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### Alone, Now

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# Alone, Now

--

Alexandra Sophia Terlesky

## Introduction

If I have learned anything from writing this book, it would be, quite simply, the fierce inevitability of change. And with that, the humbling reality that no one is ever fully prepared for it.

About a year ago, around this time, the email that goes out to all us senior Creative Writing majors to remind us that, yes, we do actually have to begin thinking about our projects and, yes, we will actually have to start writing, arrived in my mailbox. I was sitting at an unbalanced table in the little café attached to my school in Aix-en-Provence, France. After re-reading the email a couple of times, I sat back in my chair. I most certainly did not know how it would happen, but in that moment, I knew that a year later I would have finished (or nearly so) a collection of poems of my own and would be walking across the stage at my graduation within the next few weeks.

Well, I was wrong in the one regard, the regard I thought totally unquestionable until only a few months ago. Before I continue: I don't mean for this 'Introduction' to become another facet to express how I feel about life reconstructed around COVID-19. Everyone has lost to this virus; a graduation ceremony is not a home, is not a livelihood, is not a relative or a friend. I bring this up more so because it was only one of the changes during this past year that I was (you guessed it) completely unprepared for.

To start from the beginning...

This project was originally intended for proving to the world that my passion for horses and riding was not to be written off as a pervasive, childhood obsession. Looking back, I see within myself a drive almost like anger pushing my fingers across the keyboard into the explanation I emailed back within an hour of receiving that first email. But, evidently, having started this paragraph with a word like 'originally,' you know that this is not where my project ended up. And, if horses have taught me anything in life, it's that reality hardly ever shapes up into what you want it to be. You expect one thing, and get something else entirely. More often than not, it turns out to be something you hadn't even thought would happen.

The desire to share something with the world that has inspired me for so much of my life was, I now realize, only the initial step in writing this book. The first poems came forth easily. I wrote about the early days of learning how to ride, moving to the incredibly formative years with my high school trainer, and then ending with the death of my mare, Lula. I was stubborn, unwavering; people who did not recognize the beauty of this sport would see it through my words. I would show them.

But then, other things started emerging, other parts of my life that I hadn't even considered looking at. The first semester of my junior year was, to say the least, a confusing time. Without going into too much detail (mostly out of selfishness, I want the details for myself), I fell in love with someone I wasn't expecting to. I went abroad during my second semester, but throughout the time I was in France and then throughout that following summer, I

thought about our reunion in the fall with an eagerness I couldn't remember ever having felt. At the same time, I was also going through the disorienting experience one has while living abroad, filled with frustrations and self-doubt, and, afterwards, the process of returning home. The third part of my book deals with the pressures and anxieties I had during this period.

Fall came, and with that, the person I had been counting down the days for. When we saw each other again, it felt like, as Anne Carson wrote in *Autobiography of Red*, "the kingdoms of [my] life all shifted down a few notches." And what did I do? Refuse to write about it. Stick to the original plan, I told myself. Horses, that's your story to tell. And so, I forced out clunky poem after clunky poem about my passion for riding from a part of myself now in the shadows of something else entirely. Until finally, one day, I started writing about it. About the girl I had left behind and returned to. And the poems came forth easily. This is the fourth part of my book.

The second part of the book deals with the part of me that could never be *completely* overshadowed: horses. The creatures I can't live without, for reasons I will never exactly be able to articulate in words, despite my many efforts. Horses have shaped me in more ways than I know, and run forth from my sketchbook, my memories, and my dreams at times when I'm least expecting them. They inspire me, remind me what life has the potential of being. If I am lost, I look to them. They are more than just a childhood fascination; for me, at least, they arrive whenever I need them the most. And they have yet to fail me.

Childhood arrives in the first part of this book. I'm blessed to be one of the people who looks back on childhood fondly, and categorizes it as an innocent time that provided me with hope and joy. Though I'm sure there were growing pains I've since blocked out, moments of ugliness that I've forgotten, and times of hardship that have faded from my mind, I present my memories in the light I remember them in. They remind me of a time when I didn't look towards the mountains in the distance with longing.

