

# **okenos**

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## table of contents

[secret]

1	v. static
3	same time next year
4	folded, hidden, i'm given up
6	fireflies
8	sunspots
10	poppy tea
11	ii. x
13	crane style
15	captive heart
17	scream
18	what is there left to give

[time resplendent]

20	upon god in nature and form
21	plain bird
22	city city
24	iii. mill creek
26	dotted line redux
28	hourglass
29	lilacs line the pathway
31	ten two eighty-seven
32	good machine

[in loving memory]

34	family tree
36	great teacher

[okenos]

- 37 okenos
- 39 i. funeral
- 41 the king is dead
- 43 memoriam
- 45 iv. death by water

[survive and past, past]

- 46 i remember her dancing
- 48 play
- 50 it all came back, grey winters
- 52 survive
- 54 earlobes
- 55 what is there left to give pt. II
- 56 dynamo
- 58 april-may
- 60 it all fits together between us

[a year without lights]

- 61 i. singing to birds
- 80 ii. pookaru
- 87 iii. go home birds



[secret]



v. *static*

the rain is keeping too many secrets  
down here beneath the sky  
clouds are full of stolen prayers  
a thought bubble hangs above me  
it's empty, an ellipsis  
thinking about what the thunder said  
i talk to myself in code  
repetition  
it was never my decision  
to take take take the verse  
time and time again  
my heartbeat  
hides the bleeding  
blood rushing  
trying to get out of my body  
my desires manifest in headaches  
temples built  
and broken in a day  
i want more  
more  
to believe in you now  
and less  
less  
to leave you behind  
my memory lifts like a thick fog  
pulling itself out of the ground  
little ghosts  
i buried my soul in the air  
under the morning dew  
thinking nothing  
i'll forget every one of you at once  
when i get to where i'm going  
i'll remember

each raindrop by its name  
a storm coming in over the seaboard  
it wants us gone  
desire!  
each drop quenches my thirst  
drinking me dry  
it's quiet  
my thoughts dissipate  
into the words i couldn't say  
calling curses into the deluge  
white noise  
in between the sleet and the streetlamps  
thinking of you



*same time next year*

you lay  
in the arms  
of a statue  
talking to birds  
about being lonely  
there is a comfort  
in being home  
in strange places and times  
sunshine  
gives us shelter  
we keep each other warm  
in winter diminished  
in summer reborn  
honeysuckle & goldenrod  
you sing like a bee  
humming slowly along  
it's evolution  
we revolve  
like lovers  
from flower to flower  
city to city  
from kiss to kiss  
in perfect harmony

*folded, hidden, i'm given up*

i am crumpled paper  
reams and waste bins  
overfull  
the lost art of simplicity  
tossed away  
there must be more garbage!  
every poem  
unfolded  
is blank  
smooth stones that disintegrate  
into a glass of water  
gather at the bottom  
or the tip of my tongue  
i utter a word  
and stuff it into an envelope  
"spilt"  
a stain is like a swan  
mailed overseas on an aeroplane  
to a stranger  
who turns it into origami  
the pages folded and placed  
cautiously  
i'm careful these days  
it isn't me  
scouring the landfill  
for old letters  
things i meant to say  
dear friends  
the message is fading  
but it's still the same  
in a way clearer  
in remnants  
remains

i won't change i swear  
the plane had to abandon its cargo  
halfway there  
the empty parcels  
burst into white birds  
scattering the sky with feathers  
my letters  
have finally made it

*fireflies*

summer ended  
with crimson blemishes on her thighs  
turning purple  
before she came up for air  
i'm not sure who won  
they say if you love them  
let them go  
so i whispered all of my secrets  
into a dim candle  
and when it was done listening  
the sparks scattered like fireflies  
off the veranda  
and out to horizontal stars  
her love burned twilight  
fire in the sky  
our bed was too warm  
she sighed  
and stayed up all night  
so i could sleep  
while she plucked at the violin  
on the front porch  
bending the strings in new ways  
she danced on my ribcage  
an echo in the atmosphere  
vibrated to the small of my toe  
it was romance in motion  
when we kissed  
our lips were numb  
she ate honeydew and green apples  
and insisted she had lost her breath  
laughing into a bottle of wine  
to be sealed and released later  
her wild smile

shining bright as Orion  
she stood in the doorway  
never coming back  
throwing shadows  
that passed into a brush fire  
turning green fields to ash  
and night to day  
she gave me everything she had left  
in a jar of fireflies  
and they disappeared into each other  
one explosion at a time

*sunspots*

a locomotive  
chokes on its own smoke  
racing to the destination  
i'm not there  
i'm far away  
there's a black butterfly  
resting on my eye-lid  
sunspots  
nearby  
her toes touch the water  
full of light  
from an old trestle  
it's the way she throws her hair  
or her ripped and ragged jean-shorts  
the patch on her backpack  
heart-shaped  
to hide the hole  
there are cigarette burns on her clothes  
i love it all  
headed back to the mainland  
she walks on water  
skipping swell to swell  
caught in the glare  
she smiles  
it's the perch of her neck  
the length of her nose  
i long to know her in other ways  
in magazines  
letters from jail  
singing in the shower  
a headstand in the rain  
standing on the sky  
i want her to look at me

like she looked at the sun  
burned into her periphery forever  
a reflection of light

*poppy tea*

the world is perfect  
except for me



ii. *x*

check my pulse  
oh, it quickens  
my veins are thick with black gold  
syringe  
each deposit depletes my soul  
love lost  
in a combustible engine  
fire in a bottle  
my prison is a cistern  
washed up from the ocean  
a relinquished return  
i've marked the calendar on my forearm  
like a treasure map  
permanence over beauty  
is it too much to ask?  
how many questions do i have left?  
in life  
each swear  
every trial and error  
begins with death  
despair  
searches for my body  
off the coast  
through shallow seas  
everybody is looking for me  
what are they even looking for?  
i've planned my escape  
over and over  
a promise  
a treaty  
an armistice  
i'll be alone for now  
in a lifeboat

a stow-away  
with a flask of black water  
and nothing to eat  
the ship already sank  
it means nothing  
i'll make it  
even if i have to swim

