anything now, for anyone.  
Downstairs a dog was barking. Thinking of nothing,  
I got up and fed us both.

Thorvaldsen

*Copenhagen, Denmark*

Like you had reached *I can't*  
*look at you* and *look at me*,  
*I'm trapped*, you stopped  
and stood in a corner  
beside a statue of Psyche, facing  
neither her nor me.

*Psyche with a vase, Psyche*  
*with an Urn, Psyche with the Beauty Cream:*  
none mention her wings or how  
her hand touches the rounded  
top of the vase, urn, bottle  
of beauty cream as if to open it  
though her eyes are downcast.

She may as well be holding  
nothing. *Psyche with worry.*  
*Psyche with a thousand thoughts.*  
Why stand beside a statue?  
Your wife, in the myth, must be her:  
you look like you're listening,

the sound sifting through the air  
bedding her body. She must say  
what the field of her stomach  
can't, where the ropes split  
and the pelvis says yes and no  
at the same time.

Outside, a red dress sits down  
on a park bench. It was terrible  
to cross the street with you  
earlier that day, to catch a look  
of goodness on the face

of a building— a window  
opening, opened— and yet a hand  
shakes out a sheet. The leaves,  
green fricative in summer wind.  
Blue conference of sky.

To say the city  
was like the primary colors  
of our last parachute  
is mostly a lie  
but it was the last time  
we went anywhere together.

The question is not  
how long have we been falling  
but what happens when it stops?

Sometimes on the corners  
of churches a salute of angels  
rhyme and crumble  
where once they had faces.

Display of wings,  
more expressive now.  
This much is true.

And what if I don't know  
the shape we made that May,  
in the surprised light  
of a reading lamp?  
You, at the foot of my bed.

Better to tell the story  
about Psyche. Better to say it  
from the point of view  
of her candle, the wax  
warm as tears. We enjoyed the day  
then boarded separate trains.

Now you stand so still, like  
you are saying I make you a statue, I do it  
right now. Better to undress

the trees from the myth  
of Daphne with her tree-bones.  
Better to say roots harness dirt  
like hope, half-sisters  
and brothers of hunger. Nothing  
really changes, only now

a telephone rings all morning  
before someone, breathless,  
picks it up. Statue, I'm tired.  
Days pass us like *water* and *mouth*  
and *meadow*. No more walking

out of gardens. Constant  
grace, too difficult to parse.  
I like talking to you. Do my footsteps,  
even as they retreat, sound like those  
of a woman, advancing?



## Outer Orbit

My younger brother called our neighbor sister. It was a game they played. They went to the moon, floated in the milky way of a tree. I was good at watching/not-watching— hung out with the big kids, leaned on the handlebars of my bike, feigning boredom, while I tracked the wobbly line my brother and his sister made with their walking; circling planets of shadow and sunlight, taking turns stepping over branches and leaf-rot, listening to satellites whirring by, bird-talk

sugaring the air. I wanted to train myself out of the word like a dog's name in the middle of its dog life so I could halt my body's orbit when he called and she answered. *Sister*. I'm not sure what it meant only that I was, wasn't one. *Sister*. Its *s* double-hung around the *i*, sung quick and twice like summoning someone who's already in the room.

## Psyche

The house is a stacking of wooden cubes  
under a swirl of paint; the sun, a burning

boat sitting dumb on saltwater  
while the women bend into the cold

at the waist. The artist gave pearls for hats,  
two shifting rivers for skirts and because

I find them beautiful in their symmetry,  
I forget they're digging in a frozen field.

Look, I said, I haven't seen this Van Gogh  
before. And he said, It's beautiful.

I don't think it's the labor or season or even  
my own looking that makes me think

of my mother. It's so small I almost lose it.  
There are two women in an open field

and one of them was there first  
and the other followed.

