

ABSTRACT

STANCAR, ANGELA DIANE. *Something Blue: Poems*. (Under the direction of John Balaban.)

Something Blue is a collection of poems that explore the physicality of relationships. “Light on Lake Michigan,” the first poem in the manuscript, explores a mother’s suicide by drowning. In the title poem, “Something Blue,” the speaker finds out an ex-lover has married and wonders if his abuse has continued with his new wife. “Fourteen” and “Purge” examine the objectification of bodies that today’s teenage girls inflict upon themselves. The poems are mostly written in free verse, with careful attention paid to line and stanza lengths and internal rhythm.

SOMETHING BLUE:

POEMS

by

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DEDICATION

To my family, who helped me get this far.

BIOGRAPHY

Angela Stancar was born in Eugene, Oregon in 1980 but has called North Carolina home since 1988. She received a Bachelor of Arts in English from Catawba College in 2002 and a Master of Arts in English from North Carolina State University in 2005. She teaches high school in Sanford.

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Light on Lake Michigan

What did you see from the pier
before the cold undertow took you,
your wool coat and snow boots pulling you down
into the tangled lake grass
so that all you saw before your eyes clouded over
was speckled light from Pilot Island?
Did the water taste
the way you always imagined it would?
Did your daughter's breath frost the passenger window
as she counted the seagulls
that nose-dived into the water?

Valentine

The doctors opened her up
like the hood of a car.
They made one long incision under her breasts
and flipped up her chest
as if it was built on a hinge,
then lifted out her damaged lungs
to make room for the transplants.

A few days later, when her breath
was still too shallow for words,
she raised her gown to display the clean cut
that rested exactly where the underwire would
when she could wear a bra again.

After visiting hours,
we exchanged hushed whispers over the phone,
and she told me that she might just leave her shirt on
the next time she led a man to bed,
to her rubied flesh, her string of bright gems.

Something Blue

When I saw their names emblazoned on the page,
separated by a thick black hyphen,
I remembered when I wanted my own name
tethered to his.

The bride forced a smile in the wedding portrait,
her face turned so the camera
wouldn't pick up the black shadows
under her eyes.

I'm sure she carefully selected her dress,
to find one with sleeves
so she could hide his fingerprints
just beneath the ivory shell.

Did she let you reach up her thigh
to grasp the barbed garter,
and did you wake in the bridal bed
clutching a fistful of hair?

Song of Lilith

How tempting it was to climb the garden wall
and taste the fruit on the other side.

I watched from the top of the highest tree
as he summoned another woman from his rib
and bit into the pomegranate she plucked for him,
the blood-like juice running down his chin.
Their sins shimmered on his lip in the evening sky.

He told her my wings were blood tipped,
woven from serpent scales,
that if she didn't sleep with one eye open to the moon
I would creep into her dreams
and snuff the life from her womb.
Because I was made of dust
and would not lie beneath him.

Fourteen

The blue-paint-chipped bathroom stall reads,
Heather gives the best head,
Brittany likes it up the butt
in crooked black Sharpie.

Last Friday Heather crouched over the boy
in the back row of World History
as the lights dimmed and Achilles
plunged onto the TV screen.
Heather stained his cock with Razzle Dazzle Razzberry,
veiling her bobbing head
with dark-rooted strands.

Brittany was caught straddling her boyfriend
on the courtyard wall during lunch.
She covered her lap with a blanket
as they rocked back and forth.
A week later,
her boyfriend fingered her best friend
in the stairwell after first period,
plunging deep-shallow-deep
to the rhythm of platform shoes clop-clopping on the stairs
behind them.

Freshman English is far from their minds
when they spread their legs in the back of the bus
on the way to school.
Heather does not know that the boy

who promises a thousand I love yous
never sees her as a whole sonnet.
She is nothing more than alliteration
on a bathroom stall.

Inside the Dragon's Belly
Jeanne d'Arc Square, Rouen, Normandy

The townspeople didn't believe God
would speak to the girl who spit fire
and masqueraded as a boy on the battlefield.

