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# Woodwords

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WOODWORDS

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A Thesis

Presented To

Eastern Washington University

Cheney, Washington

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing

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By

Carol Harrington

Fall 2011



## MASTER'S THESIS

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**WoodWords**

**WoodWords**



Carol Harrington

For my sister, Nanette

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## Stealing Hydrangeas

Like exotic islands the domes rise  
from a whorl of sea green sepals,  
gems from Japan.

Ayesha, Domotoi, Pia,  
Lanarth, Preziosa...  
Colors no canvas could ever hold.

Eyes swim in unreal indigo and  
blood quickens at rufescent blooms  
blotted with bridal white blossoms.

Colors like that  
change us.  
I could have

that brilliance  
that saturated intensity,  
I could lie in it, a

fine silk kimono of color  
covering  
a burnt umber life.

## **The Forgiveness of Snow**

Soft paws, whisker white  
pad silent and  
smooth the stubble of fields,  
cushion the fodder of gardens and  
lace strands of fence together  
tucking three seasons of work  
to bed under a down blanket.

Hiding all that came before and  
giving away all that follows, it  
tracks me shushing my journey into  
white dreams where there are  
no mistakes,  
no rust and  
no lies.

## Bleeding Pride

It was harder to get up  
from that rocky ground every time  
she bucked me off.  
I wanted to lie there and  
bleed. The fifth time  
my knees gave when I tried to  
stand – slowly from all fours,  
breathing hard like that dark  
three-year-old bay.  
They came and carried me  
to the flatbed and  
drove to *Uncle Joe's*,  
where I tended bar.  
Banks of my calves rested high  
on the bar. Ice bags, two frozen peaks,  
top my swollen, bleeding knees.  
I stared at the beers they'd  
all bought me lined up behind  
the first drink – whiskey.  
I put on the best cowboy face I knew,  
raised the glass and said,  
"Here's to the bitch-of-a-bay!" and  
winced all over when I shot it down.

## Folds

Long slender blade of grass  
between her thumbs carries her whistle.

Furrow of her brow deepens when  
the belt stings her father's message home.

Dog-eared pages mark the  
passages she pretends to travel.

Crook of her red arm carries the blue  
steel Ruger after the kill is quartered.

Morrison's *Crazy Love* sways her  
callow hips for an imaginary lover.

Pucker of pressed lips tremble and  
bloom, her first kiss.

Her sister's suicide note crinkles  
screams from her that have no sound.

Ruck of long legs wrap around the rise  
and fall of her lover's strong hips.

Palms meet at dawn, offering  
all that is hemmed in her life to Him.

## **He is mine**

but not mine.  
In infancy, tucked tight, fed from my breast  
pink and full.  
Now four, his cheeks flush red  
with fever.  
He cries and squirms when I wrap the cool damp sheet  
around him.  
Did Isaac squirm when trussed up  
by Abraham?  
Held against his father's breast did their eyes lock  
in that moment?  
How could a boy understand this necessary pain,  
the blade drawn  
above him? I see my reflection  
in my son's trusting eyes  
briefly before his lids lower in sleep, his cheek  
cooler now,  
arms tumbling slowly from the sheet.

## **Held By Water**

Thin slivers of her surfaced  
even methodic shining

an arc of arm slowly waving  
off gravity then dipping ahead,

slick shoulder pushing through  
a lissome world where the sway

of her hips suck  
eddies about her thighs

every fourth stroke an ellipse  
of her face, eye closed, mouth

dark oval singing breath of air  
a hymn of what holds her.

She climbs the metal ladder to concrete.  
Her legs lumber and jostle against each other.

Her soft wet eyelashes bat away  
anything that weighs her down.

## **The canoe**

became graceful and agile  
as did I when we slid into the lake and left  
the coarse scrape of beach sand behind  
this canoe, my body  
thankful for the empty spaces that make us buoyant.  
Somewhere deep within me I have never  
forgotten what it feels like, sounds like  
to be held by water  
delivering me into a journey.

I seek shady places across the lake  
(the sun can find me in shorter days)  
hemming the shore,  
cool air washing my skin,  
smooth waters slithering the sides,  
and I cease to paddle.

## **Skating Skin Deep**

His tongue swirling shiny patterns  
on my skin I slue into

this slippery night, our legs,  
forge figure 8's.