## Apartment on 2<sup>nd</sup> Street

She didn't yell when she arrived, she spoke. *Help*, she was saying, *somebody please let me in*. When she stopped at my apartment, only the swish of her winter coat as she placed one hand and then the other on my door. What does it mean that she didn't knock? She flattened them as if on the chest of a lover, that quiet, like a hand asking to be traced by another. It's not difficult to imagine a hand. If I opened the door I would have seen her face.

\*

When I moved in,  
I chose the odd set  
of plates because  
I liked them most.  
Yellow at the edges  
where blue-bells  
arranged themselves  
like women, alone  
in sun, insisting  
they love how  
beaches felt  
like borders, blue  
water like an image  
of the endless  
they could enter.

## Arena of Revelation

I saw everything better  
because I never did— the whole thing  
housed in mirror. What happened

was my father and mother hid all the knives  
in the house

and because it hurts to say  
what is obvious, they didn't

for a long time. A pulse of red

in the water  
has something to do with the loon, liliated  
and long-limbed, who floats there.

I've tried to live in that precinct, *There*,  
entered a boy who died and came back as a color

in the softest spot of a bird. Should one?  
I volunteered, I found a stick and drew the X

where a house could be built  
and a woman could draw open  
like a curtain

so a boy could fall out crying for the first time  
and this is where, I changed my mind,  
I'd like to stop.

## One Idea

I told you to get a P.O. box  
a short walk from your house  
in Saint-Cloud, a nice tree  
out front, a Paulownia,  
to shield you as you'd stop  
and stoop, fishing out  
the silver key from your bag.  
The tree could also be a shelf,  
on which, like large trinkets,  
the buffed leaves  
could clutter until autumn.  
There are few people on earth  
with whom I will share  
even some of my belongings.  
I would write that to you  
if you got a P.O. box  
a short walk from your house.  
Saint-Cloud's streets  
lined with parked cars,  
Paulownias, parked cars...  
All summer the tape  
I checked out  
from the library  
filled the small lung of my bedroom  
with the same sequence  
of sentences in French.  
In a dream, I walk your dog  
down your street  
with only my voice  
as a leash.

Now

No clarity now, I think, but in all the lives  
I can't perceive

like the toppled carousel  
of lemon rind in *Still Life with Glasses and Tobacco* .  
The glasses, tobacco.

A woman leaning over her lunch  
of boiled potatoes

and cabbage, to light a man's cigarette.  
That sort of thing.

Slight sadnesses, what had to be  
written down  
lest they dissolve, a sign they should

are so close to happiness  
they seem interchangeable to me.

I wrote that in a restlessness like that  
of the summer we met, the insects

laying careful rows of eggs  
along the waxy straight of pine needles

and you walked beside me, such loose ropes  
we held—a sign of order,

the temperance in our not touching...

Dear \_\_\_\_\_, between the misplacing  
and finding out what's been misplaced, time shines

like a bone, exposed. We felt free.

## Psyche

Here is the bad news: my lover  
is not a monster. It would be easier

if that were the case. I would be able  
to sit in the fringe of clover

and concentrate on my book.  
Being involved with a monster

made me a productive person.  
I wrote letters, learned a language,

I dug up the Evelyn roses  
and hauled them to the north wall.

After dinner I'd put my feet up  
on the couch while the sun

rubbed out each parcel of light  
along the straight of the hallway,

massaging night into the house,  
into the L-shaped bedroom

where I would wait, my skin  
smooth as my solitude.

Sometimes on a clear night  
I could see each star was like

some furious novel cut down  
to one word. Already,

I've assumed a writer.

## Psyche

Beneath the open shock of a tree, I slept  
and woke and like any good myth,

I wander off. I see something new:  
flicker in a wave of glass, a shape

blinking in liquid field. Without a word  
for self, I was not—not earlobes, not eye

neighboring eye, not milk push, not womb,  
not beautiful, no I was not beautiful at all.

I think God should have scrubbed rocks  
instead, been tender lichen. Is it loneliness

that makes someone clear the path  
of their throat to interrupt what isn't talking?