Could I have ever predicted that life would take me here, home but totally uprooted? No. I'm dealing with that now, and in the final section of my poems. Having lived for a little while in what we could label as 'interesting times,' I'll admit that I don't particularly enjoy it. But what I do enjoy is words and how they can be used to connect us. If we take the time to see beauty in the works of other poets, writers, and artists alike, we involve ourselves. We remind ourselves that we are not alone. Yes, change is inevitable, but we are all going through it.

Now... shall we? Here is my collection of poems about moments that have surprised me, moments that have taught me, moments that have softened me. Enjoy.

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“Then repeat to yourself the most comforting of all words: ‘This too shall pass.’”

-- *Ann Landers*

I



*Below the horizon*

Night mixes all colors together  
into a dark blue, knowing life begins  
with absence. In the quiet,  
Time whispers itself into existence  
with Past and Future as siblings would,  
painting the world to sleep and,  
each morning, erasing everything  
back into existence.

*Orbits*

A sun and a moon. One  
that burns with the task  
of growing up first, and the other  
that guides with the subtle glow  
of being younger. My sister  
outside with me searching  
for satellites. They glide across the cold,  
dim but steady. I point out  
each one to her, and she looks,  
kinetic, at every one. I'm looking  
for the next movement when I hear  
    There! There!  
Beside me, my sister's face;  
a beam of light.

*Hide and seek*

Each night, the moon gets to choose  
how brightly she shines  
while she sucks the water and salt  
to mix together  
across dry sand. Higher and higher  
does she pull the waves  
until they realize  
they could never reach the one  
who teases us on a summer night,  
leaving just enough light  
on the branches to see them,  
gleaming, as they shift.

*Intruder*

I almost wanted to be a bird  
until a goldfinch flew into the window  
behind the dining room table  
and I saw it twitch and soften  
into the brick patio.

After that, I wasn't so sure.  
This morning, a coyote padded across our lawn  
like a curious child, unafraid.  
Mom announced him and told us  
we couldn't let the cat out.

When I headed downstairs  
to the barn, I thought I saw his eyes from the bushes.  
Make yourself as big as possible,  
be loud and assertive is what Dad  
told us to do if we ever ran into one.

They weren't his eyes, though,  
just light hitting the dew. He must've slipped out  
the gate into the pasture behind the barn.  
It's filled with mustard flowers  
that grow taller after each rain.

*Ghosts*

Our house came with a barn,  
but we never got any horses.  
I always ask if we can get some,  
if only to fill the empty space.

*Cage*

Each spring,  
    drinking nectar from the clouds,

the land becomes green as it pushes the hollow bones  
of tall grasses below  
    the mustard seed  
which brushes against itself fighting for room above  
    holes so numerous they will never be filled

    even if we caught all the rabbits,  
like when Dad and I caught one and it threw itself  
    against the metal grid as we loaded it into the car

and took it to the fields  
    right outside our neighborhood  
and even walked the trap out into the middle  
where the stalks grow so tall that no hawk

could end freedom

    with talons sinking into a lung  
and the rabbit ran out the minute we stepped back  
only to speed across the dirt and back into our neighborhood

    where it hopped  
through the syrupy green lawn of a house  
    just inside the chain-link fence

    separating wilderness from the road.

*Throughout this garden*

I would like to hold  
a small bird in my hands.

It would be purple  
with a song like amber,

thick syrup notes.  
Why is the color of envy green?

Green is growth, birth,  
moving forward.

Gold is sticky like jealousy  
over something

of less importance  
than a blooming flower.

*For some reason, we were always orphans*

It's a miracle my cousins and I  
ever survived, chronic bare feet  
clambering everywhere labeled  
with a parent's warning. Rusty metal  
didn't look like Tetanus, and danger

didn't look familiar to us.  
Unless we were running away  
from Bad Men circling above us  
in helicopters. Whenever we heard one,

one of us would cry out  
and we'd run down the hill  
held together by deteriorating steel mesh,  
desperate to escape the clutches of Evil,  
never looking down at the ground.