Mimicking the moan and  
heave of marbled ice under  
pointed pressure we both fall

below feeling first the scalding  
pleasure and

later

the awkward  
flail for solid ground.

## **The Path of Rain**

Mist that refracts sunlight is stolen  
by the Chinooks who carry it sideways  
before it lands and becomes a snow eater.

Meeting itself in a pelagic path over the ocean  
it wafts landward to wash a gold sea of grain,  
sending farmers back to lonely wives.

After dropping on chemically  
correct pools in Phoenix it tires  
and seeks fenland bending soft green

swords before dripping into the marsh,  
sated in the euphony of its own wet song.  
And after it sifts through your beard I

lick it up like so much honey.

## The Doe

Just yesterday, I waded through the snow  
to the marble edge of the lake.  
Wisps of white texture swirled like  
frozen feathers, intricate and lacelike.  
The sun framed behind bare trees,  
the archetypal stained glass window.

This morning, the cabin window framed  
a fighting figure.  
Not sure, I grab the binoculars and wince  
when across the silver surface  
I see a deer, caught in the icy trap.  
Ears fluttering, neck straining,  
steam rolling from nostrils wide with fright  
like the eyes.  
She lurches forward again  
and again and  
I imagine the dull useless thud,  
front hooves on the shelf of surrounding ice, swimming her  
ragged breath  
back and forth  
from one end of the dark icy pool  
to the other,  
the heaving, straining – long slender neck.  
In the isolation of this cabin, this wood,  
I can do nothing.  
I am unable to turn away,  
and watch her grave  
widen and yawn black.

I think of the deer all day at work.  
Did she go into shock after the first numbing,  
then stiffen in death?  
Or did exhaustion let her sink,  
lungs filling with scalding cold water?

At dusk, standing in the amber  
light through the window...  
I hear the howling. The shadows  
of three coyotes on the ice  
snarl and fight to tear  
something from within.  
Black hawks dive about the dogs, desperate—  
crying for us all.

## My Portion Ingrained

1

I took my pillowcase and crept out of the cold cabin careful not to wake anyone. The cottonwoods set seeds adrift in white tufts I collected near the lake. Mother told me later that trees would sprout in my ears if I kept sleeping on that pillow. *Glorious.*

2

It takes a long time to peel enough pine nuts to get a small handful. The sweet white meat worth it. I sat cross-legged in the woods as a girl and sometimes let an ant heft one away imagining her hero's welcome at the domed nest, all the colonists—black beaded strings of workers—mandibles dropped in awe.

3

Building a fire at the lake my brother and I broke branches for kindling over our knees knowing we would get to the point where a bunch of them together would not break.

4

I listen for mute trees. My ax, a tuning fork for pitch. If they sing, they must remain standing. I hug the hollow ones and look up, my chin resting on the bark, look for the lean. Lay a soft corridor for them so they don't break or explode. The Face Cut opens down and the holding wood hinges on me while I watch and listen for them to give.

5

There are secrets hidden in puzzle pieces of conifer bark.

6

Rings tell of hard winters and dry summers, like a diary I am reluctant to read, as if plundering pockets. Even fallen cones close up in rain, little plates of armor that will open again when they know it is dry, when they're brave enough to let go of their seeds.

7

When I closed my eyes that autumn Sunday in mass, Latin in my ears, I saw quaking aspen, naked of leaves, hold and frame the crimson and gilt sunset—my station at the cross.

## David

And I have rolled the memory of him over and over,  
feeling for a fault line - the crack, dip slip, thrust  
fracturing what I had thought  
solid.

Side glances across the room that autumn—  
blushing at the nearness of him when he leaned  
in to whisper that winter. An ache seeding inside  
as grass turned green again. Coffee dates in bay  
windows, shoulder to shoulder on the bookstore's  
windowsill sharing poetry and prose. At the Winery,  
the slow lean and tilt of his head to kiss me the first time.  
Lying in the park, sun and cirrus clouds winking  
at the emerald blanket of us. The brush of his lips  
whispering he loves me and that question about  
the rest of my life...  
the promise of never being lonely again  
after a decade of hoping.