*crane style*

for maija

the cherry tree  
speaks in pink carnations  
refractions  
that meet themselves half-way  
to the surface of a pool  
incantations  
ripples  
there are blossoms floating in it  
i'm unread  
unreadable  
unseen, unseeable  
is there someone looking back?  
my sadness  
stacks stones  
into more sadnesses  
statuesque and silent  
it's so quiet  
soft  
solemn farewells  
to friends in passing  
petals i can't grow back  
who am i to throw a rock?  
to shake a leaf?  
who am i  
but the in between  
of the tree and myself  
teardrops  
falling  
softening the ground  
making room for something new  
Spring will be here soon

and i'll be back darling  
once more before you go

*captive heart*

there is an angel inside of me  
my captive  
heartbeat heartbeat  
he breathes  
through bloody lungs  
teaching me the stillness  
of a shooting star  
dust in the atmosphere  
gone  
he won't come out  
leave me alone  
i'm stuck in a photograph  
inert and perfect  
stop  
slow  
faster  
the picture grows old  
colors run  
i'm fading from day to day  
Time  
my captor  
stares  
through locked doors  
i rattle the cage  
it hurts my ribs  
from laughing  
there's no escape!  
my savior looks at the mess  
and looks away  
please look away  
i want to be elsewhere  
i count the days  
five

i'm trying my best not to die  
seriously  
i'm trying my best not to die

*scream*

i've eaten my own shadow  
now i'm alone  
incarcerated in a dream  
something is trying to get out,  
escape! before it's too late!  
the little birds break free  
into the only song they know  
each note growing smaller  
i can't see them anymore  
they cover the sun  
with light  
i'm blinded  
by every prayer i've knelt by the bedside  
every broken breath  
every suicide  
the few become many  
dead crows  
rotten twine  
my sinew and string  
oxygen and carbon dioxide  
where i am going  
where i have been

*what is there left to give?*

for alex

my treasures corrode in the ocean  
i've lost each face i've lost them all  
the moon is disappearing  
more each night  
i'll wait for you in my past life  
*okenos* swells and swallows  
my dreams  
hiding diamonds in its belly  
nations hide in silence  
under the rubble  
tequila burns the back of my throat  
my nostrils fill with salt air  
you are leading me down the beach  
i follow your white shawl  
it turns black  
into gold  
i'm sorry  
the castle is falling  
there's a story adrift in this bottle  
filling with sand  
what is there left to give?  
things are breaking in my head  
the waves replay  
projections  
years pass and we grow  
slowing down the moments  
into one sad smile  
as you throw your ring into the sea  
and i wait for it to wash up again  
for me  
fifty years later



i'll remember  
i wish i could save you  
the salt and the stars  
sitting on the edge of the world  
far off the coast  
between us



[time resplendent]



*upon god in nature and form*

i'm just trying to create  
something that cannot be destroyed

*plain bird*

calico  
Fall  
maybe failure  
chrysanthemum.  
i've lost myself in a meadow  
surrounded by wheat-grass  
the distance closes  
between what i know and what i've known  
i'm so sure of where i've gone  
that i try to go back  
you smile  
and cover your eyes  
thank you for the place to hide  
violet.  
my pupils grow  
flowers bloom  
they take everything inside of them  
thrush—  
what a plain bird  
i've become  
one wing stuck in the thistles  
one wing stuck in the sky

*city city*

midnight didn't stick around  
i wrote her name on a brown bag  
and tucked it in my pocket  
for later  
what did it even say?  
the city doesn't care  
choosing to stay lit  
as i stumble from streetlight to streetlight  
searching for an alley to stay in  
to call it home  
i saw a man outlined in chalk  
but he was just sleeping  
drawn on the sidewalk  
where the children throw rocks  
and hop over the cracks  
long after the sun goes down  
i can see it all now  
the graffiti under the bridge  
a heart longing for an arrow  
passing cars remind me of her  
and wrecks  
crashing into telephone poles  
stumble, stumble  
stumble from the scene into a wall  
and onto the asphalt  
"go away"  
is written under the overpass  
from interstates and avenues  
i've searched  
my footsteps  
cover the city  
with tracks  
and the pavement is cracked

where i lay my head  
a disaster  
a flower  
traced along the highway  
growing where it isn't wanted



iii. *mill creek*

for zachary

i can see the wind in dead leaves  
yellow and red haunting the breezes  
gusts of another lifetime  
stirring the bonfire  
scattering into memories  
crackle  
the night sky climbs  
like shadows in a tree  
like trees in a shadow  
there's nothing left to see  
i pass the bottle  
back into the darkness  
falling asleep in your arms  
the colors burn out  
turning grey  
what is the light that doesn't give?  
the fire stops in a still-frame  
frozen in time  
the moon and the liquor  
slurring thoughts into words  
forgotten  
choke vomit choke  
smoking and smoldering  
slumber  
sleep  
we pass out in a circle  
one at a time  
we're alone in stasis  
was this the beginning or the end?  
past future present  
echoes

residual flickers  
going going going  
it grows, dying slowly i know the ashes will fall.  
but where? where?  
where will it all go?

*dotted line redux*

for lorraine

lovers have written this poem  
over and over  
in bathroom stalls  
and pages that don't want to be read  
the clock isn't ticking anymore  
it trickles down the wall  
an avalanche, a waterfall  
no verse is truly free  
the paper bends  
it could have been a swan  
i wish you would try  
i can't keep going  
my understanding of this mess  
inside  
is to cut every paper  
on the dotted line  
why and why not?  
put me together again  
reassemble  
love is about keeping the pieces  
and never giving them back  
kisses goodbye  
a disappearing act  
invisible ink  
misunderstood  
love hides in strange places  
a list of hickeys on your neck  
you clench your fist  
it's the size of a human heart  
love hides between two lungs  
in love

somebody wins and somebody loses  
never giving them back  
my greatest work  
collects dust in the closet  
a coffee stain  
tick tick tick  
i write notes on the bedsheets  
drops of blood  
tick tick tick  
love takes its time  
will she ever come back?  
from who she used to be?