*Piper*

On my ninth birthday, our eucalyptus out front  
fell across the road. Only days before,  
my cousin and I had climbed up into its leaves  
where a perfect perch engulfed us from the world.  
She talked about Spanish, and how  
she could hold a conversation with the gardener below  
if she really wanted to.

Piper grew up faster than any of us.  
Maybe it was the divorce that did it,

or maybe she knew it was the only way  
she could run after adventures all over any continent  
other than this one.

During our last phone call,  
she was loving India.  
I know she would've stayed nestled in the shadows of a Sagon tree  
if the world hadn't gotten the wind knocked out of it  
and sent everyone home.

*Summer*

California is known for its big, red trees,  
but the image of sunlight flickering through  
the branches of our pepper trees' brand new  
leaves hanging heavy with their pinkish beads  
has always seemed more like home to me.  
So, while walking next to her, I again continue:

Yes, California is known for its big, red trees,  
yet I promise you, love, that once you've seen  
a sunset behind branches pushed up softly into  
the air, barely stirring the peppercorn seeds, you  
will understand why I don't completely agree  
with California being known for its big, red trees.

II

*Allow*

Wax can't drip without a flame,  
and she will still grow older  
even as I stay the same.

Wild horses in her veins  
now make it hard to hold her:  
wax can't drip without a flame

and even if the fire's tame  
I cannot control her  
even as I stay the same.

Why can't she just remain  
right up here on my shoulders?  
Wax can't drip without a flame,

and the horses call her name  
and they will not run slower,  
even as I stay the same.

So now, as she grabs their mane,  
I know my time is over;  
wax can't drip without a flame,  
even as I stay the same.

### *Counting strides*

Debbie had the standards in the jump ring repainted since I left. The paint tatters in certain places and I slowly recognize them.

Jumping the brighter colors doesn't feel any different. My heels stay down and I count my strides so I don't forget to breathe.

When I had jump lessons every Wednesday, Debbie always had to tell me to look forward. She still says, "Don't look at the ground

or that's where you'll end up." I'm not riding Lula anymore, but landing after a jump on any horse feels like a jolt against time.

*Angel*

Angel had one eye  
and limped eight days  
out of seven.

But when you were on her right side  
and couldn't see the hollow  
where her left eye should've been,  
it wasn't so hard  
to imagine that you were going  
out to win the Grand Prix.

Eventually, a girl in the neighborhood  
bought Angel. Angel was joined  
shortly after by  
a little buckskin  
who could jump much higher  
and who was much younger.

I left this barn  
before Angel died, but  
I sometimes wonder whether  
there was a vet who slipped  
a silver needle into Angel's neck,  
like they did for Lula,  
or if Angel laid down one day  
on her left side  
and closed her final eye.

*Tempo*

Everything  
has a beat.  
Music, rain.  
A canter  
goes like this:  
1 23, 1 23, 1 23...  
almost like  
a heart does.

*Listen*

The skin closest  
to the fetlock  
is thin as a  
butterfly's wing.

When the vet showed  
me the x-rays,  
there was no hint  
of any flesh

at all. Just a  
glowing abscess  
in each front hoof.  
A shift in breath.

Try to hand-walk  
her for fifteen  
minutes a day.

Any questions?

--

Do you hear them?  
my mom asked me  
as I ran out  
to the driveway

and knew I had  
been right. Coming  
into view, two,  
overlapping.

The sound of horse-  
shoes against the  
road carries like  
a monarch's grace.



*El Sueño*

When I take horses out to the cross-ties,  
the chains feel cold and hard in my hands.

The other ties' clamps twinkle like stars  
as they land against their metal posts,

a constellation of *clinks*.  
Above the western tip of the Big Dipper's ladle

flickers the North Star;  
I can't see it right now, during the day,

though it could guide me through the dark  
like a horse's nicker.