Inside the dragon's belly,
they built a sanctuary for her.

The poppies, newly sprung, blackened
under soot from the flames that embraced her.
The sky glowed almost pink that night.

Inside the dragon's belly,
they built a sanctuary for her.

Spectators gathered to watch her body
writhe and blister before it disintegrated
into the April mist.

Inside the dragon's belly,
they built a sanctuary for her.

When it crackled and hissed, a pile of cinders
at their feet, they lifted their faces in prayer.
They licked their lips. They tasted of ash.

Dénouement

The first time I visited her in the nursing home,
displaced from her home of forty years,
she fumbled for a dull pencil, scribbling furiously
as I mentioned names of family members, dates, places,
her fragmented handwriting sometimes splitting
words in two.

Her mind had already flown to Maui
to reclaim the vanquished memories.

“Do you remember it?” I asked.

“The hula dancing, the angel fish, the pineapple fields?”

Her hungry eyes searched my face
as her fingers curled into giant commas,
pressing the pencil to the notepad
to write my name.

Escape Artist

In the converted janitor's closet,
he taught us how to conjugate strong verbs,
how to penetrate their armored façades.

Fahren, fuhr, gefahren.

How seductive was the umlaut in *möchten*—
like tiny teeth marks someone made
to suck the marrow from the word—
the s-tset in *grüßen*
curving like a woman's breast.

It had been years since he rode his bicycle
across the Swiss border,
escaping the furor of the crisp Nazi uniform,
the same straightjacket whose seams
had pulled his brother's body taut
and turned him into a toy soldier.
When he reached Arbon, he picked up speed,
his feet pedaling faster, faster
until he lifted off the ground.

When the Dead Sleep

We buried the Labrador
in the half-frozen January earth
of a neighbor's farm
with his plastic chew toys and faded blue collar.
I had never seen a dead body—
the stiffness of joints,
cold surface of his coarse black fur.
Daddy cried for only the second time
in my life
as we poured dirt over the black body
and I said a prayer we usually said at supper time.

When we placed Grandpa in the vault,
I expected the real dead
to look more like
abandoned artillery,
empty and half shell-shocked.
Instead, he lay like a mannequin
against the unyielding satin and oak,
no fur to protect him
against the snow.

Kilauea's Ashes

In your last trimester, the volcano erupted
on the eastern shore of the island.

That night you held your breath
to make your stomach flat again,
letting the air flow in slow ribbons
from between your cracked lips,
your hand pressing against the soft meat
between your ribs.

Thick waves of heat bruised
velvet lawns and uprooted trees.

Pele played a concerto
on the slick walls of your abdomen.

The earth's fissure broke the sound barrier,
far-away rumblings lulling you to sleep.

In the morning, your mother called,
spoke of feeling you like a phantom limb
as the sky rained fire
and she found ashes at her front door.

Birthday

You slipped through this world like Tommy,
who fell through the ice that winter in Sugar Camp.
The divers held his mother's hands behind her back
so she wouldn't jump in after him.
They lifted his body from the frozen lake,
his stiff limbs pointed outwards
in the shape of a star.
Ice crystals sparkled in his wet hair.

Our mother leaned over the bowl,
scooped you up with a spoon,
and placed you in a mason jar.
On our way to the hospital, she held you in her lap,
stroking the ridges on the shiny metal lid
as each bump in the road
felt like rocking a baby to sleep.

Afterbirth

Henry Ford Hospital or *The Flying Bed*, Frida Kahlo, Oil on metal panel, 1932

The baby came out in pieces.

In the recovery room, hollowed out
and painting a self-portrait of pain,
she smeared the blood that rushed from between her legs
with each twinge and shudder of her belly
onto the slick metal canvas.

In her opus, she lies on a hospital bed
suspended in an empty plain,
the Motor City dwarfed in the distance behind her.
Her belly is still round, breasts swollen.
The doctors have taken out her braids
so her hair spills off the side of the bed.

A single tear beads at the corner of her left eye.
In her hands she grips six red strings, objects she can't let go of
tethered to the ends like helium balloons.
An alien-like fetus looms above her, hands entwined
as if in prayer. On one side of it, a woman's torso,
on the other, a snail; how slow and steady the blood left her.

