

# Invite Cats

*poems*

Jam Hale

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this is my will and testament.

1. cremate me with this copy of east of eden. i'm tom hamilton.
2. listen to leonard cohen's "old ideas," joanna newsom's "ys," bon iver's "22, a million" and conor oberst's "ruminations" at my funeral. invite cats
3. go to tenth street, the mode and bittercreek for drinks. oh, & neuro patio
4. throw a party in municipal park—ruth, you are in charge of music.
5. read more books, travel often, write letters and poems, do cartwheels, be/swim naked, go for more walks and bike rides, make bouquets with wildflowers, eliminate the gender binary and crush the patriarchy.
6. josh and ruth—look through my poems and see if there are any good ones.
7. smile and laugh and drink wine straight from the box when you think of me. odds are, i loved you!

Jam Hale  
April 17, 2017

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## FOREWORD

How does one introduce a book of poems published posthumously for a brother? There is a desire to write an elegy or an epigraph, or to connect the themes of the work to the poet's life and death, especially for readers who did not know the beautiful person that was Jam. Attempting to do so, though, would fall flat. A life cannot be summed up, and the death of a young person cannot be understood. At no point would we be satisfied with what is written. The best we can do, any of us, is to read the poems contained here and revel in them. While the range of subjects in these pieces may be limited, they contain the depth and breadth of what it is to be human—family, friends, food, drink, sex, love, death, humor, heartbreak, loneliness, the question of home, cats.

Hundreds of poems were collected in the weeks following Jam's suicide in April. Most of them were recovered from Jam's personal digital files, some from their journals, and others were sent to us by friends. There is no way we can know if these poems were considered finished or ready to share by the author, but we exercised our best judgement in choosing almost one hundred pieces, spanning nearly a decade, that demonstrate Jam's powerful use of language as a tool to work through the intricacies of love and pain. In the same vein of unknowing, the title assigned to each poem represents either a clearly designated poem title or, more often, a file name. The sections in this edition are organized loosely by theme for ease of reading with two longer, recent pieces included in the back.

Poetry exists between words. It expresses what prose cannot; what cannot be explained to another person, but can be shared. It is at the same time extremely personal and universal. Share these poems. Keep them to yourself. Take them with you into the mountains, hot springs, and bars that Jam loved.

Ruth & Joshua Hale  
June 2017



# Invite Cats

*poems*



I went to the humane society  
today  
to see if they sometimes  
take in humans  
it's in the name

they said I could volunteer  
& I told them  
“you misunderstood me,  
I've lost a person  
she hasn't come back  
to eat for months  
and I'm afraid she never will.”

they told me to leave

I asked if I could see  
all the cats up for adoption  
first.

*Oliver and the mouse*

Oliver sits in a chair and he has no wings  
it looks unnatural, his body supporting his head,  
tiny muscles in his neck  
his hands playing with the fabric of his shirt  
his lips pursed and suckling the air for a nipple

he says I can be a king if I'd like  
and then he says king is the wrong word  
a king is never content.

he says I can be happy

I ask him if he liked the songs Ruth sang to him  
in the hospital  
and he tells me gently, no questions.

his eyes are shimmering  
like eyes about to cry  
and they shift from gray to bright blue and back again  
never wholly one color or the other

Oliver says, *I have never seen a sun  
that did not bury his head  
in the side of the world when the day is done*  
and I recognize it from a song  
but I don't say anything

a white mouse moves across the floor  
Oliver watches it with infant eyes  
a cat follows closely  
with no hunger in its steps  
but a fearful playfulness attached to each claw

and we can both see small red spots  
on the mouse's fur

Oliver tells me he has to go  
and I say, my eyes shimmering,  
please stay.  
he tells me that counts as a question

the mouse fits between the bookshelf and the wall,  
too small a space for the cat  
who begins to clean his paws  
unaware of us

the chair where Oliver is sitting  
begins to change from wood to cinder  
with no fire licking at its legs  
until it is wholly charcoal

as his body, still without wings, disappears  
from the collapsing chair  
Oliver tells me he loved Ruth's songs

one day all the dogs and cats  
will turn on us  
and that will be the apocalypse

asleep in our beds,  
eaten from toes to noses  
they'll leave our brains

these are my thoughts  
and these are my cat's thoughts  
as he lays there cleaning his paws

underneath silk moon  
I'm trying to write like Li Po  
we both get drunk and dance  
breaking clay jars and spilling wine  
breaking bottles and spilling beer  
watching birds hop from limb to limb  
and take flight without warning  
until I see my cat slowly creeping through the grass

my dreams are filled with ghosts of newborns  
there is an empty teacup teasing a black cat  
*nothing is ever truly empty*  
the cat says to me as he stares into the porcelain  
*empty is the place between a square and a circle*  
*empty is discovering mathematics*  
*and a good book*

there is a collaboration of sensuality in the room  
a fireplace where only sentences are used for heat  
a girl looking great in denim shorts offers me a cigarette  
and explains the significance of the number zero  
*just look at it in Chinese characters*  
she says, and the cat nods knowingly



my cat doesn't think about jesus. but he hears all the insects  
moving  
under the grass where the disciples walked. *smoosh, smash.*  
his radar ears know who is in each room.

my cat doesn't ask me about my nephew or Jimmy or Loren.  
he understands death better than I do because he doesn't  
ponder it.  
I could find so many answers if I stopped looking.

my cat doesn't always eat what he kills but brings mice as gifts.  
I'm half tempted to cook one up just to show him how grateful  
I am.  
maybe a satay on a bed of arugula and lemon zest, maybe mouse  
wellington.

my cat can be alone for days at a time without getting sad.  
I used to think he and I had this in common. I wonder if maybe  
he just can't conceive time. he gets everything else.

my cat doesn't let me use him as a pillow unless he is as tired  
as me.  
but he obliges to curl up on my feet, especially when I'm ready to  
get up  
ready to pour food into his bowl and bury the mouse he left at my  
doorstep.

watching my cat's nose  
as I make coffee in the morning,  
the floor too cold  
reminds me that there are things  
unique to us:

profitless wars, purposeless music, unrelenting hate.

we don't have the upper hand here.

watching my cat's nose  
as I cook bacon and eggs  
and quinoa to cool for lunch  
reminds me that we are animals

feasting when the harvest is good  
and starving when the harvest is bitten by frost.

but my cat, with his grain-free canned venison dinner  
and my too-small paycheck  
reminds me that my priorities are right

as I pour my coffee  
and watch my cat's nose.





your footsteps on the tarmac  
are the apocalypse  
your eyes are cyanide  
I'm trying to say  
your almond-shaped eyes are the end of me

I've never danced so deliberately  
in my backyard  
the cats watching my craving  
as I hold the air  
against my body &  
in my lungs



we gathered our senses and blackberries  
in the back of a dodge durango and  
a cleaned out milk jug severed at the head  
we kissed our fingertips  
and smeared ripe redness onto our faces and chests  
we buried ghosts like acorns  
to grow into bigger  
but much friendlier ghosts

no one has ever feared a tree  
with roots still planted firmly  
in the earth

I've forgotten your taste  
smell, laughter  
& not on purpose

something about  
a homecoming  
old memories dissolve  
into the memories I've made  
since you left

I've encountered so much laughter  
since you disappeared—  
so many smells

I've tasted infidelity  
but I refused to eat

I am so hungry  
how long must I wait  
for you to climb into my mouth



I wish you were here  
to hear  
Ireland Moving  
with me

But the sea is wide  
and cold—  
and I am just a windfall  
plum.