*Poetry*

Words thrown across the arena:  
More leg, less seat, soft elbows!

Upon falling into place,  
(There you go, that's it, perfection!)

two bodies combining.

*Reminders*

Leather  
rubbing  
between  
fingers  
will give  
them bumps  
right where  
the reins  
are held.

I have  
some of  
my own.  
Look; see  
each top  
knuckle  
on my  
two ring  
fingers?

The side  
closest  
to my  
pinkies  
never  
will be  
unmarked.

*Vantage Point*

Right now: a frame. On the left, a type of pine.  
The branches look as if they dried wrong,  
all curled up into themselves. One twists headlong  
into the leaves on the right like twine,

and trunks stick up through each leafy pileus  
like needles. The landscape just beyond  
where I am, with clouds merging, murmurs along  
behind the frame, a sort of stillness

in the ribbon of trees lining the bottom.  
There's a church steeple, too, splitting up  
from the band of green, insisting and abrupt.  
I don't go to church (well, not often)

since I learned unleavened bread is someone's flesh.  
Instead, I taste the blood on my tongue  
when Deb yells put your heels down, use your lungs  
and keep your head up. But, nonetheless,

just moments ago: the dressage arena.  
To the left, the leaves on three small oaks  
were brushed by a slight breeze. The sun broke  
across the ground, streaming beneath a

horizon made of clouds. In the dimming light,  
Lula and I stepping, dancing, to the right.

*To the woman who carved me:*

For all the things you told me I couldn't do,  
I thank you now, I'm no longer scared of you.

*Unspoken*

You're not listening to me,  
I say,  
why won't you listen to me?

If I at first do not understand,  
replied the mare,  
it is you who must rephrase the question.

*Collic*

Lula in the back of her stall,  
sweating.  
As she pawed the shavings,  
discomfort clouding her eyes,  
Deb came over.  
I didn't look at her,  
I didn't have to.  
The show vet did what he could,  
and we went home.

*Moving on*

It wasn't as if  
I didn't want comfort  
when Lula died,  
but I most certainly did not  
want cupcakes.

Those sticky artifacts,  
a 1 and an 8  
stuck in the middle two.  
I gave half to a friend.

When I woke up one morning,  
two years later,  
    I knew  
to call losing a horse  
a severing of hemispheres,  
a split in consciousness.



*Coffins*

When I left, Debbie gave me a tin box shaped like a heart. Inside, there were pieces of each horses' mane braided together.

So you don't forget us.

On my drive back home, I remembered a phrase she told us riders before one cross-country course: Now if you feel them back off,

Just spur 'em through the heart.

### III

*Tailwinds*

Flying up to where weather is made  
has the reverse effect  
of using a magnifying glass.  
When all the roads below

become thin as veins, I take out  
my earphones. Behind me,  
I hear teenage voices traveling  
the length of the plane.

How does gossip about a “James”  
make me feel this old? Why?  
The stories about another “him”  
carried across the halls

of my high school; with every second,  
the elevation grows  
and distance moves faster than the clouds.  
Gold on the horizon.

*Impressionism*

A train of thought here,  
a train of thought there,  
follow my process along each canvas.  
When I like a stroke of color,  
the piece untangles.

Leaning in with fingertips;  
can I feel myself in these blues?

John tells us  
the best artwork comes  
from leaving yourself behind.

*Blank*

I see only white  
as I try to describe a tree.  
What glory  
comes from burning?  
I'm not sure yet, but I know  
to feed the flame

and not try to hide from it.

*Les jumelles*

On one of the last days in March,  
our class went on a walk to see  
the overlooked pieces  
of our jigsaw city.

At 11h00

in the doorway of Saint Sauveur,  
the lady with swollen cheeks  
framed by her black shawl  
extended a cup in both her hands  
and said,

S'il vous plait, madame

or

monsieur

as we listened to John's lecture  
about the twin spirals.

--

The first is slightly askew;  
carefully look to see  
the gentle tip  
from curve to curve.