An armor-like pelvis rests beneath her,
a car engine at the foot of the bed.
A purple orchid shadows her belly,
its petals frayed and limp, its color pooling
on the ground below. The heavens have not broken
through her gray-scale clouds to swallow her.

She has not painted the saints' faces
in this votive, has not swirled a brush stroke
to dedicate her sorrow. St. Margaret was not there
to hold her hand when the body, entombed in her womb,
broke the surface too soon
and suffocated in the sunlit air.

Molting

The night my father learned the Spanish
he would need to fumble through the Colombian adoption,
my mother was home finishing the season's canning,

carefully peeling the skin loose
from fat peaches that would line the pantry shelves
through winter, swimming in their own juices.

She gutted the plump fruits, carving out their pits
before tossing them into the boiling water
as my father sputtered and spit

out verbs he would surely use
when they landed in Bogotá to claim their son.
She sorted through the disfigured and bruised,

saving the pulp and discarding the peel.
She caught full-on the steaming eruption
from the pressure cooker, a scalding swell

that washed over her body and burned her tee-shirt
into her chest. When she pulled the cotton from her sticky body,
she took the top layer of skin, birthing

a caul of pink that spread across her chest.
She emptied the icebox into the bathtub
and soaked in the cold. Skin curled from her breasts

and floated to the surface, revealing a bright shine,
the red splotches like Rorschach blots
or the map of a jagged coastline.

That night, when my father helped her slather a thick layer
of salve over her breasts and belly,
they received a call from Colombia:

the birth mother had changed her mind.
The peaches gleamed in their mason jars
under the hot kitchen lights.

Jamaican Gold

For Ijah

The merchant's molasses-colored fingers
graze my skin as he fastens beaded bamboo
around my ivory neck.

I close my fist over pink beads,
strands of opalescent blue
that brush my peeling sunburn.

He tells me how beautiful I look
in his craftwork, presses more trinkets into my hands.
His wife is threading fishing line
with brilliant baubles, tiny clasps.

Later, away from her, he points to his son
twirling in March grass.
His tousled corkscrew curls
shift in noon breeze
punctuating his forehead like quotation marks.

"He had a brother once," the father says.

"He was eleven months when he died.

We raise money to bury him on Monday."

He entices more day-trippers into his makeshift stall
off of the buzz of the main boulevard.

The beads pirouette
on an invisible balance beam of wire,
weaving loss into her body's sinews and fibers
like pearls.

Jewel

On August nights, we captured fireflies
And fashioned rings with their flaming bodies.
We'd wear the shiny sparks until they died
And flash our glittering gems—those disembodied

Embers flaring in the moonlit sky.
They burned so brightly on our fingers,
The fiery glow reflecting in our eyes.
I knew their blaze would never linger.

Evolution

In this greasy traveler's diner in New Mexico,
I suck melted cheese
from inside a flour tortilla,
kick my unlaced shoe back and forth,
peel my sweat-drenched thighs
from the green vinyl booth.
My father pays the bill
with the little change he carries.
Balancing my toddler sister on her knee,
my mother twists her wedding ring
around her heat-swollen finger,
balls her hands into tight fists,
some kind of prayer that once we get to Wisconsin
Goodwill hand-me-downs
will be over.
I kneel before the dusty metal barstools,
searching for divinity
in this desert café,
prickly leg hairs sticking to the tacky floor.
I peel back my mother's craggy fingers
and search for what remains of us—
tattered suitcases,
faded I.D. tags with no forwarding address—
washed ashore
on this Albuquerque Sahara.

Byways

The movers found me in the moving van
curled up between my oak dresser and a box-spring,
wrapped in packing blankets in August.
I tried to conceal myself
like part of a nativity scene.

Days later when we crossed the state line,
Mother took a Polaroid
of the Blue Ridge Mountains,
images framed by the car windshield,
peaks hidden among the summer haze
and rain-soaked horizon.