Then I felt the tremors  
of his past, shuddering,  
crowning cold and hard.  
Exhuming his guilt,  
turning the smooth slope of us into talus.

I still wince upon waking in grey dawn for the want  
of him. My days amble on, exposed stones –  
but they are solid and I believe in the green  
promise of moss.

## **Clearing Chaos**

The roar of the chainsaw  
was beautiful.  
I left a wake of  
snarling branches behind  
in the spray of sawdust.  
A clean sweep of acreage.

I will burn the crack dry cones  
and smile when kindling  
hisses at me.  
Eliminating negative space in  
stacked cords fills me.

Only now can I rest.  
The sweet ache and tremble  
of my arms hanging  
spent at my sides.

## **Singing the Blues**

In the evening something calls me  
from the wash of light the house holds into  
the azure gown of night. All the blue folds

wrap me in cool hues quilt soft and quiet.  
Wandering deeper into the dark I slow and  
sift each sound that weaves around me.

Faint friction of cricket limbs  
    Throaty croak of moist frogs  
        Subtle static of restless leaves

I know then that they are all waiting  
for me - my offering. Arms stretched out  
holding back the curtain I sing a ribbon of

velvet vespers completing the canticle before  
I bleed back across the threshold and turn out  
the house lights one by one.

## Sniper Secret

Because the bartender looked as old as he was. And it was dead quiet that afternoon in this tavern so far from home. The barstool felt easy, even with its split brown vinyl. His hands slowly turned the amber bottle before he took a taste his tongue hadn't touched for 40 years. It was good. The bartender didn't bother him with questions; just ran a towel tenderly down the counter, folding it neatly near the end before ambling back toward his only customer who, with liquid brown eyes, only halfway through his beer began to deliberately and slowly speak...

*All the boy's faces are still young.  
Moon-faced boys, really.  
We had a scout, Wilson.  
God, he was funny.  
Always makin' me laugh.  
He'd always take recon.  
Saved us many a time.  
I was always posted up front, ya know.  
I was the best shot.  
God, when I was a little fella, I'd shoot supper every day.  
I was told to look for officers and  
radio guys mostly.*

The bartender's steady eyes - patient as a pendulum.

*One time, in the fog  
way out front  
I'd sat forever  
still as dirt.  
I saw something moving  
slow like  
in the woods ahead.  
I shot it and it stopped.  
Wilson was brought in  
the next morning with  
a head wound.  
Died shortly after.  
Everyone thought it was the Germans...still do.  
That boy's head is still bleeding  
wrapped inside my ribs.*

## Moot Dust

A twenty minute hike  
*at best*  
to top a lonely knoll.  
I can see Canada from here  
but not home.  
The dust I wipe  
from my eyes  
may be from my birthplace.  
Specks trailing the midnight Amtrak,  
trying to keep  
their breath  
and  
existence.  
Maybe descending on Dodson –  
or swirling through Saco  
wrapped in fine snow.

I've turned away, though.  
Mounds of sprawling rocks and roots  
are considered mountains here.  
At least fragments of home fall frequently –  
pine cones and long, slender needles.

## Loneliness

I have known the gray weathered barn,  
Slivering gravity, leaning her way to weeds,  
Shafts of sunlight bleeding through her shakes,  
Ribbed with empty stalls, sinewed in old fodder,  
Rusty nails draped with stiff bridles and dull bits  
Tattered cobwebs sift dust, cling to corners,  
Dreaming of flies long gone.

And I have heard the groan and sigh, her reply  
To the wind's whistle, its rude rearrangements  
Tiny cyclones within her loft.

Dusk diffuses her swayback pitch in soft  
Pink and gold strokes, but even that leaves her  
In the end.

## The first time I hurt you

it was intentional.

Curled against my breast, your soft beautiful arms sprang out in shock and we both froze stiff – holding each other's wide blue-eyed gaze.

Your budding baby teeth had left marks in my nipple before. The book I had on mothering said to *flick the baby's forehead with a finger when biting occurs*. I had winced through tear-filled eyes but could never do it until now. Neither of us knew how to react for that long moment. I thought of how someday your lip will tremble, as it is now, when someone you love and trust has broken your heart.