The second, to the right, is longer,  
flatter. I can't understand  
exactly why I don't like this one.

John made us guess  
which was the original.

The left, I said.

Yes, sometime between 1655 and 1678  
an architect by the name of Pavillon  
carved these sentential spirals  
at each side of every window sill.

After the Revolution, a renovation was ordered  
for spirals too damaged to remain untouched.

Who sees the difference?

How many saw the difference?

I look at the renovated twin  
and then at the mold on the left.

Oh, the considered, focused edges  
of a first born...

*Here*

I don't want to go to Budapest,  
no, not this week, no, not next.  
I don't want to go to Budapest,  
no really, I'd rather get some rest.

I want to stay right here,  
what could I say to make this more clear?  
Yes, really, I want to stay right here,  
so please go on without me, dear.

But if I had to choose a place to go,  
you'd find me in the studio.  
Because of all the places that I'll go,  
it's where I always feel at home.

*Escaping Seminar*

Watching seconds blow by in  
the pollen leaking from the trees,

I run and catch up with the breeze.



*Promises aren't phone calls*

Tie around my wrist  
a bracelet and call it friendship.  
I wish I wasn't worried,  
    but we talk less  
    and I forget to call.  
Tell me what happens  
    when the world restarts  
    us miles apart.

*Token*

If I ever give up on you,  
throw the night I crumbled into your arms  
and you told me

I will always be there for you  
into my hands. Tell me to dig its grave  
myself.

If you ever give up on me, well...  
accept this empty sketchbook  
for when the pages of your other one fill up  
with four-leaf clovers;

I've never seen anyone find them like you do.

*If I asked*

Do you believe in birdsong,  
or does your mother  
    drive you mad?  
Does the rain wash away the tears  
you thought  
    you'd never have?  
When I dream,

    it's of an orchard  
    filled with oranges.  
Come closer;  
    do you hear the bees  
burying their secrets  
    in the blooms?  
    I must tread lightly  
    around the caterpillars,  
for when I dance,

it's only to sing.  
    When I sing,  
I don't want the world  
    to listen, but do you want to know  
a thing about my dream?  
    Where the wind  
    swept up a seed  
and carried it  
to a far off land  
    where I buried myself  
in the dirt.

*Subconscious*

When I approached him,  
I knew he was there to kill me.  
So I asked him:

Are you going to kill me?

Lips spreading apart like sleepy eyelids,  
curling up to reveal his teeth.

Yes.

I swung a bat of nails and glass  
and hit him on the side of the head.  
His skin was made of diamonds.  
I turned  
and ran.

--

When she approached me,  
she could sense my hunger. I knew  
what she meant was:

I've walked into your teeth.

Panic seeping through her body  
like food coloring crawls through water.

Yes.

It's difficult to scratch a fragment,  
and my bones grew stronger with her fear.  
But please, my dear,  
run  
all you'd like.

*Sabotage*

Within myself,  
sharp words cut my veins.  
The blood runs thick and strong.  
Before long,  
the shards seem to pulse  
on their own.

Quiet.

There are pieces  
of glass in my throat.

*Los Angeles*

My sister called me last night,  
trembling. I listened and cradled her  
with my voice. This morning, I wish I told her

that a rose escapes from its bud  
only to grow ever more radiant, and 'sublime'  
is defined by some sort of vastness.

I wish I told her that if the scale weighed  
her kindness against her photographs, which  
effortlessly pose mountains against the sky,  
the Earth would shake  
when she woke each morning,

stretching her arms above a body  
I worry might shatter  
if embraced too tightly.

*Women*

Running wolves out for blood.  
They smell it. Personification  
doesn't understand the ways stars alight  
on their fur; it's different  
than the way it glitters on their fangs.  
There is my reflection in the moon:  
I call to it.

IV



*Belonging*

My dinner consisted of dark chocolate  
and someone else becoming an orphan.  
Then “Another One Bites the Dust” came on,  
soft in the background.