I didn't understand the freedom of an Interstate,
only fixed my eyes on the roadside cafes
like Aunt Bea's and Jimmy Jack's Barbecue,
waiting for a sign I couldn't have found
back home in the Midwest.

As we neared our new home,
the towns grew closer together,
the air thicker, quieter.
Through the fog,
a prophecy—
Bridge
Ices Before
Road.

Evidence

I sit in dusky shadows
in a neon orange chair by the window.
The admitting nurses wear pastels
under their hospital whites,
the hallways decorated for Easter.

Somewhere in the back,
they are scraping her insides
like the flesh of a ripe peach.
They survey the rest of her—
dig deeper into her pillaged insides
and cover the black-and-blue fingerprints
above her pelvis.

Later, she told me the details pricked
at the torn space between her thighs.
The black skirt she stole from my closet
was split up the back.
When she walked the five miles home,
her sandal strap snapped
and slapped against the mud.

When she crossed the threshold of the apartment,
the tap from the bathroom sink
leaked onto the cracked porcelain,
the alarm beeped incessantly,
the unblinking message light on the answering machine
stained her eyelids a deep garnet.

The Venetian blinds cut light across her forehead,
stale sunlight dividing her in half.

Rapunzel

She envied Rapunzel's long braid,
the girls in her class who already shaved their legs.
She had long imagined what it would feel like
for a man to run his fingers through her thick curls.

She was haunted by memories of the first strands
that fell from her head and thick lashes
that showered into her open palm.

In her dreams, she wraps an auburn coil
around her index finger. Sometimes she sports
a spiky pink style or lets phantom tresses
tumble down her back, stretching to China.

Music Teacher

She hadn't played Beethoven in years
but measured her days with scales and *Do-re-mis*,
armed with a ruler in case her pupils' arched hands grew slack.

Did she play deep, longing crescendos for her husband
before he left her, before the only notes
that curled from her fingers were flat arpeggios?

Did she try to teach him to play for her,
guiding his fingers across the ivory as he tripped
over sharps and flats like he tripped about her body?

Or did the dollar-store CD version of the Seventh Symphony
comfort her in the lonely hours, its thunderous climax
jostling the metronome she kept on the bedside table?

Professor

Under lantern light and the glow
of bottles of Red Stripe,
she tell us—two young women
still slippery with the afterbirth of adolescence—
that foolishness doesn't always fade with age.

She was drawn to the timbre of his Scottish accent,
the way his tongue curled over consonants
and pronounced her name,
loved how his Edinburgh spires
had somehow made it into her landscape.

But they didn't share the same midnight,
and she could smell the whiskey and sex
over the transatlantic line when he said,
"I can't marry you. I hope you understand."
St. Giles's bells pealed in the distance.

She wandered across half the globe
to get him out of her head,
leaving Charlotte for El Escorial and then St. Petersburg.
She came home when there was still frost on the ground.
When she sighed, her breath wrote his name in the fog.

Mallorca

He always dreamed they'd go to Mallorca—
to watch the flamenco dancers, to taste the tapas
and feel the flush of the white-hot Mediterranean sun
as it bleeds into the sea. From the tiny window
in the clinic, with its white paint crusting at the corners,

Pollença's painted hills undulate just like the shiny brochures
his wife gave him for their anniversary.

The Spanish nurse pokes his engorged veins, tapping
each one to find a spot for filtering his blood.

He doesn't even feel the sting of the needle,

its hot tip burrowing under his skin, or the grip of his wife's hand,
her manicured nails tearing flesh. He's grown used to the pain,
even imagined his own death, blood spilling from his body
as his wife soaks in the Mallorcan sunshine and curls her tongue
to taste salty oysters and bright mimosas with the other merry widows.

Hollowed out by time, she might want a man
who only bleeds for her. The light in his window
will extinguish, calling her from the shore.

His bed will still be hot,
and she will press herself into its curve.

The Dancer of Murano

The glassblower pulls an orange ball of fire
from the oven, twirls it before a mesmerized crowd,
then shapes it with his breath.
With each exhalation and gyration,
the molten orb transforms into a nimble leg,
a slender arm, a swan-like neck.