*hourglass*

for renee

i can't move in you  
when the desert stands between us  
an oasis  
my footprints circle your location  
i'm walking on glass  
just to get back  
time past  
it's going to freeze tonight, darling  
and i'll not keep you warm

cloaked and covered in sand  
sleeves and thigh-highs  
you try to hide  
the pretty scars i've created  
the pretty lies i've told.

the cold offers no shelter  
this rock will erode  
it's destiny  
barren wastes  
and midwest prairies  
plains  
the moon is close  
but it will be gone  
before you wake

we've been lost for so long  
my dear  
i hope we stay this way  
forever

*lilacs line the pathway*

i've taken the raven  
in a gaze  
my skull is full of light  
but i can't see it  
my eyes contract in the daytime  
making everything less  
a tree within a forest  
a ring inside a tree  
a carving in the tree trunk  
illegible  
it's the shape of a heart  
who loves who?  
lilacs line the pathway  
to my grave  
i'm early  
my initials are an epitaph  
take me home  
a city of stumps  
mark what i used to know  
cut down from the sky  
with blackened wings ablaze  
the dead birds plummet;  
sunshine  
falls on my eyes  
i'm happy with your hand in mine  
i've taken the raven  
in a gaze  
it disappeared into the distance  
i'm happy  
i can feel time passing  
between your fingers  
back and forth  
life pulses in your wrists

a possible future  
i'm still alive  
each kiss is a reminder  
that we're not dead, yet

*ten two eighty-seven*

i planted the seeds  
of my old longings  
into the rows and rows of footprints  
that i left behind  
now the apples are ripe like fresh dew  
close under this October sky



*good machine*

for peirce

the good machine  
wears a human suit  
shooting bubbles from a gun  
bang  
i saw it all on the television  
through the dust on the screen  
a peace sign  
he traced it onto a newspaper  
charcoal impressions  
i'm not a diamond yet  
the crayons take flight—  
rainbows scribble themselves down the walls  
through the hallway  
running from his eyes  
spectrum  
perspective is an interference  
beep beep beep  
click  
the good machine  
spits out bloody bolts  
gold  
into existence  
his resistance  
is divisible by zero  
a cognitive dissonance  
the source code  
binary  
black and white  
black white black  
he sits at a typewriter  
making sounds into concertos

singing along to the madness  
suffering  
alone  
he was written into a midnight fit of innocence  
defenseless against the sequence  
blank fate  
blank slate  
i wish it wasn't blank  
sometimes  
color  
does not compute  
in this world of nonsense  
clunk.  
if love could power an engine  
he'd be perpetually in motion  
instances of sleep  
keeping him awake  
dreams  
i love this robot  
like this robot loves me  
an arrangement  
estranged but blameless  
it's all quite pretty  
don't you agree?

[in loving memory]



*family tree*

for marcella

the smell of orange blossoms  
every bloom  
reminds me of you  
even fruit has to fall  
it comes back  
seeds  
our family tree  
grows and grows and grows  
you live  
the cicada sing  
an elegy  
it overlaps  
it comes back  
the grove sleeps  
Spring is a promise  
that God will always keep  
i repeat myself  
in prayers  
planted after the last frost  
before the first rain  
the smile fades into wrinkles  
age  
grace  
we had to let you go  
each memory  
renewed  
carved into the stump  
of a magnolia  
so many rings  
love  
it will all come back

it will all come back  
it will all come back  
in our hearts  
seeds  
our family tree  
grows and grows and grows

*great teacher*

for poppa

flowers  
visit with sad smiles  
people are dying  
memories  
are scarred into our bodies  
bouquets  
they know how to die  
and show others, too  
great teachers  
transient lovers  
ephemera  
we chew on the stems  
until marigold takes over  
forgetful  
loose syllables  
the words you left with me  
i'll remember  
every lesson  
how to die, too  
gathered at the bedside  
the flowers took you with them  
withering in whispers  
you laid to rest  
goodbye, old man  
your heart became a garden  
your tongue returned to sea





[okenos]



*okenos*

for josephine

the sun glimpses into the ocean  
looking at itself  
shown like spun-gold  
i stare into the distance  
she is drowning  
in my mind  
i mix my tears with shots of whiskey  
strong drinks  
salt water  
daybreak  
a lit cigarette  
the hours are smeared in lipstick  
against the window  
red at morning  
farewell amorilla—  
she is outlined in white linen  
even as she walks away  
into each memory  
down the beach  
i gave her to the sea  
my sorrow is an offering  
the rain becomes a stream  
a stream through the wasteland  
a tributary, a dream—  
it all comes back from which it came  
her fingertips graze my lips  
lines deeper than ancient *okenos*  
carved from a great lineage  
buried in time  
eons of broken glass  
sand

between her toes  
it was all something else back then  
the statue of an angel  
crumbled into many secrets  
a thousand ships  
sunk in my bloodstream  
i searched the debris  
sigh  
my bleeding needs a heartbeat  
the current of my kingdom  
deep breaths  
rise and fall  
empires of rust  
kisses blown  
the waves keep coming  
she disappears  
on the horizon  
and i write her name again  
on the shoreline  
and the ocean takes it away

i. *funeral*

my skeleton  
embraces your bones  
in the cemetery  
a tome of scratched out names  
rest in peace  
you lied and lied and lied  
until you laid in the ground  
you are still lying  
writing letters and explanations  
excuses  
the undertaker accused of a mistake  
semantics  
a misspelling  
the obituary was wrong  
false  
a cold eulogy  
the dirge  
i want to sleep somewhere warm  
not here  
snowstorms  
cover my tracks as i go  
danger  
i can't discern  
the cryptic message on your tombstone  
etched in the dark  
no moon  
i trace engravings  
trying to get closer to you  
now you are following me everywhere i go  
down empty streets  
around and around  
cul-de-sacs  
dead ends

empty pages  
exclamations  
prints  
question marks  
translated  
at the funeral you smoked cigarettes  
a ghost  
a circle of friends with black umbrellas  
rain in January  
everything in January  
i left you a note in your casket  
the words you couldn't say to me  
it's okay though  
i know what they are

*the king is dead*

i am holding  
holding on  
to a bird encased in glass  
it tries to get out  
my rendition of the song  
is an endless revision  
derivatives  
a handful of dust  
sits in my palm  
i lap it up like lemonade  
peach pits  
dissolve in my stomach  
my reflection  
is full and empty  
verses of vomit  
i'm bent over the toilet  
writing a script  
where i am the star  
it's just an imitation  
a regurgitated omission  
what must be asked?  
it's the same sensation  
i've created something broken  
the dialogue  
breaks off  
i just stand there  
the king of paper hearts  
my disaster unfolds  
growing in scale  
outward  
my reflection  
spreads  
through the audience in laughter

ha ha ha!  
tragedy  
comedy  
what's the difference?  
everything i've lost;  
everything i can't get back