I hold you against me, my heart, my breast, and stroke your tender forehead and cheek while your round mouth, still wet with milk, opens wide to cry both because of me and into me. When you tuck your tiny arms back into me whimpering, I whisper, *I know, I know...*

it is something we never get used to.

## **Enduring Decay, To Begin Again**

I step over a large cedar, recently fallen.  
Stiff and straight, on the forest floor,  
it begins to die leaving a gaping  
shock of blue, a rude eye staring.  
Leaves and branches blink,  
politely filling in the opening  
as decay begins.  
Beetles bore holes into bark  
dead weight bows with an exhale and  
slumps into the bosom  
of the earth.

After a season of cold quiet brilliance and  
white thought, gray fiber softens and warms  
hosting fungi and spores.  
Cushions of moss cover cuts.  
Freckled domes of mushrooms and  
orange lichen rib through flaking bark.  
I run my fingers down its flanks.

## The Turning

You laugh when I tell you the falling  
leaves are writing cursive love letters.  
*To the tree or to the ground?* you ask.  
It is both but I won't tell you. We are  
only held for so long.

I don't know the biological process by  
which a leaf leaves. I don't know who  
lets go first, the tree or the leaf.  
It doesn't seem to matter now and  
there is no hiding this blush from you.

## **In the Fall Field 5 AM**

Frozen fog of my breath  
convection caught  
amidst lows and highs  
gauzes this field, a  
gray slip of dawn I  
wear until Sun bids  
me. *Rise and  
release. I will  
warm the field. Trust in*

*dissipation.*

I rise in a cirrus reckoning,  
reshaped and ceded to  
the Sun, slip into a  
gown of ice crystals high;  
holding the curve of every field.

## **Fair Fowl**

Dying horribly and perfectly  
frozen upright to the fence,  
you stood solid, your feathers  
gold like the flecks  
frozen in your small narrow eyes.  
I stood and stared, my breath, your crimson comb  
punctuating our gaze in the quiet crowless dawn.  
Pulling your trapped beak  
from chicken wire I wonder if the hens  
will miss your cock and strut,  
your peck at their cackling  
and wandering ways.  
I walk out onto the prairie,  
your stiff body brushing the sage—  
tawny florets whisper this offering  
to the coyotes who will come  
later, yipping me to sleep.

## Holes

I remember how odd it seemed  
the pictures  
many pictures  
on the walls  
the walls holding up  
pictures  
some big  
small  
crooked  
cracked.

I didn't get to play  
ever at her house and only  
saw them twice while I waited  
on the porch for her to come out  
looking through holes in the  
screen door, tiny wires poking out like  
coarse eyelashes around empty eyes.  
She was careful to *never* let it  
slam  
behind her.

I had forgotten all about her until now  
twenty years later sewing this  
patch to cover the hole  
a campfire ember  
burned  
into my coat.

## **A Rhythm in Burial**

I placed the little tufts  
of fur, white brown black,  
in the trash bag with the rest  
of him.

Easy to find, his torn body at the end  
of the blood stained snow.

Dad had let him out late last night,  
forgetting coyotes.

We dug at that frozen ground  
in the woods behind the house and  
did not speak.

Basalt rocks loosed under our blades  
were cast away from my dog's  
shallow grave.

Through tears I saw my father's wet  
cheeks and the steel of his shovel  
taking turns with mine. Both  
of us then knelt to pat and  
smooth the rough mound.

## Rain He Knew Would Come

The twine stretched tight across his palms.  
He pulled the tarp taut over the slash piled high,  
well over his head. A tangled heap of wood.  
A gust of wind fought back, making his hands shake.

Next to his wife of thirteen years at their son's Christmas play  
he'd fought to keep his eyes from his lover's back  
a hand's reach in front of him – the wisps of her hair  
had escaped the tie that held it off her smooth neck, the tie

that had been lost in a tangle of their legs and sheets...  
He had helped his son wrap the sheet across his  
forehead, listened to the shepherd's lines repeated while  
his hands shook tying the tan cord to hold it on, hold it together.

And even after he'd had his scotch, his wife asked if he was all  
right when his hands trembled zipping up her dress...  
remembering the smooth glide of the zipper as he pulled it  
down past the dip of her lower back that arched into him,  
slid the tie from her hair and unfastened the tiny  
hooks of her black bra...