In each version of paradise I'm foot-bound,  
standing up in water-sky, water-sky.

.



## Psyche

A bed sheet, my legs kicking in sleep.  
Desire came up like linen, one night

lifting off my skin, fine as pollen or flour,  
too fine to catch. Just once I'd like

to be a flamingo standing in rain,  
to have feathers to take in what I thirst.

I don't know when the silk triangles  
of my dreams will mean something

more than sex, hot air balloon I watch  
arms crossed...

## Gold Circle, Blue Square

You called me up while short-rib  
tenderized in the oven, a gift  
for your wife, the baby onions  
like fat blossoms in broth. I cried  
as if this hurt me but I was,  
the way I am some mornings  
in spring when nothing happens  
and still, something nags  
like switchgrass a bee, tired  
from mating, enters to die.  
You hung up then called back,  
said you thought you heard  
your gate when it was the one  
next door, opening and unhinging  
going slack as if the second life  
of a gate is a life of falling  
and hitting the shrub. What soft  
racket, the sound of somebody  
coming home. It's our figures  
of speech that make us real  
to each other. I say *right okay*  
*where was I?*

## Last Poem about Saint-Cloud

James drives me to his house  
through twenty minutes

of country, mostly trees.  
Even then, more like acres

of what, wintering out, becomes less.  
Again, about the lack I perceive

in the naming of things. November,  
night-pond. Except for the moon

rising early, hand-painted  
to be folded in half, the rest

of the good world lowers. After  
we sleep together we speak

of the other shapes we could see  
our lives making. When he says

*mail carrier*, of course,  
I thought of you— beloved,

not mine— the letters we sent.  
What is a truth past saying?

I still call you my closest friend.  
In the morning he drives me

back into town. Says it's okay,  
he'll wait while I change.

## Ars Longa

Art is long, life is short; or magenta makes a run for it across the red  
bud in the garden while a four year old turns to me only to say *you*  
*cannot draw stars* because we're drawing stars, context for a planet  
draped in dark and light, gray and pink. I have often wanted to be  
exact, to be the porous bones of a hummingbird or to make music  
from nothing but myself. I have also  
gone to sit before what is beautiful and felt nothing, could not bear  
holding anything long enough to praise it or even hate it. *To The Gates of Hell*

I went and I confess: I remember the green wall of shrub  
just beyond the gates as much as Dante, struck forever in the awning  
kneeling or is it crouched above those bronze sheets of suffering like bat wings  
let loose in night, from which so many bodies writhe...

My feeling is that this sort of pain is not reserved for hell  
nor is a poem reserved for pain— sometimes, but also joy:  
or before night, the sun fans above landscape in orange  
procession. Joy of drawing celestial bodies in any color I like. In the tiled  
quiet of my kitchen I calculate some arbitrary  
rate at which my life, like a dusty bus, arrives somewhere  
slightly stranger than this like walking  
the square perimeter of Roger's house when he was alive, retired architect, a bachelor,  
unrelenting that I must not, I must not leave until I take his Tolstoy  
vines of gold etching a road across a merlot cover and what  
with death being such a small door, nothing can fit through, not books, not those  
xeroxed house plans, not light too wide as if flung, not  
yogurt left in a dish. Roger, I draw stars. Even nothing is not  
zero.

