

**Every Day**

Alexandra Pasian

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The Department

of

English

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Every Day**

Alexandra Pasian

**Every Day** is a collection of lyric poems that grapples with the quotidian nature of language, motherhood, life. For the speaker in this collection, the quotidian does not mean mundane or ordinary. For this speaker, it is the daily struggle that is her greatest work. Every day she tries to make language her own. Every day she balances and weighs the images she creates, asking herself “Is this the stuff of poetry?” Every day she endeavours to engage with a literary tradition that includes the poetry of Paul Celan, Anne Sexton, William Carlos Williams, without becoming overwhelmed by the weight of their work. Every day she tries to embrace her world.



### **Acknowledgements**

Poems in this collection have previously appeared or will soon appear in the following print journals: *Atlantis*, *Arc*, *Contemporary Verse 2*, *Event*, and *The Fiddlehead*.

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**Every Day**

## **The View From Here**

I am beginning to wonder if failure is built into my room. From this spot on my bed I have tried to make these walls symmetrical: balance their lengths, reconcile the angles. The ceiling shows multiple cracks, rippling along a north-south axis. In the afternoon they form a tide moving toward the door. Everything is still white, except the lamp which shows me a grotesque red mouth and too small, dark eyes.



## Rain

A crow sits  
    in our tree.  
He is silent,  
tired. I never think of birds  
being like this, or lonely.

    You might be thinking  
that the crow's feathers  
are sleek with the rain,  
blue-black.

But they are neither.  
This crow's feathers are clumped,  
    gray.

He is just sitting  
    in our tree.  
His beak closed,  
the rain beating down.

## **Talisman**

A word discovered in a book—a memory of summer camp surfaces. Sun burning morning mist off the water as canoe slips into the lake to make ripples which break the smooth glass. Once settled, a habit, I touch a pouch tied to my neck.

It was explained to me as a collection of sacred things wrapped in skin, carried for protection.

For months, my hand dropped to stomach as if I could talk to you through skin: layers and layers of yours and mine. My belly becoming stone, round and smooth. Finally, a day's slow melt to your arrival. And you moved out into the world. In that hour I did not know I was moving with you, a part of me to be carried within the soft pocket of your heart.

## Song

Finally, he raises his beak  
to the sky, and lets loose  
a truncated sound.

(Now I hear  
the traffic, music  
from downstairs, no wind  
in the trees.)

Who is he calling?  
Why is there is no answer  
for his too short cry?

I look to the tree tops,  
roof tops: maybe she too is waiting  
for that second *caw*.

**Summer Vacation, 1997, Reims**

I took a single photograph  
that afternoon. It was hot. Now  
it is difficult to make out the line  
of the ruin from the trees and the day's haze.  
There is too much grass  
in the photograph and I do not remember  
the grass. I remember the stone  
holding heat deep under  
yellow lichen. I trailed my fingers  
along the broken shapes. We walked  
carefully. Our sandals on damp gravel broke  
the silence remaining from mornings  
when nuns wordlessly tended  
vegetable gardens.

## **The Placement of Objects**

Have you ever found furniture rearranged in your dreams?  
A chair moved, a table gone. And then, the dream moves,  
shifts to a kind of figuring out why the chair is now on the other side,  
and hateful green where it once was peach. I build machines  
in my dreams to interpret the meaning and placement of objects  
(the jars are poems; a china cup is you). The crank turns:  
a lamp by the door. And all of us sink in waist-deep water. Sometimes  
the machine takes over my dream; spurts out its findings  
with terrible sounds so that I do not hear the door shut  
when you leave.

## Evening

He has returned.  
Tentative at first  
in the tree tops; finally  
choosing a branch

close to the house.  
The sun set  
some time ago, pulled the blue  
from the sky.

                    Turned everything:  
bird, tree, streetlamp  
into shadow.

There is no gray  
now, just black,  
                    more black.

The crow  
is almost himself tonight.

## **I am six**

And seeing a woman's vagina for the first time.  
We are spending the summer in the Gaspé,  
Trois-Pistoles. My father teaches English to local  
high school students.

Of course I have looked at my own  
and the hairless V folded neatly  
between other girls' legs, have glimpsed  
the dark hair beneath my mother's white silk underwear.  
But this is different.

Dad's classes run in the morning,  
his students practice verb agreements,  
vocabulary, while Mom pursues  
the rolling R. My brother  
and I stay with Chantal.

I think it looks like a cow.  
I know nothing of cows. But there were cows  
in the fields on our drive through Québec.  
Its purple lips thick, demanding.