Now, pausing, sucking in his breath, wincing  
at the cut of the cord in his hands,  
the tarp whips up and down  
winking wet blue plastic then tangled wood.  
He lets go.  
The wind carries the cover away; the twisted  
fiber of dead wood wet  
in the rain he knew would come.  
And he exhales.

## **Reciprocity**

Finger your way tenderly around extrusions  
in your path.  
Curl them close and forfeit agenda.  
See how the roots grow around the rock?

Rock breaks and dimples for all of water's moods,  
ice or flow,  
creating each other's shapes.  
Concurrent potter and clay.

And if you wound another there is always  
the moss of forgiveness.  
Do not limit yourself to the north side of trees;  
follow their bark and curve full round.

Roots curl around a rock,  
branching out  
to hold what veritably  
holds them.

## **What I Would Do With His Words**

Put that thing down.  
Take all you would text and  
find me  
my face  
place your hands on my shoulders my hips and  
let the words spill  
over your lips and I will  
hold them wet  
them dance with the smell  
the sight  
the feel of you  
before me.

## Tensile Strength

And if I fall you will brace  
yourself on belay watching  
my arms and legs initially fan then  
lock at the jerk when slack is done.

I swing back to granite's texture  
and trace its scars fingering holds  
my curled toes pivot their way to calm.  
I remember my baby boy's folded limbs  
flying out momentarily when I'd lift  
him away from one breast to another  
the 'startle reaction' until latching on  
again.

These minerals wear my breath becoming  
even and I glance down to the other end  
of the line, your static strength weaving its way  
up to me. *I gotcha*. I nod and feel  
the response in the slackening of the cord.

I had not thought to learn so much  
from you, my son, or be on this end  
of the line so soon.

I begin again.

## **How Heron Goes**

after Mary Oliver

It is an exceptional affair  
to see how at dawn  
Heron leaves the marsh,  
gathers his long slender neck  
to lean forward a slate-gray line.  
His impossibly slow take-off  
wings unfolding frame and feathers  
barely beating the air, lifting the  
smudge of his body over cattails  
aerial prodigy.

### **Sissy Pantywaist Milquetoast**

Slight stalks pressed flat under  
five weeks of winter's berm; your  
leaves, small green tongues leading  
to cheeky violet petals  
still velvet – it is good to see you  
again.

You were the last bloom I saw  
undaunted by the first heavy snows  
your face upturned and bright  
unafraid of change.

Perennial wonder, copious and brave  
give me strength to face the world  
like a pansy.

## **The Pulse of Waves**

I love the way we wade lip and finger  
long before we swim in each other.

I am smooth surface water where all is silent  
until your touch pulls sighs out of me  
like waves reaching for the moon.

We ripple in eddies around the rise  
and fall of salty skin. My white panties,  
a pale blue shell washed up on this night's shore.

Your patience opens what I had thought closed forever  
in a deep ocean of pain. I hold you  
inside me as water holds light.

And after our heave and curl we lie close,  
breathing even and slow.

## **Constant Purr**

Like an unwanted stray cat  
I have foolishly fed,  
loneliness curls itself around  
my legs and refuses to  
leave.

Trying to move on in small  
hesitant steps, blinking in the  
blur of your leaving me,  
I trip over the memory of you  
constantly.

Angry during the day I kick  
away the curl and exhaust myself  
clearing the house and acreage of  
clutter.

But at night find myself curled  
around that cat weeping into its  
static familiar fur.

## Woodwords from Stafford

It's almost as if I were looking over his shoulder.  
Paging through his lens feeling quiet  
and motionless on the outside,  
hummingbird blur on the inside.

But *The Day Millicent Found the World* he

took me by the hand under the great green  
dome and laid my palm lightly against a tall tree.  
His breath in my ear said, "Now close your eyes,  
you cannot watch me go..."

*No one called me back that time* so I

stayed and lightly ran my fingertips over  
the bark Braille reading the messages there.  
The softest secrets grow inside my green  
moss breast beating to the pulse of wood.

Held *in a great powerful embrace*

the puzzle pieces of warm red bark  
breathe and whisper the way to the  
words until I am quiet and motionless on  
the inside – hummingbird blur on the outside.