## Anti-Aubade

The buildings here  
are like boys  
the first months  
they begin to look  
like men; broad  
brick shoulders,  
the shyness of each  
exposed balcony;  
busted pot of ferns,  
daisy white of plastic  
chairs, a blouse  
on a hanger.  
I don't care  
if this morning  
is already half-over.  
A feather lifts up  
in some airy groove  
between the buildings  
as if the secret desire  
we have to touch and be  
touched is so light  
it can be borne up  
on air and is—

## Self-Portrait In Watercolor and Pencil

Now I remember myself more than him, how I was when I was the bathers, all twelve of them, waxing in the slack squint of a reversing sun. Women too solid to ever be sainted. Morning assembles on what? Hairpins, houseplants. Green gathered by branch is made bright by rust bunching the foot of a chair. No, I didn't mean death or decay— it's just light murmuring a word to itself. Heartsick for a man, a friend calls to say *Tonight is so vague, what does he mean?* But isn't this too? This mid-rib moment already slipping off the reel. I want to tell her: it doesn't matter. Love keeps walking or it doesn't. Outside, a bit of spider thread glistens to a simple end. The town wore a blue cap a field away while the water set and reset like the static of a radio station too faint to enter. There are too many ways to interpret the sky but in memory it's pressed close like a scarf over the mouth— ultramarine from heel to crown, lacking the lightness that translates to distance; or, walking across Euclid with him how could I ever cut the blue stroke of sky from myself? I want to tell her: Love keeps walking even when you don't. In the hushed hull of this capsized hour I pluck myself from his naked branch. He paints the scrap of a woman in the water like an afterthought but still he paints her— as if the center could never hold without the small pin of someone dying or she's swimming— even then, life overshadowed by life. Don't my stairs rise each day to the soft landing? I was the hush falling over the water before it fell over me. I was the white canvas, empty voice-box. I was myself watching myself from the shore. So much for oral history. Sometimes the facts wake me gently and walk me to the mirror. I was sometimes the water.

## Sibling Study, McLean Hospital

Of gratitude, I don't know.  
Hummed out of the MRI, I was helped

into a chair. Gratitude

of arms, mercy of a window,  
in which these—

spike and gloss

the roots below, anchoring.

A lady reads off questions like: *have you ever known a parachutist  
and lied about it?*

Untrue to say  
I did not see him then, autumn

of that nineteenth year, hunched in his fur trapper hat  
thinking it over.

## Psyche

Because I had taken off my glasses  
and set them down by the depressed silver

of the sink, the two figures I saw, towing  
the child behind them on a sled, bled

across the gutter of air between the houses  
as if they were leaving something, out

of something and blurry as if to say no one  
here, no one here to be caught in crosshairs

as if to be free of danger was to be free  
of form. Lately, I wonder about my heart

in between beats, if that's the room  
where I first had you— hush, finish

the word— how long can love stay  
diastolic? As in chamber filling up

to be emptied out.



## Psyche

If I had killed myself, I don't think  
he'd follow. He would sleep less and less

until not at all but when spring, in gradient  
color, came up and over his unrolled

windows as he drove, it would be like  
spring. Each blossom nursed back.

A stem sets like a stem, no metaphor  
in the magnolia tree. I love our life.

The soap in the sink, the singular  
picked bone of the walkway

up to the porch, porch-swing, baby  
in knit sweater and all those albums

that house us; those neat, faux-leather,  
three-ring binders I labeled all

in one sitting— June 1999, Naples  
Florida, Winter 2004 with question

mark, Wedding, Honeymoon—as if  
we took them in one day. In the morning

I give birth. I do a handstand, my dress  
inside out and denim and

over my head. I'm twenty and too thin.  
You eat fries in the grass of a rest stop.

In the morning my parents hold hands  
on the steps of their house. Here

is a fresh coat of paint. We christen a baby  
just shy of noon. We look serious. Our friend

swims in lake water. It's always summer  
in the afternoon. Our cat sleeps in sun.

We go to a museum. We get a dog,  
bury our cat. Our daughter sits

on her bicycle, among friends. Around  
sunset I don't want my photograph taken.

I read a book, eat celery in bed. You wear  
a tie. I fix your tie. Your parents

are teenagers. My haircut is unflattering.  
We laugh all hours of the day. It's a party.

It's the day before a party. Through  
the dark frame of an open door, I look in

or out, depending. We get married.  
Spring comes. We sleep entwined.