Familiar skylines speak  
no words  
but foreign meadows pen  
old poems.

I am a vague pronoun an  
empty “it”  
I am the place to rest your head—

dearest, please find me sleeping  
in this copse  
with forgotten songs still warm  
on my lips.

on a borrowed swingset  
my father told me about god  
I was four  
and every day after  
by my mother  
and siblings

we grew up with god  
sitting at the dinner table  
finishing our broccoli  
finishing our casserole  
that is, we were—  
god ate from the tree of life, or something

at church  
we sang songs of penitence  
and recompense  
all the words ending  
in sounds that rhymed with  
minced or glimpse or

and somewhere I learned  
about writing poetry  
and I still  
avoid rhyming

when I can



cigarette ash falling in my tea  
like Li Po's snowflakes  
I'm craving wine  
late on a Tuesday in Shanghai  
in a convenience store labeled  
*supermarket*  
I find out they grow grapes  
in China

tell me I am handsome  
with your hands  
use your breasts to spell out  
*you are the luckiest*  
across my pressing thighs  
gain momentum  
in the bedsheet half-dawn

wake up to our smell

explore.

we are ghosts against this river backdrop  
photographs can't handle our movement

make me feel sexy  
in the grocery store

comment on the ripe avocados.

make me feel needed  
at self-checkout

we can dance the whole way home  
and I'll turn you on  
dicing a tomato

I'm counting my time in Mondays

I've become a regular at the post office,  
liquor store,  
library.

nobody recognizes me at the grocery store  
anymore.

I discovered I prefer strawberry jam  
over strawberry preserves.

It spreads easier  
for my one-a-day meal  
that doesn't involve a shot glass  
& preservation is no longer a thing  
with which I concern myself.

*two bottle stories*

we were two bottles  
of wine  
into the night  
apples falling from the tree  
in your backyard  
cigarette ash  
falling from our fingers  
I'll sweep  
the patio  
in the morning

we were sharing  
two bottle stories  
& the night  
felt increasingly  
unqualified  
to be sharing its quiet  
with your laughter





the kids after tag  
line up at the water fountain  
and can't get the pressure right

they are hydrating through their noses  
and down their shirts

I wonder if this is how we write  
opening our hearts as mouths  
hoping the words flow in

begging our hands  
lit up with pens  
that we don't spill too much  
or drown in our inspirations

it's simple.

drink whiskey, lots of it  
but never too much  
at once.

get an easy job  
drink at work  
master a flask like  
French archers mastered  
a quiver and bow.  
be discreet  
as you don't want your bowfingers cut off.

at home, at the park, at the bar:  
write poems.  
at work, on your bicycle, walking to the grocery:  
write poems in your head.

never drink so much  
you cannot write poems.

don't think about dying  
or if you do,  
don't fear it.

remember to eat.  
remember to drink water.  
it's simple:  
drink whiskey, lots of it.

new callouses on my hands and feet  
I have been climbing trees  
and clinging to stories  
my toes tangled in metaphor  
and popped by adjectives

it aches, the toll it takes on the body  
to find such value in a turn of phrase  
neglecting breakfast for a sunrise  
I'm spending all my meals  
swallowing your words instead

before creation, we wallowed underneath  
willow trees and ran our hands  
against the treefrog bark  
before The Lord  
someone said something  
about being God  
and someone listened  
Ivan thinks I use too much symbolism  
in my poetry:  
I think Ivan doesn't listen to enough Jay-Z

you have to let your head move to the music once in awhile

Ivan knows too many words  
and not enough sentences

a lot of writing poetry  
is just thinking  
surrounded by wordless objects  
opening bottles or closed books  
feeling the softness of your own skin  
feeling the callouses  
on your feet and hands  
the heat of sitting in one place too long

we forget to sweat  
we forget to sway

the courage of an airplane  
the compassion of these giant wheels  
I am never wholly in one city  
my hand is flat against the Great Wall  
our voices can't reach over  
so we choose our words carefully

we break teacups  
on purpose  
we believe they are made of ice  
we wait for them to melt  
& no one can tell us differently

when will we find the quiet  
to read to one another  
I can read  
or write  
poetry  
or prose  
in a nightclub  
in a strange city  
with electronic music dictating  
where and how  
I should move my hips

in the quietest corner  
bathed in red light  
all of the women  
blend together  
until you appear  
in a surreal apparition  
on the lock screen  
of my phone  
and stand out

I called a suicide prevention hotline tonight  
for the first time & to be candid: I texted first  
I hate talking on the phone  
to anyone but my sister

Jen, who capitalized all the right letters, gave stock answers.  
I explained my depression & she said:  
“Sorry, our system can only handle 140 characters—  
can you repeat what came after ‘really wa’?”  
I asked her if she was a robot  
she said no  
she said it was strong of me to reach out  
and when I stopped texting  
she said  
“It looks like now’s not a good time.  
Please text in again if you’re in crisis.  
We’re here 24/7.”  
good thing about robots, they don’t sleep.

& right before I dialed the number to talk to Rose  
Rose, who cradled my tears  
Rose, who used gender neutral pronouns  
for my ex-partner who she had never met  
Rose, who really understood how capitalism breeds violence  
sexism  
racism  
depression  
Rose, who made me promise to call her when I was in Salinas  
as I dialed the last digit of 1(800) 273-8255 to talk to Rose,  
Jen texted me and said:  
“Hey—we’re always looking to do the best we can.  
Did you find this conversation helpful? Y/N”

I wanted to reply

*Jen, I'm just looking to do the best I can, too.*



the scarf  
you knit for my birthday  
three months ago  
is still at the store  
in skeins of burnt orange yarn

we use poetry to predict the future  
or create it  
we are driven by romance  
we are bonded by fear  
to walk bravely into the hot night  
into the dark room

we measure our courage  
by how long we can sit in the quiet  
of summer  
desireless

or, more-so, desirous  
but with steady hands  
focused eyes  
the lights of the city at our back

I measure intelligence  
by the distance between our lips  
unsure yet  
which end of the spectrum  
denotes what



we had a therapy accident  
I should say  
we had accidental therapy

I laid on your couch  
with a bottle of whiskey  
between us

we solved distance  
you picked up my brain  
and set it back  
where it should be

thank you  
I wanted so badly  
to use laughter  
again  
in my poems

we've made it through  
bottles of wine and Bulleit rye  
we've talked in poems  
and slow danced to fast songs

you held my hand  
until Oliver was really dead  
you put line breaks in my poems  
until he was alive again



my cat sees ghosts of insects  
that once sneaked upon our earth  
and pounces  
and I hear earthworms peaking their heads  
(or asses, no one really knows)  
through the ground to find little puddles  
of rainwater  
sitting in the miniature ponds  
in the creases of autumn leaves  
or maybe I hear the ghosts of insects  
that once sneaked upon our earth.