*memoriam*

for eric

he chewed handfuls of confetti  
shredded poems and dead leaves  
i couldn't read his work  
all pulped and plastered  
and stuck to the ceiling  
spit-balls  
a cocoon awaits a butterfly  
the spider makes his web  
there must be a way to save them both  
something else  
i cut it open with a knife  
i've saved another life  
saved them all  
only to keep losing them  
again  
let me out  
the innards of the parade  
spill out into crowds of fiction  
lost in the streets  
every page  
torn  
his book fades at the edges  
now it is real;  
woven in silk  
a tapestry of vowels  
languages i don't speak  
sounds resonate through town  
libraries of the dead  
pour through the city  
born again in echoes  
famous last words

the end, a stanza resides  
somewhere safe  
hidden away  
i have to keep my place  
i can't leave him  
buried in the lonely prose  
a floral skeleton  
hidden in skin  
chrysalis in memoriam  
he offered death a manuscript  
that he had edited  
into just one line

iv. *death by water*

for amela

the sunset washes me clean  
covering the ocean with roses  
dead sea  
you swim in a wedding dress  
trying to escape  
my chardonnay is vast  
death by water  
grasping beneath the surface  
for breaths  
you can't have them back  
a soliloquy breaks from my lungs  
you slept like a seashell  
and seven years  
you swallowed salt water  
becoming a memory  
open like a pearl  
i wander down the beach  
skipping stones  
saying your name  
amela, amela, amela  
the waves crest and collapse  
like a dream within a dream  
i begin to cry  
a starfish washed ashore  
great beauty gives and takes away  
the sea needs to be lonely  
lovers drown  
stars cross  
there are many burials  
and very little time



[survive and past, past]



*i remember her dancing*

who planted the wildflowers  
on my mountainside devoured  
now scorched earth  
i take pills  
lilies hum  
hymns and hills  
i've created a wasteland  
pulled up from the roots  
a daffodil  
droops between my fingers  
i'm ready to start a new life  
with my flower girl  
she lifts up her skirt  
shimmies  
the breeze remembers  
her hips  
crescendo  
my home burns to her lips  
a kiss  
turning over my forearms  
scar tissue  
have i done enough?  
if you don't take it  
i will  
juniper wine  
waters the seeds  
that will replace her  
my scent scatters in the wind  
refuse  
she wilts  
to her knees  
these fields were a kingdom  
if i was a king

my crown a curse  
the disease  
chains of daisies  
blacken her grave  
pulling up purple blossoms  
one last bouquet  
for my bride  
that sleeps under a headstone  
i'll wait  
i'll wait  
i'll wait for the rain



*play*

a cloak of poison ivy  
around his neck  
narcissus in bloom  
he has a forest in his pocket  
hiding a smile  
in a dark place  
there is a face staring back  
mirror mirror  
the one-eyed jack  
looks through the sword  
until the monsters leave  
hearts  
have shadows too  
i can't look any further  
i can't die yet  
his thoughts  
ripple in his goblet  
another perspective  
spider-webs  
his butterflies  
suffer  
made of tin cans  
tissue-paper  
there is a reservoir of tears  
built to spill  
a dialect  
of sadness  
it speaks to the delusion  
madness stabs the curtain  
the wrong conclusion  
confused actors  
scatter the stage  
with fake blood

the crowd reacts  
throwing  
hearts  
like tomatoes  
ha ha ha!  
he catches one in his teeth  
it stains his smile  
red grapes  
rotten wine  
i've slept in this vineyard  
but i can't remember  
who made it to the end  
there were effects  
slow motion  
a speech no doubt  
the emotion  
was removed for character accuracy  
an explosion  
was reversed  
so it would all come together  
was it rehearsed?  
i loved the action  
but the plot was boring  
general admission  
was too expensive  
his incentive  
remitted  
to bring everything back  
on the stage  
dim the lights  
and let the players, play!

*it all came back, grey winters*

for lawler

we took the backroads  
through drifts of cotton  
coming down like snow  
in fits of Alabama grey  
asleep at the wheel  
drunk on cherry wine  
jugged in Tennessee  
the reflectors blurred into  
maps into medians and  
atlases older than asphalt  
dirtier than the Old South soil  
kicking up memories  
like dust  
collecting everything  
in burlap  
the music took the wheel  
towards a chimney  
edged into the cornerstone  
of a house falling apart  
like an old man  
smoking a pipe  
sitting by the fire inside  
tilting a glass of milk  
as he goes to sleep in the  
armchair  
maybe  
i could have been the finest  
strawberry  
to sprout midwinter  
between the suffering  
and pulling of hair

in fields that never end  
even in the distance  
until the Mississippi turns black  
and we pin the map to the dashboard  
with a butter knife  
sharpened into a fine blade  
gracing the road with motion  
in your old Honda Acura  
we cut silently down the county line  
towards new hopes and old regrets  
all balancing on a miracle  
each tiny snowflake, falling

*survive*

they gave me pills like thorned seeds  
that i spit and spit and spit  
into my garden of dead weeds  
now i'm the king of hibiscus  
the sparrows catch me as i fall  
singing from my shoulder blades on the way down  
i'm a scarecrow now  
enemy! sweet enemy!  
give me your hand  
take every grain that i've sewn  
and turn it into something gold  
the meadow is free  
from gypsy flower and wild lavender  
these are the things that you will see  
in each daydream on the hillside  
sleeping in a bed of leaves  
tracing thoughts like clouds against blue skies,  
like a boy lost in the woods  
following his own trail of picked clovers  
taken home by new growth  
in the meadow  
two strangers  
dance like honeysuckle  
windswept  
the convergence of a kiss  
the embrace of sagebrush  
hiding in the sunlight  
under a summer dress and cinnamon  
sips of dandelion ale  
the sky is caked like muddy feet  
to the world  
and we dipped our toes in the well  
for wishes cast like stones

each coin displaces a memory  
the water rises  
like smoke from a signal fire  
in the distance  
the village wants you back  
but you stay,  
counting the clouds—  
should you survive me into Summer  
i pray that my body  
yields sweet fruit  
seedless grapes to keep you young  
and soft apricots to remind you  
we've aged

*earlobes*

a paper bird  
lands over a spill of ink  
then evaporates  
into a fog  
of consonants  
the ancient alphabet of  
choked goodbyes  
sealed letters  
earlobes  
the words hide  
on the tracks  
trying to say something  
but becoming blanks  
she mouths "i love you"  
from the window  
of a train  
and her smile  
blurs into a heart  
breathes farewell  
with her hand  
to the glass  
leaving only a fingerprint  
against your lips

*what is there left to give pt. II*

i feel like i'm made out of matchsticks  
the splinters from a tree  
i want out of my skin  
all structures are made to collapse  
fire subdues  
the fumes  
reuse themselves in breaths  
that i've given  
what is there left to give?  
i was born in a strange land  
now i'm a stranger  
with my shadow aflame  
it licks at the heels of my feet  
before i'm engulfed  
burnt to the earth  
ash in an urn  
the desert is burning black  
following my footsteps to the city  
to the sacrifice  
the ritual  
a lighter flicks to light the corridor  
but i can't see you  
calling me and stalking me  
circle circle  
dance dance  
i trace the darkness with a lit cigarette  
signals sent to my former self  
is this a series of warnings  
or does this fire imply my growth?