*Long strokes of golden sunlight shift over my feet and hands.*

## Making Certain

I was simply gone.  
Vanished into thin air and he was screaming. Silent only  
long enough to take in breath for another. I was there  
in the kitchen over a steaming sink of dirty dishes  
and then, I wasn't.

I'd simply gone  
to the bathroom, down the driveway to check the mail,  
move a load of wash to the dryer, take the trash out.  
His seven year old mind required the visual,  
the physical. Daddy had left, Mama could go  
at any second. *Nothing* is certain.

I'd been told to watch for a return to bed-wetting,  
thumb-sucking, and other regressions. But no, it was just  
the screaming; it lasted almost a year.  
He'd watch me go into my bathroom. I'd hear  
the soft scuff of his small feet up to the door then  
a slight bumping, his forehead tapping reassurance  
"Mama's almost done, bud, okay?" When I'd come out  
he'd wrap one arm around my leg, walk with me back  
to the living room.

I create certain.  
Slowing to his little leg pace, hand in hand  
we get the mail. We kneel in the garden and pick  
what is ripe for us. We crawl over raw ground,  
say good night to everything,  
end our prayers with  
*my soul to keep.*

That summer, in the town parade, he  
marched in Boy Scout blues, head turned  
almost tripping to watch me weave  
through the crowded sidewalk, staying in his sight,  
making certain.

Now, at fourteen, as tall as me, he walks  
onto the football field, long stride of his sure legs,  
engrossed with the game, tackling adolescence.  
After recovering a fumble, he turns his head,  
scans the crowd. Finding me, he waves and smiles,  
making certain.

## **Mantis**

Luminous and cool  
Thorax of green light  
Encased and ending  
In the ovals of your eyes.

Your longing joints itself  
in graceful defiant prayer.

***Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine***

—Mary Oliver

Running my fingers down blocks of  
basalt along the Centennial Trail I pace off  
pain, slow even strides.  
Blue black pangs stacked heart high  
form tight crevices—intersections in the wall.  
There is a lot of this igneous rock hewn  
to hold back the earth. It feels rough,  
my fingertips bump at intervals  
over the black seams, like the systolic  
memory of you beating  
into the structure of my days  
since you left.

The fronds of a fiddlehead  
fern break my stride and I stand  
before its small scroll of green.

Oh play! Tell me how you are  
hard-pressed on all sides. Soft clef of  
veined fronds cleaving the dark days—sing!

## From Sand to Sword (Kera to Katana)

The Swordsmith heats the clay vessel to the correct temperature. Ash, charcoal and iron sand are fired in layers—not allowed to become fully molten but Tamahagane. The vessel is broken to remove the steel bloom known as *Kera*.

Two boys roll *Citrus reticulata* across the breakfast table to each other, pretend to slice the Mandarin like Samari warriors, swords drawn above their heads, mouths round in high-pitched squeals. Their mother grins and grabs it, peels back the thin, flame-orange rind exposes the sweet aromatic pulp.

The Swordsmith breaks the bloom apart, forges steel in layers, crafting the skin. Heat, hammer, fold—over and over.

The wedges are splayed on the blue plate like little fiery petals before consumed, sweet and sour juice, drips from two small chins. The mother gathers torn peels from the table, her palms, cradling them to compost.

*Kera* is quenched in water then broken again to remove slag. Swordsmith reforms and rewelds *Kera* toward toughness and purity—distinctive in appearance: a curved, slender, single edged blade with a long grip to accommodate two hands:  
*Katana*.

## Imprinting the Foals

Quivering and steaming,  
you come into the world all lank and legs,  
blink and breath, knowing you must  
stand for milk and flight to live.  
Soon after you suckle I give you memories  
of what is to come. Holding your hocks, one at a time,  
I tap the bottom of your small soft hooves with my palm.  
The plastic sack crinkles and scranches over your penny hide  
as you nod and bob your perfect head at me,  
but lie still when I run my fingers  
around your velvet ears  
and slickery gums.

You will forget me, little foal, but stand calm recalling  
the rub and tap, *shoe*, *saddle* and *bit* before the race.

## **Birdsong**

Dozens of little black birds puffed and round  
in autumn's chill  
pearled the telephone wires.

I approach pedaling down the dirt road  
the white noise  
of gravel beneath my tires.

