

True Knives

What I cannot undo, what will not be salt-soaked and cleared away: Your silhouette
deep set in the ivory palates of bone and tooth—your skin as I remember it

appears Eskimo. Twenty-odd little scrimshaws
calendar my months in carving, and in my prayers I ask the good gracious God
to true my knife. And in these dull days

I long for squall, the colorful figure of the whale's final flurry, the lashings of a fin. Cutting in to
the monster: what a sweet time-swallower that would be.

But the bowheads have been neither playful nor plentiful here. And so
we've headed West to prepare for the freeze, before the ice closes in around us—
my fellow sufferers and I. On the masthead today I thought

if I had some paper, I would spell your name time and again and fly it
down from the crow's nest. I have started seeing shapes in the waves—your hands hiding behind
the water whites: ten sandy hilled knuckles, waving “who are you.” And waving.

The Wedding Dress Smell Is Formaldehyde

like the Medical Examiner's office,
Hamilton County
where I saw my first body,
torso rather, with the other
forensics students—
all the talkers got quiet, left to smoke.

Inside, the pearly tiles imitate hospital,
but different things float in jars, different
words on charts. There is a woman:

naked, breastless, charred
centerpiece. A planet. I think:
she can never know
we are here. Doesn't know rain and wind. She seems
to wait, a waning patience of brick dust.

Procession of fall against the cotton white
draped *the end*—

What earthly pomp
the sack that is
the body bears. And what

about the feeble way we shed a pound of skin
a year? What goes in the space we leave? I'm thinking

now of vows, of feckless flowers,
goldenrod and cotton blossom bouquet. I want to thank
the flies and worms and bees who do
so much and see what looks like nothing.

When You Yawn I Yawn

Because of the bottle rocket's
blossom in your ear when you were a boy,
you have to watch my lips as if you would paint them.

You walk without the pitiless crunch of the snow,
without the yawp of the passing busses. The city

on your left might as well be sleeping,
the couple on the other side of the wall
might be loving... And why not

try to go all day without your glasses
as well? I promise to speak up. I will graze
your forearm like a sparrow when the light changes.

The curve between my lips will be fuzzier,
the boundaries of my skin more blurred
by yours. It would be a truth that you would need

the very thing that you are looking for,
to find the thing that you are looking for.