The blue dancer stands poised
at the end of the metal spit,
ready to pirouette across the Grand Canal,
to quick-step over the Ponte di Rialto.

Spectators have traveled from the darkest parts of earth
to watch him forge her from his sizzling kiln,
a body so strong that when she cools and he smashes her
against his work table before a dazed audience,
she will not fracture into tiny shards
that speckle the ceiling with blue light.

Barometer

“Who needs a weatherman?” Dad would say
while pointing to my leg—
heavy as lead, a deep pulsing from ankle to knee
as the storm clouds rolled in,
pain seeming to glisten like drizzle on pavement.
I could feel the showers
beneath my skin
before they were announced on the evening news
or beaded on my windowpane.

But I could not predict
the surge of his words or the flurry of accusations,
thick as thunderheads inside the house.
My bones were silent.
Ruin seemed to seep through the windows.
I almost drowned in the downpour.

Breathing Lessons

The first night after surgery,
my mother awoke from a labored sleep to
silence.

She slipped into my room
and held a mirror under my nose,
waiting for the fog of breath to appear
on the slippery glass surface,
so incredulous I could breathe again,
smooth rhythms replacing the wheezing and choking
while I dreamed of pretty things.

The next morning
when she fixed me pancakes,
dribbling thick saccharine juice
onto my plate,
she listened to the hush of my lungs,
not believing I remembered how
to exhale.

Penelope's War

Strand by strand, I unwove
that tapestry
until my fingers bled,
and I bolted the windows
to escape the wailing
the wind carried from the sea.

How I wished
those men
who bayed at the moon
would turn to pigs
so I could lead them
to slaughter.

My son kept watch
at dusk,
his black eye
shining
through the crack in the door
like the bright northern star.

Messiah

Above the bed
hung the flea market portrait of Jesus at Gethsemane,
a single ray of watercolor sunlight haloing his upturned face.

When she dressed—
a deep shudder coursing through her body
as she pulled her stockings over her thighs—
she sometimes pictured herself washing his feet,
gently caressing one callused heel at a time.

And when her husband
stumbled home in morning's hollow hours and fell into bed,
pummeling her with whiskey breath,
she pretended he was raising her
from the dead.

The Mermaid of Zennor

Once upon a time a mermaid was enchanted by a singer in the church at Zennor. When he next went fishing she called out to him and he in turn became enchanted with her. One night he threw himself into the sea to be with her. Although no body was found his friends decided he had drowned. Many years passed and then one day, while fishing near a cave, some fishermen were surprised to see their friend swimming with a fish's tail. With him was the mermaid and several young merboys and mergirls!

--ancient legend printed on a postcard from Cornwall, England

She waited with baited hook
until the day he plunged head first into the whitecaps
and let the salty water fill his lungs.
He stroked her slippery scales,
his hands resting where skin meets fin,
myth meets breath.

He first saw her rising out of the swells
like a phoenix, her red hair
surfacing like flames,
her face a beacon
as the harshest rollers battered the cliffs.

When the tide is low,
sailors can hear his tenor cantatas
wrapping around the cliffs
that hang over the Cornish coast,
matching the wind's long sighs.

Soldiers

My grandmother, obsessed with Pontius Pilate,
says the man was a Fascist,
that she would never
tilt her hip toward his bony frame
like she would her husband,
long-dead stout soldier who stole a lock of her russet hair
the night before he left her half-swollen with his child
to navigate the sour waters of the South Pacific.
She keeps his letters in a cardboard box
in the back of her closet
to remind her of the years when his words
could turn her blood into wine,
of the hands that stopped just short
but unfastened her anyway.

White Horses

Rounding the curve,
how could the driver know
that the horse would stop to graze
at the road's shoulder, and slow
as his rider urged him toward the other side?

The August heat haze
must have clouded his vision.
The Explorer careened into the thoroughbred;
he crumpled under the tires.
Launched from the saddle, the rider

landed in a pile of wildflowers
at the road's edge, the reins
still wrapped around her fingers.
The horse lay across the hot asphalt,
the broken yellow line dividing its body.