I waited for hours for your voice  
against the trees, the hollow suffering of ants  
of beetles  
a caterpillar approached my index finger  
with curiosity, his little ass wagging in the air

for an hour I wrote poems in my head  
and drew faces on the tree trunk with my finger  
and I danced against the black sky  
my cigarette illuminating orange gnats  
in the air, the smoke from my mouth disrupting their little clouds

dropping like flies

I opened the bottle of whiskey I brought  
for you  
and took two sips  
I wanted you here sipping with me and before I knew it I was  
drunk  
sloppy, song drunk  
the poems in my head were full of moss and dirt  
getting heavier, my poems were bogged down,  
were marshland

I danced to songs disinclined to dancing  
I was swirling giant circles in the clearing between the two trees  
you said we should dress up  
my cigarette glowing an open-shutter circle  
a diameter equal to my height  
it seemed to be getting smaller



I threw the bottle at a butterfly  
I told the caterpillar I was sick of waiting, too  
and laid down in the cold grass  
hoping to wake beside you in the city

*army ants*

below the needlegrass and bladderpods  
an army of ants builds and builds  
with no plans for attack or an afterlife  
stretching hundreds of feet underground

their home burrows and winds into trees  
and it has been rumored some of these ants  
traveling thick like shag carpet  
can eat a human down to its skeleton in a matter of minutes

from here, hunching over the volcano of red ants  
spilling like lava onto the sand and back in again  
I watch and wonder if these are the ants  
that can devour my body, and I push my fist deep  
  into the mess of legs and mandibles



dream to be an ant  
de-arm  
our futures

give us something  
worth loving

me, ghost-thin  
in the reflection  
of the spilt  
cocktail

they huddle around

split the difference,  
split the tab

I know I am drinking alone!  
my ghost buys her own drinks

I was opposed to traps  
you were full of them

these insects  
scent is, this pheromone

re:  
h o m e  
p e o n

I watch these ants tangle antennae  
communicating better than we do  
in our own home.

the bread you baked for me had ants in it  
but you were standing there watching me  
and so proudly,  
and I ate it.

my brother always said we could reduce the world hunger problem by eating bugs.

but then I worried about the world bug shortage  
and how our problem shouldn't become theirs  
and you told me you were afraid of bees.

and I told you,  
my parents used to tell me the story of the rich man  
who did everything else for god  
but wouldn't give up his money  
and it was hell for him for eternity

that seems a little unreasonable, even for god.

does god know what happens in the series finale of Lost?  
has he read East of Eden or Man and Superman?

you tell me it is okay for you  
to be afraid of bees  
you know it is irrational

and you tell me  
it is okay for me to be frustrated with a god  
in which I don't believe

the bread you baked for me was good  
and I learned to love the taste of bugs  
and you tried to learn the delicate hum and dance of bees in the  
yard

I watch a spider dancing on her web  
Grateful for my pack of cigarettes  
& bottle of vodka  
Her symmetry  
Her inherent knowledge of geometry  
She is weaving a map of Ladd's Addition

In my childhood  
I was crippled by a disease  
That could only be diagnosed  
After I formed a dogmatic  
(& pragmatic)  
Opposition & disbelief in medicine:  
Mental, Physical, Allopathic, Homeopathic.  
*She doesn't want to get better.*

Our precious spider dissolved her web  
She is hiding in some crevice  
Waiting until tomorrow  
To begin her plight again

Spiders don't suffer mental illness  
Regardless of the symptoms we share  
Samantha isn't struck at four in the morning  
With the uncontrollable urge  
To connect with the world

She waits until the sun rises  
To fill our world with webs

Samantha doesn't have vodka before coffee  
She found a path  
Consecrated silk, a path into the sky

Samantha knows how to fly  
She surpasses birds in her tiny universe  
Never looking outside herself  
For the materials she needs to build a home



the trembling insects induce a strange fright, their hollowed carcasses shaking like dull sequins on an erotic dancer's pasties—I'm unsure which I fear more.

the spider who has drained these husks of blood and bile is hiding beneath the orchid, waiting for the faint tremble of her web to signal dinner. she promises she will dispose of her entomological trophies once the study is complete: this hovering graveyard cannot be good for business

*arachnid vs. hexapods! patrons, place your bets.*

those left standing, count your limbs. I shudder away from her myriad eyes and am left with two shaky legs and a misanthropic fear that every human is a Wandering Spider and I am two limbs short of a trembling insect.



we didn't question the intent of the sun as it set violently  
behind the mountains, our feet bruised and gypsied our  
hands clasped tripping fumbling over limbs of trees the hour  
of our consummation a fabled place we found we are mythical  
our bodies finally resting where the water

oh, the water

trickles delicately from the rocks and the water is warm  
too warm we shovel cold water from the river we drink  
cold beer from the river we dance in the moonlight as  
it replaces the light from the sun placidly we are every  
atom of this moment

she sings like the cool of the river  
the way our feet look distorted underwater  
she sings like smoke insulating  
the tumblers of whiskey supported  
by this thousand year old bar

she hugs like camping  
the warmth of the comparison  
of the heat of a body  
and cold of the early mountain air  
she hugs like hot springs in winter

she moves like a dancer  
it takes her minutes to sit down  
on the red leather barstool  
spinning, her fingers feeling  
the fluidity of the air

she laughs like a yawning cat  
eyes closed, every facet of her  
exposed to the safety of our  
two glasses of wine & quiet stoop  
she laughs knowing she has a place to sleep

in the park submerged  
in the flooding of the willamette  
lady sees a battlefield of squirrels  
and smells the traces of  
every dog that has run gleefully  
on this grassy highground  
pulling at her leash

I spot the tops of  
mermaids using the gazebo  
for plotting mischief  
fish spinning the alphabet dice  
suspended by rusted axles  
with a bump of their beaks  
where young adults fooled around  
behind these educational parapets  
safe in their midnight terraces  
when the water is low

otters riding the slide, hand-in-hand  
ducks diving to pick through  
the water-logged wood shavings  
for crumbs left by clumsy children  
that make up the splintered carpet  
that will reemerge in the summer

and I see your son  
asking gleefully on his swing  
to go higher. your arms tiring,  
I take a turn.  
him, refracted through the water.  
like trying to see yourself in a mirror  
in a dream

his visage is a centrifugal blur  
in the circles of the surface of the pond  
where I skip a stone  
and find little conclusion  
in the denouement of our time together.

we drank enough for breakfast to last us all day and by noon  
we had skinned a squirrel tacked its hide to a tree gathered  
firewood and PL insisted we saw down the dead tree left  
like a skeleton by the wildfire

we sweated whiskey

we set the teeth of our saw in the bark we dug our feet into  
the sawdust forming in piles sticking to our sweaty naked backs  
Jason filmed the tree falling we cheered like lords of the flies  
we ran to the river and dove in gathering freshwater mussels  
in our hands and crooks of our elbows and we feasted on  
their labial appearance

the surreality of the airport is that  
she sensed you hesitating  
from 100 miles away

I was too busy  
with whiskey and radio wires  
I was lost in a sea of Portland

the ocean beckoning my name  
Railli calling my name  
and my phone  
my sister clambering up a totem pole  
of cocktails

I was too busy  
to remember the fallen tree  
where we jumped into the river  
where we fell on love



no one buried the dead elk in winter & come spring we were climbing over its skeleton in the morning and tripping over its skeleton at night and clumsily I spilled red wine on your white blouse.