## Psyche

Were we so different from anyone else.  
Wasn't it confusing for a while,

at the beginning. Wasn't the beginning  
more like the time the four or five deer

stayed seated like soft stones, the color  
of caraway seeds, in the middle

of the road. Isn't a beginning always  
an interruption. Wasn't it normal

and extraordinary, how we stopped  
and got out. And wasn't the night

cold. Didn't we use our scarves  
for some reason to usher them into

the woods. Isn't the point of the story  
that we turn toward each other

every time we tell it.

## Self-Portrait at Twenty-Four

The oak trees copied me  
crosshatching the backdrop

of the reservoir like rust.  
Those cream high-waters

I was wearing, whenever  
I quit my walking, took on

the shape of belled sleeves  
saints wear in statuary.

This was after we had passed  
a sandwich back and forth

across the middle console  
of his car. Half a mile in

he put the boxy camera  
to his face because he liked

how this part of the world  
looked, locking arms

with me. I crossed my arms  
but I was happy, I see that

in how I hold back while  
the moss was laying hands

on anything that let it.  
The hour long beneath us

like last week's rain we barely  
remember. This too is a way

of telling time: to say  
the couple is us, myself

and him, and to believe it.  
January. Anyone can see that.

In the difference between doing  
and appearing to have done it,

that's where we live. It looks  
like here— day-lit, just as lonely.

## Anonymous Season

in which my legs  
wrap around your waist and you're  
asking *what is it?* And because  
this has already happened,  
though I can't remember  
what happened, I say  
*I don't know, I really don't.*  
Here is the light  
boredom of passing hours  
with you. Here is history  
writ small as a sigh  
escaping my mouth.  
Here is pasta making a nest  
of the plate. Here is a body  
out of context, undressed  
and swimming  
up ahead. Here is river  
and shower and song  
you sang in the shower  
*my little Mickey!*  
Here is the inexact  
stillness of our single file  
through snow. Here  
is the woodpile's rough  
pattern on the neighbor's  
porch and the wood  
we stole from it, so quickly  
burned. Here is the fire  
as soon as it's started  
the year I turned twenty  
in which I climbed out a window  
only because you climbed out first.

## The Child

The child is heavy if you are a child and the child is a man you must carry up the stairs. The child is heavy when it's the child you remember being, hanging onto the lip of a pool, kicking. The child is heavy when you are tired and the child is not, says *get up* and you say *not now*. Just because the child is heavy doesn't mean the child isn't like summer in your mother's part of the world, midnight so heavy with sunlight. The child is heavy when the child is more than a child, is all children. All children wish to be heavy, want to be bigger, hands reaching for more surface. When a child can't articulate what it is they want, the lump in their throat is heavy and heavier when they can and it comes out wrong like now, like for instance there is no child and this is heavy, is an impasse, is not exactly a place, barely even a parking lot in a dream, more of an impression upon waking: a weightlessness, your arms so capable.

## Death, Two Summers Ago

Like birth: fat, wet stones in fabric, clapped in gunshot, falling  
out the walls we built. Ache, like the collar

of trees around the field,

is stark, formal. Then a warm wind  
as if the heart's rudder of heat

begins again

in all things. I heard a boy's body is heavier in death  
though logic says lighter,

*lighter*—the soul  
lilied up.

\*

It's December again

and outside, a dog crosses the sky, smudging  
the marble from the day like a sign... Gytrash in this

Irish nocturne, pad-foot

in heather. A portent, a hand sprung up, above  
the fieldgrass, high-pitched

as glass or whistle, as if  
to wave me back to the present.

*I'm alive!* Now that's a song  
I don't sing so well.



## Half-Sonnet

When you go back, back into your life,  
I let you. *Wait* is the word above Kafka's desk

in umber Prague. In 1913 he almost takes a wife  
into September, into winter; caps and fleecy vests

down there on the street. Who isn't waiting? I  
think the past lives in the room we live inside.