How he must have resembled the chalk horses
in Oxfordshire, their lithe white frames—
skeleton-like—forever carved into deep green hills,
an endless loping across the cloudy plain.

Reassembling the Parts

The Tuesday paper called you an
unidentified
white female
who lost control of her Toyota Corolla
and launched into a neighbor's yard,
tucked inside a hunk of green metal.

When I approach the box that holds your remains—
a body broken and pieced back together—
I close my fist over the brass handles
keeping you horizontal,
witnessing through thick wood
what I can only imagine you look like.

Across the room,
your mother's refracted image in the hallway mirror—
inky rivers flowing out of her mascara-caked eyes
and fixing her gaze on the painted oak locked tight
so your translucent skin doesn't rot
under parlor lights.

She folds herself into the thick smell of roses,
cartographer of your hollowed eyes,
powdered bruises,
your Irish red hair,
those few loose strands
a stain between her fingers.

What Remains

After the funeral,
Mother scanned the old messages
on the answering machine.
Your disembodied voice filled the room,
wishing us a happy Thanksgiving.

You hung above us in the kitchen,
over meatloaf and shortcake,
like the mist that hovers over the lake
on humid July mornings.

She will retrace her steps,
back to the empty house she used to know.
She will sort through your clothes.
The hangers will lie empty on your bed
like a pile of bones.

Living Will

If I die in Prague,
rim your margarita glass
with my ashes
at the Cafe Savoy.

Let me linger
among the tequila
and the smoky air.

Build an ossuary
of my bones
on the banks of the Vltava.
Kneel at my hip bone,
my thigh, shades
of the skin
you once knew so well.

If I die in Prague,
write my name
on one of the blackened angels
on the Charles Bridge.
Follow the blue haze
of midnight spires
until you hear the bells
that chime my name.

Transatlantic

Whenever I come here, it comes to this:
bursting sound barriers to sleep in Paris gray,
moments of blindness and fleeting bliss.

The time zones that separate us exist as if
to divide my Carolina twang from your *si vous plais*.
Whenever I come here, it comes to this.

If I said I could do this forever I'd be remiss.
I never really liked the Champs-Élysées
or moments of blindness and fleeting bliss.

The whistle of the train and the tea kettle hiss
ruptures twilight and sends me on my way.
Whenever I come here, it comes to this.

Twisted in the duvet, you accept my parting kiss.
There must be any easier way, you say,
than moments of blindness and fleeting bliss.

Goodbye always lingers on our salty lips.
Maybe one day you'll ask me to stay.
Whenever I come here, it comes to this:
moments of blindness and fleeting bliss.

“Útok na Londýn”

Today in Staroměstská station, a headline
blazed from the *Prague Post*, clutched
in the hands of the passenger next to me.
A mass of twisted metal I barely recognized
as a double-decker bus exploded from the page.
A man’s blackened face peered at me
from beneath fingers smudged with newsprint.

At the American laundromat near Hradčanská,
CNN broadcast faces of the missing.
I was folding socks, tucking one end into the other,
when “Adrian Johnson” scrolled across the screen
beneath a face I had never seen.

I thought of you headed to King’s Cross,
of your brother catching the Tube
to his office on Liverpool Street.
I imagined you swimming through a darkened tunnel
as I wandered in the rain through Old Town Square,
ducking into the Church of Our Lady Before Tyn
to dry my sopping hair.

At home in bed, having overslept,
you awoke, my Adrian, to Morrissey
(“*The rain falls down on a humdrum town*”)
while someone else’s wife stood outside Euston Station
and called your name.

Dissident
Prague Spring

Words burned my fingers
and arched their spines

toward me, the yellowed pages beckoning
me to slip inside, to live between the leather covers.

Under candlelight and fog of supremacy,
I read with crazed delight

until I loosened the grip
of hands around my mind.

When the seasons changed,
I found Kafka at the supermarket checkout.