I searched your eyes for anger but you unbuttoned your shirt and dressed the antlers of the giant skeleton with it

*you said it looked like a Halloween prank*

*you asked me to take your picture by the crime scene*

& we stayed topless for days in the woods on the porch in the river you insisted on bringing wine into the hot spring and we took Communion in excess, the blood of Christ ran down our mouths and necks and into the water and when we kissed it tasted like wine but salty, like wine but honeyed and like wine we ran down the length of our bodies there in the mountains we howled  
we echoed into the night

I'm getting used to not drinking the water  
the sun never sets on the Spanish Empire  
we were lost in Madrid  
in the dark of early morning

thirsty and only a bottle of wine between us  
the lights of the city deciding  
who is going to bed  
and who is dragging themselves hungover  
to work

we skipped the formalities  
of hostels  
and slept beneath open skies  
or bridges  
you were shivering  
you lost your scarf by the river  
and I gave you my half of the blanket  
and my arms and chest and our feet were fidgeting

I was warm with the excitement of the planet

we shared secrets in the morning  
I was afraid to tell you about my father  
you related him to god  
    so cleanly  
we finished the leftover wine  
still afraid to drink the water

I hummed a melody to a song we couldn't remember  
and you went up the river, looking for your scarf in the trees





hark

the sun is rising  
or something

you are applauding  
a dog  
for taking a shit

in the grass.

*heading east of the Garden of Eden*

Humankind! You give me the highest highs  
in low mountain valleys, in creek-bed sleepy hollows  
where I'll light a campfire and cigarettes  
and watch all the embers dissolve at once into the night  
(and the Gitche Manitou knows there's no shame in that.)

I'm heading east of the beguiling garden  
east of the promises I've promised not to make  
to myself or anyone else  
east of the potential to mistake *sorry for please*  
because holy heaven's gatekeeper knows I'm a fuck-up  
but everyone is fucked up when the fat boils down, saying collec-  
tively,  
"There's no shame in that."

It's the springtime river-sun glimmering on her lips  
that makes this trip seem difficult  
this trip I've begged from celestial flesh-colored Christs  
God, to be torn so evenly  
I'm cropped halfway between intimacy with celestial *her*  
and intimacy with the road (and the splintering pickguard of my  
guitar)  
The endless highway speaks to me,  
"There's no shame in that."

Humankind! Far away from you, and in the hinterlands,  
I can sit against rotted oak and appreciate your  
idiosyncratic smiles and movements—  
speaking specifically now of *her*  
—but when the moment comes, and god! in this segue of sweater  
to skin

I find myself scraping bare, surrounded by a nicotine cloud, and  
found wanting Allah above! I've been weighed on the scales and  
found wanting  
and the Tao Te Ching tells me  
"There's no shame in that."

I'll be heading east soon  
wandering the lonely cobbled alleys of cities still clinging to their  
colonial roots  
the roots that shot through the ground and through hearts of men  
the sacrifices now seemingly in vain  
but when the tires leave rotted rubber against Spring's morning  
pavement  
we'll know nothing is in vain, and as your epiphanic, glimmering  
mind clings closely to mine  
(I pray through thick clouds of incense to the misunderstood  
Buddha)  
Ganesha tells me personally

"There's no shame in that."

we became delicate  
in the early morning  
in a basement  
I read the time like braille  
on your skin  
your gooseflesh told me  
it was hours until breakfast

the sun couldn't make it down  
the stairs  
like we did the night before  
slightly stumbling  
already exploring each other

pausing under the artwork  
hanging above us  
I kissed you against the wall  
we found each other  
wanting

this

the wet heat between us  
told me we both knew  
how to fill the hours



*gratitude  
for r.e. hale*

your smile deafens my depression  
a train car filled with azaleas and hollyhock  
the poetry in your simple greeting  
is the sun that breaks the fog  
and takes the chill out of early morning

before we began unpacking your things  
i stepped outside for a cigarette  
and thanked the god you believe in  
for your footsteps on the kitchen floor

my skin burned from the constant sun  
it seems like days since I've seen the moon  
night is such a welcome vagrant  
I gladly give what it asks of me  
reflection like the still waters of Lucky Peak  
fear like the distant howling at Daniel's plateau  
observation like that of Scott the Orphan  
and loneliness like the Tenth Street Station



the mildness of this absinthe  
is like the constellations  
in a way I can't explain

like the impression  
of the touch-down of the needle  
to your favorite record

the bass turned up  
a little too high, and the neighbors call in complaints  
my nose is full of licorice and herbs  
and my ears are full of this synthetic  
backbeat  
that keeps my concerns  
so far away from the telephone

you are a cancer  
and you tell me, a sagittarius,  
everything about me  
I wonder if you are cheating  
and writing these horoscopes  
based on our cumulative hours  
of conversation

I'm not one to say  
the constellations don't bring insight  
as I swirl my absinthe  
and watch the milky green  
cocktail's legs slip slowly down the side of the glass

the thing about wine  
is that  
it dyes your face a color

mine was getting too cold  
in the summer night  
I held it between my legs  
and made room for your hand

your thumb ran the eclipse  
of my glass  
your thumb  
rested on my leg and your eyes  
rested on my eyes

Nate and Kate sit with knitting needles  
and instruments and books  
on bright horrid beautiful couches  
oranges that previously didn't exist  
and yellows humankind had tried to forget

Nate and Kate pour me glass after glass  
of wine: it becomes bottle after bottle

I had a dream about my father  
last night  
he was telling me about The Lord  
again  
and  
I listened  
again

because of him  
not because of The Lord

Oliver was born  
without any muscles in his heart.  
The doctors said  
they were dispersed  
to the curiosity in his hands  
and the cooing in his lungs.

Oliver was born on the first of April  
in a rainforest, in a meadow  
on the Oregon coast, in the brine of the Pacific Ocean  
at the top of Multnomah Falls.  
His diet of salt air and sand dollars  
was a phenomenon given through a tiny yellow feeding tube.  
The doctors wanted to ask him what it felt like to fly  
for eighteen days

but none of us could fathom the breadth  
and depth  
of Oliver's words  
the only translation  
could be found in what we understood  
about living  
when we walked  
from Oliver's empty hospital bed.

Oliver was born  
with too many muscles in his heart.  
It was too strong  
for an operation  
we sat defenseless  
until the doctors had a solution.



“Just wait until he comes back down  
from flying so close to the moon;  
to the sun.  
He is trying to save Icarus  
and all we can do is wait.”

We sang songs to Oliver  
to the metronomic pumping and beep  
of the machines  
trying to measure his heartbeat  
to keep it alive  
they could not keep up  
but wouldn't keep trying.

When Oliver returned from the sun  
we sat and listened to his story  
but we were slow to understand  
his strange and powerful language.

He didn't save Icarus;  
the heat from the muscles in Oliver's heart  
was too much  
for those wings made  
of wax and feathers.

We opened a window  
our room in the hospital  
was sweltering.  
Oliver's heart, his muscles  
were becoming too much  
for his tiny corporeal frame.

Oliver's heartbeat was deafening  
we could no longer hear  
his words.