*dynamo*

you are shooting through the universe  
forming new constellations, dancing into my vision  
from peripheral stars  
slow motion  
in the eastern sky  
it seems to be so far away now  
when our systems collided  
the beginning of light  
combined from who we would be  
and who we were  
when we sat on the top of a mountain  
naming children  
that we would never have  
i twirled your hair  
tiny galaxies  
freckles connected on your arm  
it was all shining in silence  
streaming down your face in tears  
close as a comet  
hanging in the sky  
midnight  
August 1, 2013  
i could feel the mass of gravity  
gathered on your tongue  
pulling me into your world  
falling through space  
in little intervals  
each moment as still as falling snow  
we hid our eyes  
and held our shivers  
filled in the blanks with glimpses of heaven  
white breaths  
condensing into whispers

continuum  
everything still  
the moon in rotation  
sharing only the sunlight from afar  
a dream expanding  
crashing through the frozen horizon  
leaving a trail that i still follow  
a path through the snow  
alone in space  
our lips holding us together  
this polar shift  
the instance of a kiss  
forever  
forever  
the birth of a star

*april-may*

we passed the mess hall  
dressed all platonic & disheveled  
fluorescent to the eye-balls  
i wore her dress  
floral fiction shifted into  
my new religion  
where love is a dandelion  
plucked from behind her ear  
you are growing fruit, darling  
it hides in your cupped hands  
a surprise that flies into a bouquet  
of yellow daydreams  
full of confident laughter  
when she kissed me in the bushes  
i told nobody until now  
how i tasted her soul  
like drops of black wine  
giving divinity a purpose  
to the street singer  
she called me over in the rain  
to brave the flourishing Spring  
one droplet at a time  
falling in love  
sideways showers  
April  
i put my jacket around her  
fleeced and covered in flannel  
she unbuttoned it  
and let her breasts show the world  
what it was missing  
never going back but always gone  
she reached into my throat  
and pulled out a rose

that grew into our garden  
and began to glow  
until she came back to me  
soaking wet but smiling  
happy to be home

*it all fits together between us*

she painted my fingernails black  
and made chai tea  
we laughed as the clouds grew dark  
making mountains  
in front of what we couldn't see  
i tore the curtain back  
a curtsy  
in togas and bedsheets  
my queen!  
alas, i'm slain!  
as i die  
everything else dies too  
along with nothing  
outside  
the downpour emerges  
from hiding  
i've missed you  
and where i've been  
black clouds, chai, love  
it all fits  
between curtains and bedsheets  
between you, and me  
it stays inside  
long after you leave



[a year without lights]





i. *singing to birds*

for carrie

i've fucked up again  
confetti and sterile whites  
Gino says i need a change of perspective  
as i vomit shards of glass  
tell it to a snowflake, tell it to the ash  
the smoke that never ends  
as i pull it from my chest in silk thread  
in breaths  
in short short breaths  
in sickle cells  
like moons and clusters of stars  
half a pill  
choked into existence  
the psychiatry of sound  
cough cough cough  
James says i am not dead  
James is quite possibly dead  
or was or will be  
i stopped keeping count  
the angels buried their feathers  
one by one  
in a cemetery of churches and suburbanites  
the sky is falling  
the sky is falling  
on empty ears, there is rain  
it's January  
where have my brothers gone?

\*

they looked from the mirror to the window  
thinking Jupiter  
the clouds look back as they pass  
condensing into heartbeats  
clovers  
she loves me! she loves me!  
she loves me not!  
in spittle and blood we locked lips  
kissing each other with scratches on the record  
and scrapes on our backs  
you wouldn't give me up  
you folded me into paper cranes  
i grew in a strange place  
all disoriented alone the sun shining  
instead of dark planets or solar systems  
constellations keeping me from sleep  
it took 7 years  
i've missed you  
i've missed you  
with nothing above me  
but the naked break of the lunar cycle  
she dances in a gown  
through the blinds to my bedside  
gives me her lips, eclipses thus  
a satellite passes  
as i consider ways to die

\*

they are watching me in cold showers  
viewing my thoughts in bubbles

...

i am a delusional speech  
waiting to happen  
god is everywhere  
that i don't look  
i am everything that i've never been

nothing is as it seems  
a circle of strangers cheering as i wake  
they are hungry  
prying at words permanent on my forearms  
notches of verse on my spine  
my story  
hides between two lips  
my heart  
hides between two lungs  
my eyes  
hide between two eye-lids  
oh i am memory and desire  
i see it coming  
i see it coming through the fluorescent lighting  
i see it coming through bolted windows and security guards  
i see it coming through the disease  
i see it coming  
like fire sees it coming  
like people huddled around me  
wondering what went wrong

\*

nobody is willing to listen  
when i scream  
inching six feet from mortality  
with razor blades and tourniquets  
i cradle my head with gauze  
i restrain myself with duct tape  
i hate you all like throats hate sharp objects  
i walk from my room to the kitchen  
in a haze of sleeping pills  
locked doors are freedom  
freedom is inanimate  
i tried to make toys out of what i've broken  
kids shoot syringes of water at each other  
and call it war

i thought i was winning hahaha  
life is beautiful  
you can have it  
take it  
take it  
take it all back  
before i give it all away

\*

the ego leaves the body in shivers  
bright lights turn inward  
the pupil shrinks in his gaze  
stars, atoms  
a cosmos of mistakes loom  
through faded halos and rings of smoke  
blown in hiding  
in hiding in hiding in hiding  
nobody will find me  
in the atoms, stars  
i burn into a smoke alarm  
the whole place has to leave in the middle of the night  
people are mumbling sheep from their chests  
i catch them  
i am the shepherd of dreamers  
and i herd them back inside, it will be okay tomorrow  
we keep telling each other that