## Instructions

On Valentines Day, cutting strawberries at the kitchen table, I got dizzy and fainted. I understood it was my name being called across the large and easy cut of darkness. Is death as large and easy? When I woke, James was holding me. Is life as sure as a hand passing fruit under cool water, and as soon? House of compassion is the house of heaven is the house of this world. I think we can bear it. Whoever is sitting close when I die, come closer. You have to say my name so I can see it fly over. You have to say it so I can choose another.

## Odic Song

O pronoun I dance around, anonymous  
as the air within the O I altar. O god  
to make verbs from nouns is always erotic,  
O chalice me in the bluish guest room  
where I laid down, O for once, my all  
for you, O bible my every hunger, O  
is the mouth I step through when I want  
to be out there in the world of okay  
airport lattes, opinion polls, onion rings, open  
24 hours, alphabet dissolving in the office  
of the optometrist, the no in no vacancy  
a neon, country of open carry and one ways,  
open house, sold out, a neighborhood  
the moment before a house is foreclosed,  
olive grove of memory, O copse of trees  
obstructing a soldier's slow dying  
from a city, O is the sure sound  
a heart makes when it sleeps, Rome  
is the city with the statue of Saint  
Teresa I mistook for suffering, that O  
not far from pleasure, field abandoned  
as soon as entered, the O a name makes  
when I won't say it, the sky in science  
books, the O-Zone, window which is not  
a way out, oops, O shit, O fuck, O god  
come back, come over, come on me,  
the prayer for nothing to come between us,  
our orthopedic objects, your trinkets, femur  
and fibula, skull and wrist O your wrist  
when you ordered oysters and they looked  
like boats, the oysters. O save me,  
we ate them all.

## A Voice

Of course I understood  
that you deleted everything

I ever sent you like  
unlacing the filmy

ribbon from an amber  
cassette, only easier.

I remember thinking  
when I was girl,

that God knew me  
by my given name

and someday would say it:  
*Michaela* like one,

two, three nods.  
The truth is he loves

his wife and God  
doesn't love any woman

the way he loves  
the world but waiting

for the bus I see  
the trillium by my feet,

a scrap lodged inside:  
yellow paper torn

from a legal pad, folded  
into bright star...

## Psyche

The baby was sleeping for a few minutes  
when I woke her, shaking her shoulders.

She whimpered, began to cry. Three times now  
I've done this. Three times, I've panicked

like a woman who's lost something which,  
having come to feel like everything, is

everything. Time, in the stretched quiet  
of the most private of moments is suddenly

brittle, unable; or, I thought I saw the fates,  
maybe, when the dozen finches outside

trembled as if in agreement. Though I don't  
believe in harmony before tragedy. There's

harmony or there isn't and still a word for it.  
*Tragedia* from *tragos* which is from the flank

of a male goat, he-goat. I'm not sure why  
this makes sense but it does, the way *harmony*

is from *harmos* as in a fastening or joint like  
I lean my head on my husband's shoulder.

## Psyche

I had a childhood. My mother sent me  
a VHS and I watch my face appear

from where it was, covered by quiet,  
mechanical dark. Maybe even the most

basic technology had not asked us  
to return here: third-born in corduroy

dress saying *hold it, hold it, hold it*  
which means I want to possess it.

In this instance, a flashlight my sister  
is playing with. Neither child seems

to get what they want. I watch us  
skip ahead, plopped down in sand

and when horses come thundering  
down the beach it's the first time

we will see so many but we don't  
know we are waiting for them, waiting

as we are for only the glassy after-life  
of the next wave. Can I call this child

me? Bowlegged girl, a wave covering  
then receding. Almost, we look unchanged.

## Psyche

Skimming the last two pages of book we wrote  
we can't remember why we took this instead of that;

unmanned boat instead of swan, adrift in milk-jacket  
in the long water-shade of a cypress. Baby's asleep

so we're quiet— easier to accept how it is, as if practicing  
for how it will be, if I'm silent when he enters me, gold

circle overlaying a blue square. I think we enter love  
and leave the same. And the heart? My heart is on all fours.