We watched  
on the nineteenth day of April  
as Oliver flew  
from his tiny bed, wire and tubes  
falling from his body  
Oliver, without wings,  
the nineteenth day of April  
the day his heartbeat left

and Icarus fell into the sea.





all the tiny birds  
hover by the feeder  
their language as beautiful and strange  
as ours  
we communicate with our bodies  
our tiny wings, our humongous feet  
we know we're bred to walk  
this earth  
flying comes later

when does the quiet start?  
I'm not speaking of that which  
we seek before sleep  
I mean the quiet that keeps our eyes  
unlocked

the nonsounds of holding hands  
the placidity of your eyes,  
the pause in conversation when I realize I have been rambling  
seeking to impress you with words  
and we both just watch each other's  
lips beginning to form  
and maybe that is when the quiet starts  
when we are both fumbling  
for something to say  
and wordless, we kiss

the downpour of quiet  
the thunderstorm of silence  
when you take my hand  
and hold it against your cheek

there is a song in your laughter  
I've studied jeketelling for decades  
for my one chance  
at drawing that melody  
from your lungs

nighttime comes like a lonely bird  
her wings are clipped but her song is heard  
wishing only to whisper to me  
it keeps me awake in the swollen hour  
I hear your voice and pick your flowers  
knowing just how long they'll keep



smother me  
see how long I can hold my breath  
I'll push you off  
when I'm ready

fill your promises  
with photographs and whiskey  
a touch on the shoulder when my skin itches  
for yours

kiss me in the morning  
get on top  
put my hand between your legs  
feed me your words  
with question mark digestifs  
I'm longing to tell you about my day

when I'm ready

forget my birthday  
on a Tuesday  
throw me a shower  
draw me a bath and climb in  
we'll see how long  
we can hold our breaths

*outside the nursing home*

i killed myself loving you  
i'm bumbling and bright-eyed  
bright like a stone wet with saliva



it is freezing rain  
and the carousel is lit up  
easy susan giving head  
behind the glowing  
roan void of genitalia  
incapable of arousal,  
carved from hard wood

god decided on the mechanics  
of anatomy  
without consultation  
(forgetting a handful  
of fleshy details)

god hates the flesh he created.

redact it, then—  
quit making excuses

all powerful?  
you selfish fucker

my fingers, hot between her legs  
she has both hands on my forearm  
pushing me deeper in,  
biting my earlobe

hard like carved wood,  
I'm thinking about  
the special kind of asshole  
god has to be.

we developed  
as newborns

our womb: your bedsheets

I am embryonic  
&  
we are starlings

I am ready to leave  
this city

darling, is this love?

I've become an uncle  
four times  
I am three times an uncle  
sometimes life writes equations  
with subtraction marks

with yellow feeding tubes  
and disposable face masks  
maybe if we'd breathed in  
more of his germs  
and given him ours

the suffering would have balanced  
a little

We have two sides:  
we carry our flesh on skeletons  
awkwardly at times, confidently at times  
with hubris, at times.  
We carry our souls on tall poles  
distant from the earth  
but not so far away  
that we lose sight.

*lose yrself to dance*

james brown caught me naked in our living room  
you away for work, me not-dancing  
the way white people do, clumsily moving arms  
and legs & leaving lipstick on my own collar  
my tongue craving your skin as I pull the sweat  
of summer afternoons through my hair  
and hold myself like an early morning erection



i want a body that doesn't need to eat or sleep  
maybe i don't want a body at all  
just a mouth for cigarettes and whiskey  
feet for dancing and hiking and boarding airplanes  
do i get a discount on airfare  
if i fit in the overhead compartment?

i'm over my heart  
i'm a donor: take my organs  
i'm sorry for how i treated them  
i was focusing on ephemera



you aren't thinking about dying  
we don't want to think about dying  
you are spinning round and round  
your hair in any still frame a halo  
your wings are hollow bones  
your tail feathers are the song  
spilling from your lips, your lisp  
is the thing that keeps me coming back

I've never heard words until now  
imagine your teeth clenched  
see polkadots of lens flare over your smile  
be careful when the smoke machine turns on

don't waste this drink  
whiskey isn't scarce  
but we treat it like love  
your lips smudged against the glass  
your grimace at the tannins  
your grimace reflects in the sweat  
forming in beads against your glass  
and on our shoulders and foreheads

we pedal our bikes to the top of the closest mountain  
and listen for the kick drum and breaking glasses  
somewhere else in the city

this isn't an exodus, this isn't an epiphany  
but the skyline looks much clearer  
from this place on your shoulders  
reaching for a single star

in the basement across the street  
Loren howled into the computer microphone  
unable to see the moon  
for concrete and carpet and clouds

I've been wearing this shirt for days  
sleeping naked in hot Bangkok nights  
and putting on the same clothes  
it is impossible to feel clean here  
it is impossible to care  
I'm always drinking coffee or beer  
my hands are never empty  
in this city punctuated with motorcycles  
and men trying to sell me suits  
there is a tailor for every tourist  
but I've grown accustomed to these sleeves  
rolled up and these buttons  
undone over my chest

drunk off bottles of Chang and roasted scorpion  
I'm imbibing on the smells of  
Thai food and the tap tap tapping  
of the man in his fedora  
fixing his bicycle so he can go on  
selling tiny porcelain elephants  
or Harley Davidson cigarette cases  
I'm constantly shaking my head  
I'm constantly offered wares

lady  
listen  
we are lingering  
loosely, a bookworm paradise  
untacking, unkempt  
and taking a chance  
but we lost our fortunes  
months ago

so what are we betting?  
what are we banking on?  
luck is  
a handful of coins  
on thumbs  
waiting

not a woman  
hailing a taxi

up past our bedtimes  
the only lights  
are stadium lights  
and you are waiting for a phone call  
drunk on whiskey  
and the love of the game

this they'll say,  
when we find you  
looking down from the windowsill  
watching the street awaken

this they'll say,  
we'll be watching  
up into your window  
letting our cigarettes burn  
then die

this you'll say,  
my tea's gone bitter  
as I watched you watching  
I let the leaves sit  
too long

this they'll say,  
we've work to do  
digging holes, raising beams  
in the cool of autumn

this you'll say,  
I've sage to pick  
and dry, but for this they'll stay  
watching  
as my kettle boils again



The pollution makes me want cigarettes  
like some kind of control over pollution.  
My music, in its quiet moments,  
is punctuated by Chinese radio  
played at a table of men chain-smoking  
and barely drinking.

I seek a different ratio.

I seek a world lost in the woods:  
not my father's war.  
A world where cellos are weapons  
and percussion, say, brush-rolled symbols,  
are battle cries.  
I seek a world where we settle our quarrels  
with jazz  
where a stand-up bass appears  
fierce like a German Panzer.  
I, II, III, IV:  
artillery means the patience  
to sit through a trumpet solo  
and defeat means  
standing up in the middle of it,  
saying loudly,  
"I need to use the bathroom."

The pollution of a smoky barroom  
is something I'd like to see  
at my wake.  
My bodyweight equal—  
pounds to litres  
—to the volume of whiskey consumed.

That is, I'd like to see my father drunk at my wake.

I seek a different ratio.

I dreamed I had a Vietnamese girlfriend  
we were on a train in east China  
where they sell cigarettes and baijiu  
on the snack cart—that much was pulled  
from real life.

Rescued from her oppressive father  
we were fleeing his chariots in a  
locomotive fury, powered by coal  
and even China isn't that antiquated:  
electricity here howls.

