

Write a Poem that Fits

on a screen,

on a rose,

on a smooth, igneous stone.

Write a poem that dances

on its hind legs.

Curtsy.

Write a poem that wants to make love

on a couch in a damp basement

with Stevie Wonder on. Don't use the word

love. Don't ever lie to the poem.

Write a poem shaped like a cloud

shaped like an elephant.

Write a poem in ivory.

Write a poem that's rare, hunted, quarantined,

a poem like the headache you had

all last week until the weather broke.

Break the poem.

Write a poem that's broken. Fix the poem

with cardboard, toothpicks and glue,

make a frame for it, a little mat to stand on.

Write a poem that's bored.

Write a poem that's bored.

Write a poem that holds its breath

until it gets its way. Spoiled poem,

poem with no conscience, poem

turning blue.

Make the poem sorry. Make the poem

say your name in its sleep.

Don't answer.

Put the poem in a low power state.

Its pixels are tired,

and you're too busy for the poem.

You never liked the poem. It fit nothing

like a glove.

Halloween Dressed Up as Longing

I want us to go as a pair, something clever
only two can be:

movie stars or condiments or gangsters

on the lam. Lamb,
let's go south

someplace exotic, but temper-
ate, that is, without tricks.

I promise, I promise

you can be the bird this time, I won't

laugh at the iridescent stop light
of your puffed-up throat; I want

all that sugar, sweet
touch of rot, nobody
stealing my candy.

I want not to be sure it's you

in the dark, roguishly riding my epaulette
like there really is gold in your chest,
like this isn't just make-believe.

Mark the spot with an X.

It's what we promised,
said we'd never not do.

Sweet

Sap's flowing, galvanized
buckets ride the maples, making little factories
lit from within

(factories or bodies)

and because my leg aches again
I'm certain what I've dreaded—a deviation, some key
linkage in my body's chromosomal chain
askew—

has finally come to roost.

Injured bird, insistent song, my mother's parting shot
from a bed she couldn't leave:

*No one gives you a gold star,
honey.*

Meaning: give up fantasy, sweet distraction
I drink straight from the tap.

Meaning: I haven't called to see if the hawk we found
recovered from its collision with a car.

I'd rather guess

from here, make a better story, but I can't
invent a different ending

for the nine boys killed collecting firewood
in the desert
from high above
by drones
on a screen, with a joystick

by other boys (almost men)
recruited in video arcades. (Somebody's brainstorm.)

It's a job
(people need to eat)
someone still has to get firewood

and even the man in my town
who fixes birds
handled the injured hawk so casually
it was hard to reconcile.

He didn't promise anything

and there's a another man I read about
who's made it his work
to bring people together
with the people who've hurt them

he doesn't try to get them to forgive
or be forgiven, but they have to look at each other
and listen.

I was afraid to hold the hawk
afraid more than the wing
might be broken

and I wanted to close my mother's eyes

after she died
but I couldn't
I was too late.
Nothing soft was left.

Because Solace

Because the world has its own version
of solace, in a field of decapitated corn stalks
on the corner of Reed's Bridge and Elm
a flock of wild turkeys scratched
as if something nourishing remained
between the rows of dry stubble, interrupting
a disappointment I can't now remember
but at that moment rose in my body
like fever-driven mercury
from those perilous, pre-digital years
when I once spent an undocumented hour
with the unprotected tip of my finger,
playing with quicksilver spilled
from a thermometer I dropped.
I was taken by the element's reluctance
to break, its talent for self-repair, reshuffling
molecules around a breach to form again
a perfect, otherworldly bubble,
when all I could be was the same
girl sealed inside the held
breath of what might come, watching
for some as yet unnamed law of attraction
to upend and shake me, hard, until something
resembling danger, but soft,
came loose and made me
disappear and different and away.