Swimming in Terezín

*“Somewhere, far away out there, childhood
sweetly sleeps,
Along that path among the trees,
There o’er that house
Which was once my pride and joy,
There mother gave me birth into this world
So I could weep...”*

--from "Terezín" by Hanuš Hachenburg (1929-1944)
I Have Not Seen a Butterfly Around Here

The prisoners dug a swimming pool
for the children of the SS guards,
moving layer upon layer of rock and dirt
as sweat dripped from their chins
into the hollows of their chests
and the guards' lashings drew beads of blood
to the surface of their backs.

In the shallow end, a lanky girl
does a handstand. She presses her palms
against the cement and kicks first one foot,
then another, into the air. She points her toes
toward the sun, upside down ballerina
pirouetting across the naked sky.

Inside the barbed wire, a boy
bargains for an extra piece of bread.
Flanked on all sides by men
whose cotton robes drip from their bodies,
he swirls his spoon around his soup bowl,
poking a small potato that floats on the watery surface.

Oslo T Bane

The eleven p.m. sunlight
reflects off of train headlights,
the moon a zealous martyr
to this twilight aurora.

I embed blurring landmarks onto Kodak film;
Vigeland's Park, Holmenkollen Ski Jump,
McDonald's—
“Twenty-three golden arches
all within five minutes walking distance,”
an American friend once told me,
and I remembered.

I count people from my subway seat
as we emerge onto open tracks
and into bronze hues of sky.

There is a homeless man
dressed in fresh, salt-licked rags,
a clean coffee cup in the seat next to him.
I resist the urge
to drop a single bill with George Washington's face
into his offering cup,
feel for a couple of kroner instead.

I blink,
the train leaving metropolis.
The sun has set on the other side of the earth.

The Writing Teacher

Each day, she lectures teenagers
on the use of imagery and metaphor—
“Don’t show me, tell me,” she says—
imparting her wisdom
on Sylvia Plath, W.B. Yeats, and Seamus Heaney.
She scrawls Shakespeare across the white board:
 ∪ / ∪ / ∪ / ∪ / ∪ /
“My MISTress’ EYES are NOthing LIKE the SUN.”
“Isn’t scansion fun?”
She helps Chris hone in on the perfect verb,
warns Dana against using the passive voice.

At night, after sifting through sonnets
and fixing rhymes in villanelles,
she struggles to place her thoughts on paper.
On the floor in the corner lies a torn folder
with fragments of abandoned verse poking out of the top.
She wants to capture the fervor of her young poets
who rummage the thesaurus
for the perfect synonym for the word *green*
and can somehow spill forth yards of similes
across the blue-lines of their notebook paper.
But she cannot cup her hands around the words
or tie a rope around a rhyme.

Purge

She folds herself into a paper swan
for the boy who locked eyes with her once
but might have memorized the curves of her waistline
or the circumference of her thighs.

He will only touch beautiful origami
sculpted under his stony gaze.
She will go home and eat herself into a stupor,
then turn herself inside out to fit into the palm of his hand.

Marnita's Baby

He wore his mother's name across his biceps,
declaring that he was not really motherless.

He was on the fifty yard line
when they found her body in the trunk of her husband's car,
a cord wound around her neck.

His father's face splashed across the front page:
"Local Pastor Charged in Wife's Murder."

He sprinted across the wet grass toward the end zone,
his cleats digging into soft earth,
when they pulled the car from the reservoir.

Words
For Amber

The first day I met you,
you handed me a fat notebook
full of pubescent scratchings,
looped letters dancing off the lined leaves.
Words like *crimson* and *soul* and *broken*
permeated the pages.

You told of a father whose hands
reached beneath the bathwater,
of a mother who cut lines on slick glass,
unaware that in the next room her husband
pinned your spine into the coil of the mattress.

At twelve, you started unpeeling
for men twice your age,
seducing them with the slow cadences
of denim hitting carpet.

After your brother took you away,
you thought you'd regained the power of speech,
but you still can't extract from your mind
the image of his body painting the pavement.

Stroking the worn edges of your notebook,
I wondered if maybe you used up all your real words
before they made it into those pages.