When we stopped in Nanjing, she asked  
to get off. Even in my dreaming state  
I have got to fight to keep things close.  
We wandered the streets of the South Capitol  
sipping baijiu until morning.

underneath that umbrella shell  
I can only see the red of your lips  
and whites of your teeth  
what color are your eyes?  
do you close them when you laugh?  
what kind of jewelry do you keep in your ears?

it isn't raining and your legs show  
you aren't afraid of the sun  
maybe it's bad luck to close your umbrella  
while I have these questions

are your eyes focused on your book?  
*the hotel eden* by ron carlson  
or are you watching the feet of passers-by  
as your fingerprints play with each other?  
are you nervous?

your feet sit calmly in your roman sandals  
maybe you are a secret agent  
or femme fatale  
maybe I'm your next mark  
would you use piano wire or poison?  
you seem like a digitalis kind of girl  
it's too hot for these foxgloves

do you go swimming at night?  
do you need people around for adventure?  
do you have days  
or even hours  
where you have nothing to do?  
if you close your eyes when you laugh  
do you keep them open while you are crying?

in the thirty seconds it takes me to order a beer  
you disappear  
and I am sure you are a spy  
lifted up by a silent helicopter  
still with that umbrella shielding your face  
you fire a poison dart from the ferrule

maybe I'll see you here again  
but you'll be in a burqa  
closing your eyes while you laugh

we, like the ghosts before us,  
struggle with alcohol & jealousy.

we don't dread the earth-labor  
the tilling or digging or planting.

we dread coming home  
grateful for bars,

when we should be grateful  
for lover's arms.







when we realized which hinges we hang from  
the slotted shade of the willow tree  
looked much better  
than our venetian blinds

a horse and buggy is fed  
by the grass it tramples  
there are still rivers where  
you can drink the water  
there are still stomachs  
that let it through

we haven't kissed in decades and your lips are a saccharine buildup. the mets are playing the phillies or the medicine is next to the fingernail clippers, we've lost all chances at talking and you spit chewed gum into the trash and I watch. the cold of winter makes me think of where we sweat and why bread grows mold and how on

*some days, eight whiskeys in*

I'll cut out the blue-white circles and spread butter. these days we cut out the blue-white flame and I'll be more stubborn than you:

I can stay cold for days. I can imagine Jimmy's death in the avalanche and know I'm not as cold as my numb hands tell me and I realize I am as cold as my hands tell me.

I've been coming  
to memories of you  
since you left this city

I've been going  
to work, the river, home  
swimming in the calendar  
dying on Tuesdays  
waking on Saturdays

borrowing cars for  
drives through the foothills  
demanding beauty  
from the sagebrush  
and lazy cattle

I stopped being sad  
on a Thursday  
for once  
I've been hugging  
everyone I can get my arms around

no one feels like you  
no one laughs like you

I quit my job  
on a Friday  
I wanted to feel in control of something

*what they say about*

we met on paper  
under a night filled with your blues  
we danced to notorious lightning  
we stayed dry

what they say about anticipation is true  
and what they say about riding your bike  
with whiskey in your bag  
into the mountains  
is true

I saw a coyote, an enemy of horses, creeping through the Sourdough Lodge parking lot where I am sleeping. I imagine these Christmas lights stay up all year long. Humans crave the symbolism of love and money that drive them: right now they are just keeping me from sleep. I'd hike into the mountains and set my tent but the coyote made is pretty clear that I should stay near the coffee and hot springs where I belong. I rarely believe I belong anywhere. And I crave to be more like that slinking half-wolf, returning every night to some burrow in the cold hills.

since I lost you in the mountains—  
scarred with autumn and a penchant for conifers  
—I've scoured every bar for us, inheriting whiskeys  
hoping to stumble into your laughter

we awoke in the mountains it was blue  
everywhere  
the snow was in our cabin  
the snow was preformed into balls  
inviting us to act eleven  
again  
we held ourselves back  
we held each other  
in this place without food and  
someone made coffee  
and left

beyond the first trees dogs bayed  
at a deer carcass, such a generous breed  
we found crackers  
we were without shoes  
so we played the ground was lava  
eleven again  
you pulled a single serving of strawberry freezer jam  
from behind my ear  
and I made your hesitancy  
disappear as we hopped from nightstand  
to countertop  
the snow was lava, our socks still dry

we took our game seriously and  
after exhausting every surface in our small cabin  
we climbed back onto the bed  
full of cracker crumbs and we made dinner  
of each other we ate our fill  
in the blue light we awoke  
in the mountains

there is trail  
through the foothills  
and I am convinced it turns and overlaps  
to spell your name in cursive

I need a helicopter to  
see you written out  
across the valley  
to take me to you

I will take the wrong turn twice  
to cross the t in your name



against the words in my ears  
and the keyboard chords  
I wanted to stop writing poetry  
                                  forever.

I wanted to listen to oracles  
so I climbed

my forehead and shoulders sweating  
my hands bruised and bloody

I forgot to take breaths along the way  
I waited until the top  
my hands were shaky and afraid of  
the wind  
of heights  
I'm afraid to tell you of my fear

a torch burns, a lighthouse  
looks as small as a candle  
and as meek, ready to snuff out

*don't hide: we've both watched snow settle  
against a winter window  
from both sides of the door*

*we've each settled for one side of the glass*

I jumped away from the edge  
I cringed at my fear  
not the distance

to the ground  
I've already conquered that once

flying is the only  
thing that keeps us  
from settling

your eyes can't compete  
with this neon

there is a hill by a field one half mile from here  
we could lay down  
climb  
somersault  
    in the wet grass  
stand like gods above the ants  
and when we're gone  
they'll say:

*weren't those curious deities  
almost palindromes  
just whispers  
Calixta made a greater first impression*

I wanted to climb away with you  
to hide in the stars

there is a baying in the distance  
and we haven't left the bar

don't walk down that alley alone

there is a grotesque crooning  
in the distance

with which we'll never  
    be able  
to compete

take my shoulders for granted  
take my arms and thighs for granted  
listen more carefully to the sounds our bodies make  
the creaking, the moaning, the reminding

that  
we don't have many mountains left in us

all we can do is dance when the room is quiet

you never asked for a bodyguard  
you asked for a kiss

I was left alone too long

believe me, the constant wanting is  
a broken circle  
    it is two half-circles  
the relief of a quiet room  
the struggle of your feet moving too slowly  
on the sidewalk

I never asked for a bodyguard

I found my answer in the film-soft red light  
of the bar bathroom  
watching myself in the sink mirror  
hands cupped of holy water, lips glistening from your gloss  
*you asked for a kiss*

&

I washed it from my face  
your lips are built from a dream  
your lips are a nightmare

we can't leave yet  
there are terrifying people in masks, their faces  
identical underneath  
with knives in their boots

our lives hidden in books

we joked about being invincible  
but

we aren't.