Sometimes we don't say a word until after we wake  
and get up the next day. Does it matter if I don't believe

in one order of thing? It shouldn't matter if the gods  
fashioned our bones when our children are the ones

who bury us. Peaceful, peaceful— it's our pleasure  
that outlives us, not our pain.

## Great Fires

Once, desire truncated  
the sky. If you don't  
remember, I will  
for the both of us.

There was nothing  
we needed, or in this case  
we had no need to look up  
but for the wish  
to point something out  
to the other.

And because one always  
mispronounces  
the name of an angel  
in visitation  
by assuming they could,  
about a persimmon,  
fugitive ember  
stashed in the tree,

you said my name.  
And later, after I left,  
I saw a sort of  
after-glow— bright  
pretext to read  
even the penciled  
line through *an occasion*  
*to begin* as more  
expressive than striking  
or crossing.



## Family Swim

When I saw a woman roll her stocking  
up her leg, varicose veins tunneling hot

and blue, I felt as I felt when my teacher  
told our class that she had stapled

our handprints into a sun. I'm saying  
I would have tore my handprint down

if I could recall which palm and fingers  
were mine; by which, I mean

I didn't want to die, to have a body  
if it could be crushed by someone else,

time. After family swim I showered fast  
and alone, looking away from the naked

women who, like statues softened to life,  
became bolder and bigger, louder

than me. Though, I felt my feelings  
were sometimes like them, these women,

as when I saw the feet of Christ  
overlapping in marble, as when a tree

shook in warm wind. And years later  
when a woman gathered my hair

in her hands, the way hands might gather  
a bouquet of certain air, what thrums

between stems above, barely above,  
the garden's scribble of green.

She was just shining close to where  
I was shining. The sheet, shaken out.

None of us, a whiplashed stem. I mean  
that they loved their nakedness,

my feelings, and the woman I was  
with another woman and the women

who washed themselves, bent at the waist,  
scrubbing the pads of their feet. Hair

down their backs— dash, milked.  
The flex of shoulders. To let the rake

of steam round them up like leaves,  
like children. And watching how

in the small dent of the body's center,  
a white cotton bra could be raised up

with no ceremony, and I thought  
what ceremony is this, how awful.

What did my fear know about living,  
that my living would not?

Lightheaded, I'd stumble out. My towel,  
by then, simple weight bundled

at the bottom of a plastic bag.  
And there were my brothers, sitting.

My father, standing. Outside in the lot,  
winter widened so we could run

through it, all of us— jumping in  
for a short drive in the dark, as if

this was why we went anywhere,  
so we could go home, passing the fields

we knew were there, these fields  
holding a few horses tucked inside

like careful stitch-work of shade  
in shadow. I love our shapes

so simplified. How we could stay  
in them, passing time.

## Les Illuminations

It wasn't the only thing I bought that summer but it was the only thing I bought that day. I bent down and shimmied it from a cardboard box of books. The title in gold on the scuffed spine, the title in gold on the cover. Nearby corn rotated over hot coals in a grocery cart, small children stop-jumped, the doors of a cafe opened and shut and opened— in gold, the summer sang, in gold. I knew enough to understand the first word was *after*. It was never more than a book and still I paid too much.

## After Overdose

If I try, I can see her running  
but not as she would in cool down

or warm up, or even as she'd pick up  
along the white line of the field's

border, eyes over her shoulder.  
Bodies shimmer in the moment

before a quick narrowing  
of space. In between

what hasn't but might happen  
the past and future are a double

hung window. The floating present  
could sail in, across; or is it

the next way as in the traveler  
may now rest and float

as if on water, as in after  
a long journey. It was how

she could say *here* or something  
louder like *yes, me, please look up*

without sounding  
an alarm— how she fluttered

almost offside one arm ready  
to rise, not yet. Is *I won't*

reserved for the living.  
When does *I don't*

become *I can't*. She's not  
in the field anymore

because she's not. She's running  
as if saving for nothing

like a mother I saw once  
trampling tulips, bright-toothed

in the first yardage  
of spring because one

of her daughter's bones  
hatched through skin.