I cannot help myself  
and throw my arms high—coasting—  
shouting *HELLO!*

The birds burst forth—  
A chorus of black notes  
flushed fortissimo—

A new song against a blank blue sky.

***And in the frosty season***

—Wordsworth

he can still be found on the ice of Esthwaite  
his worn skates following the frozen curve  
where the thick snowy lip of shore  
cornices the pond's edge. His aged frame  
a deep indigo against the lighter blues  
moon brings to these shadowed banks, and  
though the hiss of his silver blades is whisper  
quiet, the heart within him pounds exaltation!  
And, as he did when young, he spins under a still  
celestial sky, stops on the points of his heels,  
and looks up. Milky thoughts swirl above  
*tinkle like iron* around the still blue boy

caught up in *one track of sparkling light* becoming  
a bodiless abstraction in a world of passion.

***Volksbuch des Dr. Faustus***

*What a man knows not, he to use requires,*

*And what he knows, he cannot use for good.*

Pawns fall on the front before the Rook's hood  
Gathered. Knowing full well what The Lion desires  
Calculations fan fires, fan fires, fan fires;

And o'er the board, the Shining, glowing, knowing you could;

And Host with her wings fan this Faustus she would  
Waiting and praying in black and white mires.

And, for every wretch, all theory is gray;

But one red drop can save the darkest soul;

Come out of the forest, Faustus, that Day Star's sway.

Oh, let Him who has won the next move dole—

Your King is but one simple move away,

Let go your logic, son, I Am your goal.

## The Dance

*Why are there trees I never walk under  
But large and melodious thoughts descend upon me?*  
—Walt Whitman

There is a tree in the woods ready  
to leave, pull up its roots and follow  
me down the trail.

Fir has managed to flex  
the fiber of one of its thicker roots  
after decades measured in seasons,  
rings of thought.

Like a dancer its leg—*Arabesque*  
brown bark mosaic held taut  
ninety degrees, toes sinewy  
knuckling soil and decay, arms extended  
tasseled in evergreen waiting, waiting.

I smile and step toward Fir, palm to bark, *Pas De Deux*,  
my skin mossing over blushing green.

## **The Elephant**

The elephant in the living room  
after eight years  
quietly, deftly  
impaled us on each tired tusk and  
buried us for  
better, for worse.  
Sick of me asking,  
Sick of you numb.

It threw the dust of my  
dissension and your disregard over  
its broad grey back and waited  
for its freedom in  
forgiveness.

## Avoiding the Eyes

They are easier to cut up  
when their heads have been  
sawed off  
mostly because of  
the eyes.  
They are objects then, meat.

Even when you are hunting and  
happen to lock eyes with him  
both of you frozen...  
it is hard to pull the trigger  
holding that gaze.

When we fight  
it does not bother me that  
you won't look  
at me then.  
Only later  
when we make up  
naked and coupled  
do I wince when  
you will not meet my gaze.

## **Broke**

He helped her put away  
the last horse she broke.  
The sky had grown dark.  
The mare was damp,  
and put on the hotwalk to cool,  
tethered, walking in circles.

That night, he led her by the hand  
to the empty bunkhouse.  
His tongue separating her  
callow lips, she, trembling  
beneath his calloused hands.  
Her head swam in deep kisses  
between something she thought she  
wanted, and a hard wall.

The last gentle pressure she felt  
his hands guiding her down  
telling her she'd like it.

Fingers wrapped 'round the brown strands of her hair  
forcing himself deeper until she gags  
throat clenched—nostrils wide blowing.  
Air - the only thing she could evulse  
In. Out. In. Out.  
Frantic cry caught and turned to a  
muzzled moan  
behind his swollen sex.

After she bit down  
he pulled and drove her head  
into the forgiving drywall.

Loosed, she ran so fast  
the walls ricocheted her  
out onto the prairie  
head in hands – wobbly.  
Walking in circles.

## **Pining Genus**

I cannot help but straighten up  
when I come upon a White Pine.

Green needles in fascicles of five  
(neither short nor long) sleeve and cuff

the branches that burgeon in regular whorls,  
quint rings up the umber column. Named for the white fiber

wrapped in smooth bark, your purple strobiles dangle,  
cupping seeds in coney sheaths fanning open in heat.