\*

Carrie  
we are not friends  
it's too early to remember Autumn  
that was yesterday  
i saw a man lying on the ground dying  
he fell from a tree  
i thought, how like a leaf he must be  
coughing  
coughing up birds

i don't want to be here either  
as they fly into the Winter and freeze  
i don't want to be here either  
as i pick up the pieces right where i left them  
like cigarette butts and piano keys  
friends don't want to be here either  
i'm not here  
you stole the King from the chess set  
and stared down the hallway at Bob  
it was your best work  
a face of words  
beautiful scriptures in chandeliers not here  
not here  
not where they keep me  
i am bleeding little rhythms and rhyme-schemes  
until they cauterize the wound  
i'm trash darling  
sunshine is somewhere else now  
as i look out the window at fog coming in through the trees  
my bookshelf has gathered dust  
i have gathered an army  
of wishes  
like ancient texts  
i have bound my person in gold  
so he can't escape hahaha  
look at this porcelain  
that looks back  
i'm not worth it  
i don't want it  
i don't want you to forgive me  
did you see what i've done?  
take  
take  
take  
take take take  
everything i've touched i've hidden

deep in my memory  
they want it back in scrolls and suicide notes  
someone is trying to recover  
my thoughts  
death death death death death  
i wish it wasn't so close  
i wish you were here  
i wish i could hold your breath in my lungs  
and we could stay together  
butterflies hatch in my stomach  
cocoon of mistrust  
where did you go on the evening of the 26th?  
my eyes empty of ivory  
i dream alone  
there are stars falling from my eyeballs  
staining my shirt in crimson  
i nurtured all these pills  
so that i can lay in one last flowerbed  
June, June, June  
it's always June  
waiting for July

\*

remember when god gave us wings?  
flags are flying from your shoulderblades  
flags are not on fire  
i don't want to dance  
freedom is a tear drop and the 10th story window opens to  
the crescendo  
of buildings falling and you jump  
snow doesn't know how to fall  
but it falls  
flurries turning through photographs  
that was your uncle, dear  
he knew he wasn't gonna live  
everything is falling all of the time

everything is falling  
all of the time  
structure fires  
receding hairlines  
bones break  
we steal the nightmare from out of our own hands  
sleep  
sleep sleep sleep  
our higher power is dumb as fuck, obviously

\*

he took our gold  
when it fell from our fingers in sunsets  
our eyes clouded over  
to hazes of idle passage  
reflecting cathodes  
under the great white nothing  
institutional walls  
caged birds, dead birds  
dead getting better  
better getting worse  
buried in granite  
like moonlight and fringe mechanics  
i am huddled in a cell  
looking through the glass  
at what i destroyed  
this is suffering, dear  
perfect perfect suffering  
i didn't choose this  
this mess  
this little pile of shiny things in tatters  
cloaks of silver  
pulled tight around our fault lines

\*

we blur into kisses and birdshot  
why doesn't blood rust?

why doesn't blood belong?  
blood is like dusk  
and blood is like dawn  
and blood is like my friends that were taken  
too soon and too early  
into the universal unknown of death  
spirits gleam  
i am haunted  
i can see your face when i stare at her  
nowhere  
we aren't nowhere yet  
you were always there  
in bad shape in worse shape  
in newspaper cuttings and scrapbooks  
in trimmed hedges and coriander  
you made it  
to death  
too soon, too soon to say goodbye

\*

you pass in cars  
as i shut the blinds again  
to cover nothing without looking  
houses of aluminum  
many sadnesses thrown together  
many lovers in separate rooms  
a collection of hours  
i piece together the delusion with cutout stars  
i spill you like wine across the egyptian bedding  
i carelessly waste my days  
thinking of oceans  
nobody has looked at me like that since  
nobody looks at me like that  
anymore  
fire wasn't here  
i've burnt my journals like churches



i've burnt out  
there are other lights that i can't see  
hanging from the ceiling i lay on the floor  
counting the holes and ways to fix them  
burnt into shadows  
burnt into dust  
burnt into ideas and lavish designs  
the West  
the West  
the West is calling  
outside of the nightmare  
she watched the dream  
praying, she prayed for everyone  
that we might not die  
before salvation

\*

a ghost that haunts the closet says i'm miserable  
there is blood in the beat of my eardrum  
i take my pulse  
you are watching through a marble  
he wants out  
lifetimes have been spent at sea and in crying enough to fill  
it back up  
what the sky takes we give back  
in spurts and leaks and screams  
maybe i am making room for something beautiful  
maybe it is rain.

\*

rain like a flatline  
rain like a hyphen  
neither alive-nor-dead  
and when i was  
and when i was  
and when i was living i wasn't  
it works like that, sometimes all of the time

i was, i was—  
i was monitored by a needle  
it watched me grow this big in a matter of years  
i look at my hands and i look at you like my hands  
something is breaking  
something broke is breaking  
my heartbeat goes up and down on a machine  
a good machine  
i am a good machine like Peirce  
ampersands &&&  
a party of ampersands in the institution  
Melissa came too  
three ampersands  
a chart, a graph cartography  
i can't guess the distance to the moon right now  
but it's small  
it's why we are drawn together so  
something bright

\*

now there are twenty-six of us  
leaving the jail  
pretending we won't be back hahaha  
climbing walls and throwing blankets over razor wire  
to escape, oh, escape escape escape  
what can i say about escape?  
other than that that's the point, right?  
we spit out questions into each other's mouths  
i pin you to the floor  
WE'RE NOT GONNA MAKE IT  
to the war  
and who will save us if we do?

\*

what years have we spent in different lives  
gone in the distance like a field covered in frost  
the horizon eats a tree

one love lost  
i am a rhyme-scheme  
a lying rhyme-scheme  
what actually happened was this, i digress  
two illusions  
is that a sun or a star?  
is that the eclipse of the moon?  
where are you going so soon  
now that we are almost home  
it won't it won't  
it won't stay  
home is never where i want it to be  
and when it is i'm not there  
i'm with you, jumping fences and missing  
all the cues  
we turn our eyes to a white sky that isn't there either  
blue was a daydream  
blue doesn't exist when you look at it that way  
blue was yesterday  
blue was something you made  
for me  
blue as deep as a cave is black  
blue as gone as how i felt  
when i sat in the corner of your visions  
trying to wake you up  
white skies  
unlike me unlike anything i know  
white unlike the blood on my pants and my second-hand  
clothing  
i lick at wounds  
i don't care  
i watch it all coalesce on my jeans  
those years, did they really happen?