Before I could explain my convulsion,  
the room grew quiet enough for my friend  
to hear the chorus, too. If laughter can’t  
belong to sadness,

than neither can we.

*Wearing new Seraphin's*

As we walked  
down the stairs,

she suddenly staggered  
into my waist  
after missing a step.

Three hours later  
and my ribs  
still feel her

arms wrapped only  
seconds around me.

*Before*

Silence, but suddenly  
a drum beating within my body

an echo  
of her voice.

*Hidden from the light*

If not a heartbeat,  
a rhythm that melts the bones  
when pressed against skin.

*Autumnal*

We're sitting beneath the leaves  
as kisses of honey sunlight  
drip across our blanket.  
Next to me, her breathing  
lifts into the branches and rests  
against the bark. Pages  
of her readings break  
from one another in the breeze.  
Her hair brushes my arm. I look down;  
asleep, her book as a makeshift pillow.

*Sketch*

She asked me to draw her.

    You won't like it,

I argue.

    Don't show me, then.

*Marginal*

Below the printed words, in pencil:

I always see you writing,  
and I wonder who it's for.

A speculation:

You?

Yes, for myself

is folded up paragraphs of her.

*I should go*

When my voice lifts,  
I'm not saying  
what I'm really thinking.  
Pitch emphasizes thoughts  
like parentheses.

(Tell me to stay.)



*Fusion*

She crawled into bed beside me, barely getting down into the sheets before I wrapped my arms around her.

You ok?

Yeah.

In the documentary I chose, a woman in grey began explaining black holes. Intense enough to rip through the fabric of space, a black hole is gravity laying invisible in its own theory.

Black holes entirely consume stars larger than our sun. Their destruction proves more about them than their existence.

Let's go to bed.

Ok.

One scientist showed a galaxy's spiral without a black hole at its center. The cluster flung itself apart, stars pulled into the heaviest objects around them where they sank into orbits like marbles.

Two Decembers ago, we danced in the rain. Her eyes grabbed mine, but I started shivering. She pulled me under her arm.

You ok?

Yes.

If two black holes come close enough together, they merge. Energy whips out across the universe. Three billion light years away, Hanford's lab records a collision's chirp by accident.

*As she laid*

Against my chest, her breathing  
as soft as a hummingbird is light

enough

to drown out any darkness  
with her wings incessantly beating.

*2:04 am*

Her information,  
in the form of skin,  
extending further  
than my fingertips.

If tracing her lips  
reminds me to breathe,  
I'm on the verge of  
a sort of purging.

*Innocent*

My heart has settled with her,

for with her

I am

stained feet from the ink of olives

and my desire

comes forth

within the belly of my bones,

longing oozing like

sins do.

*Repeat*

My lover is gentle with my spirit.  
She doesn't intend to break it,  
but last night  
she asked about the future like he once did  
after explaining how guitar  
kept tearing his fingers apart.

My lover is gentle, so I told her  
what I needed her to hear:  
my voice,  
as loud as autumn and as sure as spring,  
over a song he once called ours,  
until her face softens like the dawn.

*Picnic*

My hands are muddy from handstands,  
and your feet are grass-stained from soccer.

As I lean closer to you on the blanket,  
you dig your toes into the cool green.

If I had known the end would come so soon,  
I would grab the ball from under your arm

and sprint away until you caught me,  
bringing me to the ground, victorious, when you did.

V

*Unprepared*

And suddenly, the space between us  
now exists in a measurement of six.



*Warm*

My match lights  
the untouched wick;

her yellow jacket  
afame beside the pillar  
in the airport. Past security,  
my throat catches and  
scorches itself.

Words pressed into page  
after page, the wick crumbling;

she didn't stop smiling  
even as I dropped my hand  
and forced myself  
into the terminal, my cheeks  
turning to ash.

*Alone, now*

I can hear the plane, a bursting sound,  
carrying itself across the sky.  
It's a believable sound, almost unquestionable,  
until I remember

stuffing my pillows on top of what I crammed into cardboard boxes  
to prevent anything from breaking in transport  
while my phone rings  
and I pick up to Mom's voice  
on the other end, and when I hang up  
I explain  
that I can't stay the extra week, I have to go home.