Perfect pinus, the first elysian evergreen.

## Bird in Hand

I could tell when it hit the window  
it would be dead or near dead  
lying at the base of the house  
feathered breast beating burst  
against the cage of its bones.  
Outside, I knelt to place  
this sliver of flight in my palm  
the sleek head dangling.

I held funerals on a somewhat  
regular basis when I was girl, our house  
full of large windows.  
I would sit in the corner of the kitchen,  
bird in hand, rub the tiny  
dropper against its beak *please*.  
So many casualties in shoe boxes  
buried in the backyard.

The room grows dim and seems small  
when I close the drapes,  
but think of the pain it will deflect.

**the geese are leaving**

a slate wake of flight heading  
southward to where you are they  
quill my message—wild  
beating caught within my chest  
cornet calls of loneliness

***Knees Suddenly Wanting Down***

—Emma Howell

And once more  
the snow received me.

My skis hem parallel hues  
of blue, whisper my way  
into the forest again. The poles  
I swing forward and push back pock  
the white surface, a Morse code  
of this lonely entry.

Branches weighted with snow sift  
my clouds of breath  
and tremble a veil of flakes over me.

Halfway down the canyon, rows of birch  
line the path, slight scrolls of their bark,  
tiny invitations to this copse. Their satin  
columns rise and branch over me knitting  
a nave of snow impossibly suspended—  
filaments arcing in the sun melting  
the rime inside me.

***My self will be the plain***

—William Stafford

It's the thinking there's no end to it  
that hounds us blesses us. Longings  
some we cannot even name big as sky  
restless as water always wanting to move over  
the plains rolling out cradling their shadows at dusk  
combing through tangled whispers of wind,  
the promise and panic of a reaping  
to want and fear going on my self a plain I plant  
posts in to measure my life: stolen candy, pets,  
first kiss, marriages, births, last time I saw him  
cadences to break the interminable space. Older now,  
learning to let spaces fill me, pull my eyes from the posts,  
*pacing toward what I know.*

## Book List

Butler, Lynne Burris, *Forever Is Easy*  
Emerson, Ralph Waldo, *The Works of Emerson*  
Flenniken, Kathleen, *Famous*  
Guernsey, Bruce, *January Thaw*  
Hodgen, John, *Heaven & Earth Holding Company*  
Kizer, Carolyn, *Cool, Calm & Collected*  
Kuipers, Keetje, *Beautiful in the Mouth*  
Langland, Joseph, *The Wheel of Summer*  
Oliver, Mary, *House of Light*  
Roethke, Theodore, *The Collected Poems*  
Stafford, William, *Passwords*  
Solomon, *Ecclesiastes*  
Stevens, Wallace, *The Collected Poems*  
Wagoner, David, *Through the Forest*  
Whitman, Walt, *Leaves of Grass*

## Notes

*How Heron Goes.* After Mary Oliver's *How Heron Comes*.

*Woodwords from Stafford.* The italicized lines are variations on lines from William Stafford's *The Day Millicent Found the World*.

*Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.* The title is taken from a line in Mary Oliver's *Wild Geese*.

*From Sand to Sword (Kera to Katana).* Japanese swordsmithing is the labor-intensive bladesmithing process developed in Japan. The steel used is known as Tamahagane or "jewel steel" produced from black sand, heated in a Tataka (clay vessel). It is mainly used to make Samurai swords like the Katana, a curved, slender, single edged blade, renowned for its sharpness and cutting ability.

*And in the frosty season.* The title and italicized text are taken from William Wordsworth's *The Prelude* 1805, Book First. The last line "a bodiless abstraction in a world of passion." taken from Thomas De Quincey in an essay he wrote on Wordsworth published in *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* (1839).

*Volksbuch des Dr. Faustus:* the name of a painting (some call it *Checkmated*) depicting a chess game between Satan and Faustus and a very interesting story attached to it regarding chess moves. Italicized lines from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust*.

*The Dance.* The epigraph is from "Song of the Open Road" *Leaves of Grass*, 1892.

*Knees Suddenly Wanting Down.* The title is taken from a line in "Prayer" *Slim Night of Recognition* by Emma Howell.

*My self will be the plain.* The title and last line are taken from William Stafford's *The Farm on the Great Plains*.

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