Because it was incredibly quiet  
I heard everything on earth

was fighting very hard, the leaf  
fighting the blue current

of another leaf's shadow.  
*What can't be sustained*, the sprinter

says to the lungs, *doesn't have to*.  
*I will sustain you now*,

the mother said, laying her down.

*for H.M.*

## Together

What I haven't seen I notice  
on my way to James: ROAD  
NARROWS. A warning or why  
put it there in yellow, borders  
reflective. I like these two  
together, enjambed fraction.  
Fraction with the line erased.  
This noun, that verb. Short  
in stature, they look married—  
an edge in all romance like  
in sickness and in health or when  
my mother says *your father  
is a good friend*. Road narrows  
and driving to James again,  
I see the sun setting on the blue  
mantle of mountains and feel  
like I've chosen something.  
And walking down it, he says  
*I like my road*. All along it,  
there are daffodils and we love  
the daffodils, so lively  
in the center where both  
sexes are housed. It means  
they're perfect. There is such myth.

Audax-

light so early  
it registers as non-light and lifting it up,

the light so early, I decide what the great  
noun is and throw it there. It's you, hooded

in marriage. Who told me adjectives are all  
the angels we get? Desire was raw umber

then middle red. Before I couldn't speak  
I said to my mother: make me. Now I think

why not here, scrolling through photographs  
of a place in Auch. Cerulean shutters snapped

in attention on the main house, wisteria  
shrugging off the shadow's noon-sick shirt.

*Although this is not an exclusive requirement,  
the sit will best suit a couple to manage the dogs*

*and garden.* I'm reliable, I say, I'm honest  
and able to work in the garden and though

I'll be alone for most of it, someone might  
join me for part of the stay—



## Interior 178

Because there's so much  
exterior, choosing where to sit  
in the morning, I gravitate  
to the window. Now I look  
as interior as I feel, drinking  
my coffee, watching the day  
toggle dailiness and radiance;  
periwinkles proposing spring  
at the roots of a leafless tree.  
I say tree and you think  
of something else and also  
that I'm speaking to you.  
Helen talks to Adam,  
her husband, across the small  
swathe of their backyard,  
olive huddle of trashcans,  
V of lights suspended above  
on string, susurrations  
of the small animals slipping  
back into trees. Helen tells me  
Adam washed her underwear,  
jeans and shirt each night  
the first winter they met  
so what she'd worn, she'd wear  
the next day, so she stayed  
another night, so love  
wants us in present tense.  
One of them stands up  
and says *I'll get the tea.*  
It's the implied I lie under  
and labor over. If you  
were not there, no, if you  
were here I would not  
say it, what I lie under  
and labor over: for you,  
for you, for you.

## Arc Entire

We reached *I can't*  
*look at you* and also  
*look at me, I'm trapped.*

It was not so different,  
the end from the start.

Years ago I asked God  
to grant us the exit

with only a little pain

though I didn't say it  
as much as kept it

just below everything  
I said. Can light,

from the lowest ring  
of a tree, step out?  
And then

what could it say?  
The world has a pattern

of answering all things  
but constant grace  
is too difficult to parse.

I like talking to you.  
Did my footsteps,

even as they advanced,  
sound like those  
of a woman, retreating?

## Acknowledgments

Thank you to the UVA faculty, Lisa Russ Spaar, Rita Dove, Greg Orr, Debra Nystrom and Paul Guest for their compassion, generosity and direction. Thank you to all my peers in the UVA poetry program. And many thanks to my first teachers, David Keplinger and Linda Voris.