You're always welcome.

--

Once the plane landed  
and I walked through airless hallways the morning after  
I was in her arms,  
strangers stared because they knew  
I wouldn't see them.

Only looking straight ahead at the carousel and now carrying  
my two suitcases and loaded duffel  
to curbside-pickup,  
where my dad pulls around and gathers me and all my baggage  
into the truck,  
after which he wipes down his steering wheel  
and passes me the hand sanitizer.

Welcome home, honey.

*Stay*

I stopped for a minute  
on my walk this early afternoon  
in order to listen to the wind.  
No, it wasn't much of a wind,  
but more a gentle breeze  
that decided to pass me  
on my left shoulder. Down  
through the world above,  
a hawk dove as I listened  
and decided to reach out  
to the yellow hills before me,  
knowing it wouldn't be long  
before I had to head home.

## *Migration*

Every March,  
my mom sadly announces  
that the orioles will not be coming back this year.

I don't know why she always says that,  
because they always do.  
This year, we spotted a male,  
brilliant and orb-like,

waiting on the pool fence  
next to where the feeders usually hang.  
My mom ran to the back room,  
where they rest in a box  
covered in antique birds  
during the months our orioles are in Mexico.  
She whips out the faded plastic,

and I start mixing the sugar water.  
She's out the door with the jelly and a glass dish  
before she checks  
if my ratio  
    (2:1)  
is correct.

Each year,  
my mom convinces us into an almost acceptance  
of the fact she's just a day or two too late  
this time.  
But her orioles never forget her,  
and always stay much longer  
than anyone else's do.

When they do leave, in late September,  
it's without warning.

One day, we all notice there are no more  
fuzzy-feathered adolescents  
dancing in the trees,  
and the shots of yellow across the sky  
are just the goldfinches.

*Tenses*

The difficulty in understanding  
the past and the present  
can be illustrated through a photograph  
and a pencil.

The past begins and ends  
with the snap of the shutter.  
The present is your pencil  
suddenly turning into just a stub  
of lead and eraser  
without warning.

Perhaps a better example:  
on the back of the picture  
we took together before I flew home,  
she wrote the date  
and returned the pencil  
to its tangled drawer.

*Misplaced*

Days and days on end, nothing shifts except for the clouds  
and sometimes the leaves.

I watch them as if I've never noticed them before,  
like how their colors flicker in the wind

and how the bees visit the eucalyptus  
just as much as they did our bottle brush trees.

Those trees got so old they had to be taken away  
when I was still afraid of bee stings, but not of falling branches.

*Spring's end*

As I sit here eating tortellini,  
I count how many times the wind starts to blow.  
It's 90° and climbing

up the tree two squirrels  
desperate to escape one another and into the sky  
once they reach the end  
of the branches

Mom tells me she walked past  
two fledglings who never met the sky, only  
the ground they landed on

I pass her my leftovers.  
She's across from me, reading about the unknown  
sneaking through cracks,  
disrupting the lives of everyone.

*A world within an acre*

I.

The exploration of our backyard  
took many years. Together,  
my sister and I found and traced  
its map within our limbs.

I don't believe in 'shrinking,' unless  
it's a rabbit upon hearing your approach.  
You see, the back pasture  
is just as big as it ever was, and the room  
we've shared for our whole lives  
still holds us both.  
The mountains in the distance,  
from the beginning? have never collapsed,  
  
but, then again, neither has the sky.



## II.

And long before  
you'd reach those distant peaks,  
just past the tip of your reach, a hill; round  
and dark with trees,  
a trail curving down from its crest  
like a fingernail  
left clipped and dangling.

But it was only after  
I dreamed of seeing myself  
from that hill's summit, standing here, and then  
after that, thought about how long it would take  
to get there by running  
over the fences and houses between;  
it was after all of this

when I started noticing the mountains.