I went looking for black bears  
in the woods of the pacific coast  
the windblown trees seemed  
to be running from the ocean

I cinched my coat: the bushes wet with rain,  
the air with brine, my lips with whiskey  
when I finally stumbled upon your burrow

I smoked my half pack of cigarettes  
and laid down to hibernate  
in our empty bed

I met god by Williams Creek  
where it feeds the Applegate River  
there was a dead skunk  
under the waterfall

I said goodbye to god  
by the ocean—  
my mom sends me pictures of the sunsets  
over the water  
as proof that god  
hasn't said goodbye to me

there is something about god:  
it only exists in a fluid state



a giant crow plucked at crab legs  
its body comical in length  
surrounded by broken sand dollars  
and bits of trash  
I chuckled at its size  
until it broke into two  
and each gull  
flew away in opposite directions

I learned something about perspective

my parents live in the same house  
never close enough  
to be confused as one  
they get along well  
in separate rooms

when the rain falls in Boise  
it comes all at once  
this is how it rained  
for seven days  
when god realized he fucked up—  
and wanted a do-over

when it rains on the Oregon coast  
it lasts for decades,  
a lifetime without sun  
and yet people never fear  
the floodwaters

I watched a seagull limping  
and pause, leaning on her one good leg  
cockeyed like a drunk  
putting her weight on a bar top  
with every flutterflight  
I watched her wince with every landing  
her sisters gloated in their happy trot  
across the parking lot

a woman pulling oyster crackers from her pocket  
wasn't using her right arm  
tearing the tiny packages open  
with her teeth and the little hexagons  
exploding like fireworks onto the sand that blows  
endlessly from the beach up into the town of Pacific City  
is it optimism or dreadful foresight that names these places?

who sweeps the sand  
back to the driftwood and rotting crabshells?  
perhaps god, humans only use brooms  
to clean up their own trash  
so they can bag it up and truck it out  
to where they have decided trash should be

I watched a seagull limping  
fat on oyster crackers and sand  
instead of raw oysters and crab meat  
and I wanted so badly to be her  
instead of one of these sweeping humans

there is hostel at the bottom of the ocean  
where the sea creatures—  
the ones we don't know about  
—go to drink local beer  
and sharks aren't allowed  
it isn't because they won't swim that deep  
they are called sharks for a reason  
and there is a pool table  
in the hostel on the ocean floor.

a season of sidewalks dressed in dead leaves  
oh, what a rhythm when we walk side by side!  
we've made plans for when the lilacs bloom  
one winter away, but promises lose feet to frostbite.  
I hunger for your warm skin, nutrition for your fingertips,  
starving now on ocean-cold sand & oyster shells.

autumn has become a midsummer night's monologue—  
why, though, when we play such a crippling duet?









**II**

**KITTEN**

You left  
The door  
c r a c k e d o p e n  
On your way out

You filled the room  
With your TOO cold

I don't want to live in a world  
That allows you to feel  
The way you do

TOO

**III**

**KITTEN**

When do I become  
Someone

Worth interrogating?

Dig deep  
Into these locks

This scalp is aching  
For the strength of your fingertips

The fists that you form

In the tresses  
Of our fragrance

I

am

buried inside of you  
Your heated breathing-out  
And your chilling inhalation  
Against my chest

I crumble at the impression  
You've made  
The blood-blisters and teeth-marks

The explanations to

Who?

When I take off my shirt  
To jump in the river  
Where your sun accidentally called me

“dad”

Why we stayed together  
How we stayed together

We didn't.

## IV

## KITTEN

the hospital begs  
four  
bags of of of of  
LOST MINDS

(blood)

5.

we are writing a shitty haiku

IV ...  
(VII?)

in the dirt

in a windstorm

V.

**v**

**kitten**

I watch a kid  
Make a V with his

POINTERFINGER t o n g u e MIDDLEFINGER

At a woman  
Trying to buy a newspaper

Perhaps

She is just looking

IV the crossword  
(the way we used to look for)

5 ACROSS:

\_ E A T H

(with)

5 DOWN:

\_ I G N I T Y

we are only missing

I

I

I

(two?) letter(s)

[  
an IV, we are dehydrated  
& losing blood]

(D)

...

Desire beauty  
Don't be surprised when  
Don't be \_ \_ \_ \_ \_

A

L

I

VVV

E

(when)

I, II, III, IV, Very much  
have this habit  
of finishing the crossword  
IV ... (without) you.

**VI**

**KITTEN**

I'm clenching teeth  
Thinking  
6 (VI) is such a prettier number  
Than V (5)

5 (V)

Vulva  
Venus  
Vagina

I changed my mind—  
V is the prettiest number

I hope I can make it  
To SEVEN  
IVI  
VII

ali, kelly, kathy, Tay,

Lore is a crumbling ideology  
the idea  
that we need to keep any of these  
STORIES

store these ideas  
like crumpled receipts in your pocket

RECEIVE  
the love that is evolving around you

- (75 words)

**VII**

**(katherine)**

i made it

I II III MADE IT  
(IV V VI)

VII  
IVI

along the ivy  
crawling up your body  
your legs like eiffel towers  
your breasts  
like punctuation  
stopping everything  
IN ITS TRACTS

i track  
your words, lips, LIPS, lotion

(i surViVed)







**Seattle, Washington & Yachats, Oregon**

It's the ephemera that drew my attention  
How a gin & tonic looks pale turquoise  
In evening light—  
A perfect marriage of  
The concomitant blue bulb at the strike of a sulphur match and  
The flash of green on the horizon  
As the sun sets over the Pacific

**Silver City, Idaho or Bear Valley Springs, California**

I can spend hours hand feeding a horse  
Watching her strong jaw  
As I massage her neck  
Those muscles  
Her lips inspect the palm of my hand  
For more apple, celery, green beans  
The sound of her giant teeth chomping baby carrots  
Could put me to sleep  
The breath from her nostrils  
Is sibling to the comfort of a hot spring in winter

It wasn't until years later that I learned  
Some suckling horses are called  
Green beans

**Trail Creek, Idaho**

It wasn't until years later that I could look at a hot spring  
Without filling up on a sense of loss  
(or)  
WHISKEY

I'm saving all my broccoli stalks and trimmings of asparagus  
For the horses  
I'm dirtying dishes just to have something to wash  
A few dashes of tabasco

I'm not eating much these days

I will wash my glass  
Between each drink  
I'll wash my glass a dozen times a night  
When my hands are soapy and wet  
At least  
They are occupied with an empty glass

This is why I'll never quit smoking  
This is why I'll wash down crumbs of tobacco  
(stuck to my lips like burrs on horsehide)  
With one more glass of whiskey.  
Rinse.  
Repeat.

### **Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho**

IT IS A SEASON OF FLASHBACKS

A real blockbuster

It is a season of mornings

of ghosts

Whispering words like

LUPINE

&

SALMONBERRIES

These ghosts are terrible

At keeping their voices down

Yelling words like **Denver, Colorado** & tequila & a recurring  
presence in your sex dreams years before we undressed together  
&

## EPHEMERAL

### **The Riverbank at Municipal Park**

A flower crown, public nudity wet with baby oil  
And a tartness on the tongue of  
A dead rat ANOTHER DEAD RAT  
Burial at sea: an old cigar box and two half-dollars  
For the ferryman

First Intermission:

### **Shanghai, China**

I'm not a dancer until I've had too much to drink and  
I'm not a drinker until I'm listening intently to the sound  
of the wine glass clinking against your ring and I want  
to hold your hand again from across the ocean we are  
separated only by water & as we know I am no swimmer  
you cannot roll cigarettes while swimming you cannot  
light cigarettes while swimming I will walk to you  
on the water and Jesus oh what is wine without water  
oh Jesus turn this sea to Malbec and let us swim to the  
middle of the pacific our skin dyed plum purple our hands fight-  
ing  
our fingers interlocking our sea-legs naked and rejoicing  
in the warmth of waking up twisted in sheets

Which reminds me  
of a poem I wrote  
on the custom stationary  
at the Modern Hotel:  
**(Boise, Idaho)**

Cleaning up the mess

Of our sex  
Can last all day

Not so much cleaning  
But clinging  
To sheets wet with our sweat

We've been ignoring alarms  
For hours  
Ours is an alarming resolve

To stay in bed.