\*

didn't i meet you somewhere in between  
the nods and the slumber parties  
just a week in the penitentiary  
down the corridor to the East Yard  
where i sit  
making stains on my sheets like music  
but they are just words  
so nobody really understands what i mean, i nod  
not like that  
not like this  
i take anything i can find  
and turn it into a mind of prose  
numb  
we will never truly know  
what grace means.

\*

i look at the grass out of the sliver they cut into the  
institution  
for me to look out of  
a jailer walks by and asks "how's the view"  
i tell him to join me  
hahaha  
oink oink oink  
hahaha  
i can't stop the grass from growing  
or i would  
like universes  
i can't stand the greenery  
the tide the tilt the spin the geometry  
it makes me so dizzy  
the circles  
the stairwells  
the sickly pigeons that pick at the seed  
poisoned  
we live without god

without fear  
without anything else  
but you and me

\*

i wrote it all down through the downpour  
the deluge, i was christened as an avalanche  
down with the mountains  
down with the clouds  
the seconds come like minutes  
hours days weeks  
months are years revisited  
time slows to a thump  
thump thump thump  
divided by thumps  
thump thump thump  
conquer the empire of my heart with stolen arrows  
spread the doves with slingshots on fire  
sum the faults of my smile with photographs  
line me up against the seaboard  
and i'll march into it  
the last soldier in town  
the first corpse to drown  
from being thirsty  
there are cities that line the reach of my view  
teeth closed  
clenched  
a tense smile  
watching god  
for pieces falling

\*

corpse weed grows thick in my mustache  
i twist it with finger bones  
i can feel my skull  
trying to get out of my timeline  
it blooms from where i look through it

with closed eyes  
the dream, the dream,  
the dream comes to me and i make it chatter  
the skull in my hand  
i make it laugh  
i make it laugh and you and me  
and our struggle  
to keep everything growing  
fools  
the fools will win  
i thought i won  
hahaha  
two children shooting water at each other from syringes  
playing pretend, playing hero  
what a beautiful thing you saw, brother  
and what did it make of you?  
i saw you put it in your arm and i still have this love  
that only you could know  
thank you  
thank you  
i bow when the power stops  
going on and off  
your eyes  
you were dying in my arms  
from old scars  
death was unfaithful and brought you back  
to catch the sun in glints  
whistles  
hums  
hum hum hum  
hum as we fall into the inferno  
hum as we walk the line  
you must have died so many times  
that they didn't want you anymore  
i am so tired of trying to grow back  
my wings

give me my wings  
god  
have you left me here again?  
and where have my brothers gone?

\*

they are wearing faces  
that they don't believe in  
just to see a glimpse  
hiding spots  
track marks  
sleeves  
cylinders where we keep our promises  
and watch them dissolve in alcohol  
solvents  
we are solving everything now  
we will all fall down  
churches wear cemeteries  
humans wear walls  
we wear crosses and charms  
we melt them down into beautiful desperate bullets  
we hold the guns to our temples  
hahaha  
and laugh  
what are we laughing at?  
death is a very slow process  
some of us wait our whole lives without it  
survival is just a breath away  
i breathed today  
and that's all i had to do  
i won't let you take it away  
my breaths  
short short breaths  
they howl like heathen prayers  
i watch my higher power destroy my enemies  
and i frown

looking elsewhere  
away from the lights that make me cold  
where god isn't looking  
where god doesn't look

\*

sometimes we are dead already  
at the wake  
at the funeral  
at the funeral we never had.

\*

i don't wanna feel it  
i don't wanna feel  
and i don't wanna feel  
anything  
anything else  
but you  
as your fingers run down my mistakes  
and heal them  
my arm is growing back in rings  
this, the eye of Ra  
that, your favorite amethyst  
you put your thumb down my throat  
and i puke up a clump of wildflowers  
that i was saving for your birthday  
my valentine  
save me  
Carrie  
you are dripping like honey from my old wounds  
you are sailing ships from my earlobes  
you are sinking into my soul like a statue of an underwater  
angel  
sighing in air bubbles  
that explode at the surface in great whispers  
take me back there again when you can  
i will not let you out



not this time  
i can't afford to  
i guess you are stuck with me hahaha  
stuck like the sun and the moon  
stuck like the rest of this deserted planet  
only it's in my heart  
where i can actually take care of you  
i will take care of you like that  
trust me  
trust me  
i won't let them get you

\*

a man stalks the hallways at rehab  
all dressed up in a black suit and white cane  
stumbling through rooms and after-parties  
is it me i'm looking for?  
is that what i'm missing?  
everything would be in flames  
if i were god  
and that makes me want it even more  
i want everything  
it's mine, right  
everything is mine  
so i try to swallow it all  
before i'm saved  
by a bone in my throat  
a feather to choke on  
you know that they call syringes feathers right?  
now you do. maybe that changes something  
when you think of angels  
maybe i think i am an angel  
maybe that's what got me here  
but where the fuck am i?  
my face has watched many tears fall from it  
watched as they turned to stone

diamonds getting harder  
harder to create  
than to destroy  
as i collapse on the floor again  
i'm wasted  
trying to hold myself in  
proud as death  
proud as a tongue that turns into an apple core  
proud as pulled hair  
proud as a survivor that lived off of lemons and salt water  
proud as fire isn't proud of fire, proud of fire  
proud of all of you that didn't die too  
proud of life for always living  
through me, through me  
proud of what i have become  
when i come back  
and i always come back  
i believe in reincarnation yet here i am  
does that say more than this poem can?  
does that say more than i ever have before?  
i believe in reincarnation and i'm still here  
i guess that means i'm a fuck up hahaha  
a cosmic fuckup  
a collection of promises broken  
a clasp of hands then a backstab  
a constellation that only gets brighter in the West  
the West  
the West  
the West

\*

i crawl to the window over the no-man's-land of our  
bedsheets  
stained yellow as teeth  
showing like curses in the light turned off  
we catch dusk in winks

between sleeping and waking up  
we are free  
we are never there  
where we belong  
is where we haven't been yet  
i have explored other ways to die  
through your touch  
i am slain by silence and beauty  
death by the reading of palms  
death by cards  
death by gold and ink and death by self-awareness  
i count my deaths  
and tally them on my arms with a dull knife  
i count my deaths  
and i give them to you in rose petals  
i love a nice bouquet  
i love coughed up blood  
i've surrendered my soul  
to the absolute zero of your embrace  
how it warms me, how it intoxicates my blood cells  
the needle dives on the monograph  
and i am alone

ii. *pookaru*

for franklyn

we take our time as the second hand  
states the obvious (we're going nowhere fast)  
one  
carving counts in the headboards of feather-beds  
picking at the plumes of fallen birds  
our cages closed like vowels, scratched words  
spoken violets choke flower  
mouth broken vase  
can't you see the pain in his face  
under the scar above his eye it says otherwise.  
giving, giving  
giving back what we took  
my visions are implicated in dilations  
a forest in my pupils  
unscrupulous growth  
water teardrop  
potted plant  
there's the symbolism i was looking for!  
II. A Game of Chess he called it, Eliot  
POOKARU i say  
a fictitious game where the winner loses  
choosing to not play as a deck of cards  
spirals  
out the window  
little birds flit in and out of the overhangs  
incessantly free  
jealousy heaves in my stomach  
settles to a gurgle  
my only decree a series of hiccups  
serious as screams, Room 18  
in the night i've chased butterflies

in my sleep drawing dreams on the ceiling  
hints of color a scene with a rainbow  
where children chase the beginning  
through fields in the distance  
getting farther away  
they spread out  
planting sunflowers, laughter  
chopped down trees sigh  
the meadow quiet, it survived  
every footstep up to now  
giving, giving  
giving what i have  
time stolen silent numerals

## II. POOKARU

what are the images i can't see  
scribbled in the mirror that i wake into  
deceived by the beauty of form  
maya, raha, delusion  
i'm starting to see things that aren't there  
shadows surround me at noon  
candle candle candle  
god holds me like a flame  
modus locus in Himalayas and peaks  
burning candle  
climbing, climbing  
a fire like a snow-capped mountain  
you can't see the glint or glimmer anymore  
when you are counting  
three

## V. What The Thunder Said

born again in a storm that rings the city  
St. Pete surrounded by lightning crashing crashing  
i huddle under the blanket  
and shut my eyes  
my tongue won't stop in whispers  
talking myself to sleep

i'll make it out wake me up  
wake me up  
wake me up  
lying on a metal sheet  
writing reminders on the top bunk  
it was all put together wrong  
loosened  
the mattress frame in disrepair  
how did i get here?  
Chuck eats pork chops out of the trash can  
it makes me sad  
i can't get it back  
memories, dreams  
the drifters walk the train tracks where i work  
oh, but they had to abandon  
every life in a rucksack  
this place was a hospital  
sickness death sadness health still hands grow lilies  
ghosts  
i love ghosts  
ten  
at least they have a home  
i'm just trying to keep you close  
ghosts.  
every morning i shake the thoughts from my head  
it's an earthquake  
shower and brush my teeth i'm never ready  
fifteen  
breaths again  
breathing heavy  
it's a long walk home  
from the bus depot  
i shoulder my backpack and limp  
everyone has a limp here  
it's like the sky weighs too much  
secrets

vows exchanged  
in pockets full of change  
so many names i don't know  
rain comes  
i'm doused and soaked in clothing and i run away  
am i still dreaming?  
or is this real again?  
every question is another question  
does it ever end?  
the questions?  
will i ever know?  
the answer? twenty-two  
my days are numbered  
i mail dry flowers in a letter  
as pretty as it gets here  
cigarettes bloom in the ashtray  
now and then  
ash and end  
plastic  
rocks on the asphalt  
i sent you a rock and said it was my heart  
guess i'm never getting that back  
all i have to do is swallow  
i take my pills every day  
they stick in my throat watermelon seeds  
that i ate a long time ago  
before i knew to spit them out.  
this tastes like salt water  
i should have drowned in utero  
now i'll surely need a tube to breathe  
on my deathbed gurgle  
gurgle  
five  
remembrance gurgle  
i love you gurgle  
i couldn't save you but at least i tried

gurgle  
there are voices in the hallway  
12 am but who's counting  
voices aren't even free here  
sparrows  
flying into the walls  
thirty-three  
clocks.  
i should have been dying.  
i should be dead.  
soil, a magnolia  
across the street  
life life i'll have another  
three  
give it back  
geranium heartbeat  
eternal smile frown butterfly  
the language was never lost  
see?  
there are words, surprises  
thorns  
inviting blood from beauty  
gentle i want to hold you forever  
i can't smile frown  
seventy-one  
the lines blur  
i'm putting them back where they belong  
tracing myself in the mirror  
with permanent marker  
trying to hold on  
nine  
i know what it says  
it's braille  
i picked it up when i was blind  
we are each other  
another between us, three



am am am  
one  
i know the prayer  
i hope god reads my writing  
or listens to what i say  
i think there's a god and he hears anyway  
the ocean makes noise  
god is noise  
god is silent  
time consoles my lonely shoulder  
i can hear it still  
ringing in my ears  
you  
here comes the rain  
it was told to me in the morning  
from pink to gold  
old symbols  
wrists  
bought and sold at the price of diamonds  
i think i want a diamond  
three  
it's been foretold  
that precious metals will rust  
if you stare at them long enough  
gems become stone  
ruby and rose and shells and blown glass  
that i stole from the garden  
where the color stays  
outside of the department of corrections  
misspelled  
everything is connected  
sigh jail  
jail  
one  
i'm standing behind the numbers  
one

bars, a cell  
if only you could join me  
join me  
please, take me home  
again

iii. *go home birds*

for murph

in the penitentiary  
we watched the blackbirds gather  
like a quiet storm  
from the yard where we hid  
our insecurities in jokes  
written on the wall  
with hidden pens  
everyone hides something  
even while hiding  
even in The Box  
we keep our treasures shined  
weep our gold in teardrops  
a boy cried all night in his sleep  
18 years old  
what was he missing?  
was it everything but a soul?  
did they take it all away?  
when the cage gets locked  
everyone sings louder  
Rotten Nazi, Lance, Famous Dave  
Chinstraps, Watts,  
all of them crying in other ways  
ways forgotten by the guards  
like pencils sharpened into dust  
like me turned into stone  
like birds  
soundless but  
covering the sky  
all wings & windward  
with open mouths trying to say  
something they've never said before