Which brings us back to  
**THESE HORSES: Greenville, Maine**  
Ice so thick you can drive a truck  
Across the lake  
A penchant for adventure  
That can only be borne  
From the boredom of a small town  
We total snowmobiles on fence posts  
Like Don Quixote riding Rocinante  
Tilting at windmills  
The hooves of horses  
Never need a parking spot  
They never fumble for quarters  
Outside your apartment downtown

I envy them:  
They know of neither love nor money

SWALLOW YOUR TONGUE, she says  
Put that bit in your mouth.  
I feel like I haven't spoken for days  
I won't suffer the limbo of your friendship  
I will put the bit into my mouth.

## **Thailand**

Our hips will get acquainted  
Our shoulders, old friends  
On Halloween night we eat scorpion and grasshopper  
Off wooden skewers. We  
dress up and  
Undress

I'll find your tattoos  
With my hands  
In the bedsheet dawn  
I've left mine  
Out in the open  
I'm inclined to surrender  
My forearms to you

There is a shrine on the rooftop of this hostel  
Glittering, gilded  
Sun-bleached and peeling  
There is a shrine to you

In the absence

Of whiskey on my lips

(I'll never make that mistake again.)

## **AND THIS**

Is where it gets serious

### **Boise, Idaho**

You loved me until I fell for you  
This is what I love so much about these goddamn horses  
They recognize value  
But aren't crippled by economy

They treasure their foals: colt and filly  
But never have to suffer love

Money and love were made by men  
Not God.  
Revealed by language  
Not Science.  
Practiced by humans  
Not  
These horses.

### **Boise, Idaho**

There is purple hidden in your tresses  
Indistinguishable to someone  
Who hasn't had their fingers  
Tangled in your hair  
While you beg me to pull it  
While you yell  
"COME HARD!"  
And ask me as we drift off to sleep  
And again  
In the early morning  
"Did you come hard enough?"

We came, and you left hard enough.

### **Bay City, Oregon & Chengdu, China**

We look past these summer outfits  
And into our histories: I am in China again  
Standing on the overpass where I named stars  
Cradling baijiu with pressed lips

Teach me more about memory  
Slather your philosophies on me like hot wax

I writhe, you bind my hands with promises  
As you tiptoe backward from the room

Second Intermission:

**Bonneville, Idaho**

no one buried the dead elk in winter & come spring we were  
climbing  
over its skeleton in the morning and tripping over its skeleton  
at night and clumsily I spilled red wine on your white blouse.  
I searched your eyes for anger but you unbuttoned your shirt  
and dressed the antlers of the giant skeleton with it

you said it looked like a Halloween prank

you asked me to take your picture by the crime scene

we stayed topless for days in the woods on the porch in the river  
you insisted on bringing wine into the hotspring and we took  
Communion in excess, the blood of Christ ran down our mouths  
and necks and into the water and when we kissed it tasted like  
wine

but salty, like wine but honeyed and like wine we ran down the  
length  
of our bodies there in the mountains we howled

the night we echoed into

AND NOW

I am in the state I was born  
But never lived

**Salinas, California**

Named for the salt marshes  
I steal a stalk of Brussels sprouts

From Lemonade Springs Farm

Whose sign reads:

EGGS

PRODUCE

MEAT

Eggs produce many things:

You. Me. Hollandaise. Salmonella.

Three nieces. One dead nephew.

I cook these tiny cabbages over stolen wood &

fall asleep watching a crow dig

Insects out of the earth

Thinking about the morning I woke up

With blood in my pubic hair

And a sigh of relief

I woke you up, saying,

We don't need that pregnancy test

But I am still going to the store

For avocados

Do you need anything?

In **Bear Valley Springs, California**

I am feeding horses

And asking them questions

As though we are on a date

Do you have a favorite song

Or

Time of day

Or

Do you believe in ghosts?

Have you ever been pregnant?

Tonight is playing out like a Leonard Cohen album or



Reading like the label of an overpriced bottle of wine  
soft and melancholic  
with notes of optimism and empathy

### In **The Middle Of Nowhere, Ohio**

I catch fireflies in a mason jar  
To light our way back to the motor home.

### In **Boston** I find

Horses punished, yoked to carts of tourists  
In Boston I am hit in the face  
With a bottle of whiskey  
For looking too Irish  
The swelling and the irony is killing me

### In **New York** I see no horses

But I think of all the poets  
Yoked to the hearts of tourists  
I smell money and love  
Entwined at Hunts Point:

The spectacle of red light districts  
That mash-up of bones and sex  
The tangibility of money and love,  
Humankind's fiercest creations

I climb into the bed of my RV  
Unable to sleep.

### **Your Bedroom, Boise Idaho**

I miss the concurrence  
Of waking beside you  
The glow of your teeth marks

In the hot skin of my chest  
As the sun  
Casts its soft light  
Through your slotted blinds

I miss the smell  
Of your wet  
In my pubic hair

I unzip to pee  
At work

Like Brautigan's surprise  
On the toilet bowl

I become aroused  
In the cold bathroom  
Begging my memories  
For a hint  
A scent  
Of what dissolved  
In the backwash of your juices  
Flooding my mouth

I am drowning

I use your underwear to wipe my lips clean  
I use my tongue  
Against your lips & clitoris  
To whet my lips again

We are at war

## Yosemite National Park

I watch Death creep through  
The parking lot of the Cedar Creek Lodge  
Sitting outside my room:  
The rotary dial cord stretched taut  
To the door  
So I can smoke and listen to that fruitless ringing  
Simultaneously

These Christmas lights must stay up all year long  
The fucking people here—  
John Muir is rolling over in his grave.  
Humans crave the  
Ghosts & illusion  
Of adventure  
But fall asleep fat with love and money.

Death sees me and nods.  
We make an agreement:  
"We'll both stay where we belong."  
I rarely believe I belong anywhere.

"I'm sorry!" I yell.  
They turn their head and nod again, exhaling.  
Your scent wafts across the parking lot  
There is a hint of blood in the air  
Different from the rumination of carrots and apples  
In the hot breath of these horses  
But with a familiar sweetness

"You belong in the pasture," Death rasps.  
I nod, they disappear into the fog  
And I dial the number again.  
Someone on the other end of the line  
Picks up.





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\*dates reflect when the files were last edited on Jam's personal documents, not necessarily when the poems were composed





## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jam Hale (Benjamin Allen Hale) was born in rural California in the winter of 1987 to a pastor and a homeschool teacher. After moving around, Jam spent most of their adult life in Boise, Idaho cultivating many friendships working as a coffee barista and bartender downtown, reading poems and stories at local literary events such as Death Rattle Writers Festival, Storyfort at Treefort Music Fest, and theBOISEAN. A tree on the bank of the Boise River is dedicated as a place for friends to gather and remember the joy and poetry that Jam brought into so many lives.