Chantal doesn't like having us  
around. Her mother, a long cigarette,  
Radio-Canada loud enough to hear  
the news at noon in the kitchen,  
doesn't play with us either.

When we arrived this morning, she was still  
in bed. As we came through the door, first  
Mike, then me, Chantal turned over  
and the sheet slides off, knees against the mattress,  
her vagina exposed, right here.

This house is no fun. The shouting  
up and downstairs, the way they talk,  
meeting our eyes, assuming we don't understand;  
and now Chantal is holding her mouth  
as if I am the one who's been seen.

## Night

At first, I could not discern  
if he slept outside  
my window  
                    all night.

Was he lost  
in the tree's shadows—

branches & leaves  
cast against one another, dappling  
the sidewalk—his dark feathers  
too deep to appear?

            Or, did he fly off  
when the sun finally set?  
My tree is his spot to enjoy  
the view.

But tonight  
I turned off the lights,  
pressed my face to the glass  
and there  
                    sitting with his  
                    head tucked.



## **Weather**

February twenty-third, Sunday, and we  
in our second day of storm, see March  
will arrive as a lion, promising  
a lamb for spring. My grandfather taught me

that. He loved those wisdoms. It was early  
when the telephone rang. I did not get  
out of bed. Mark spoke to Dad. Grandpa died  
in the night at Linhaven. This news passed

from man to man. While the women sit  
steadying themselves. The snow turns to ice,  
sealing the world. We cannot make the trip  
home today. Nor do we know when this storm

will let up. And the only man I know  
who could predict it, is gone.

## The Shape of Tuesday

Late morning, I find both cats curled  
on the bed in the back room. Each in his  
spot under the sun: bound in a window  
pane reflected on that rough wool blanket.

Magic, being larger, chose the greater  
section. Like any young brother, Marvin  
mirrors posture—both cats tuck their noses  
under a paw, eyes tight to face the sun.

Do they know the difference between this  
close winter light, and the more diffuse light  
to come? *Tuck this scene away.* Carry it  
until after dinner when I sit by

your bed in the low chair, I'll talk of changing  
light. But no. You've been gone since Sunday morning.

**One Found Poem & One Imaginary One:  
A Note From My Grandfather**

A self-portrait in pencil on foolscap, lines written (before  
the shaking hand) now photocopied over  
and over: pages distributed among the children,  
grandchildren—not just the poet—each of us  
our copy of their marriage.

*Dear M,  
I've burned the sheets.  
Left the country.  
Please write.  
Love, H.*

*H in the sanatorium: two years  
for tuberculosis. M at home making Tuesday  
pudding for the first two kids. M at home  
hanging laundry on the line to bleach  
under the sun. M at home now, alone  
but for cats. His picture pinned to the wall.*

*Dear H,  
Write please.  
The country is mad.  
I cannot change the sheets  
(they still smell of you).  
Love, M.*

## **Imagine**

I don't want to think  
about where he spends  
his days, what he eats,  
if he has friends.

I will not imagine him  
in a game with smaller birds  
because those his size refuse  
to play.

I will not picture him  
pecking at his food  
along the highway. Loud  
cars whizzing past.

I don't hear your protestations  
about drama, sentimentality;  
until he lands on his branch,  
I do not let him exist.

## **Lullaby**

Down the street  
from our first apartment  
    near the law courts  
a group of very tall trees.

At night  
    all winter long  
crows flew down  
from the mountain  
to sleep.

Like the hordes of flying monkeys  
going to get Dorothy,  
but without small vests, hats,  
hands.

Through the night  
they perched  
releasing breath loudly  
letting shit fall to the ground.



**Frantic**  
Scenes for Paul Celan

In your desert, mirror shards reflect  
from a string.

                  You wave your arms, open  
and close your mouth. I cannot hear

above the crashing waves  
my own empty ocean.



Postcards arrive  
daily a new picture:

                  statues outside or abstract  
                  paintings without walls.      Your signature

                  a distant gesture; not a token  
                  for anything.



That afternoon I found you—

blind, your fingers at your face,  
tracing the length of your nose,  
curve of your lip.

                                  Your father  
long dead. Then,

later, laughing  
when we said our names

backward.



You collect sticks. Gather them  
in vases across the table, about  
this small room. *It is lovely*  
I say *organic*.

No smell lingers.  
Without graves, who has the need  
for flowers



In the park, a dog  
hobbled. Its hind leg broken

once, or arthritic. Running,  
back paws in unison: a slow  
rabbit.

Disappearing into the snow.



Paul, they are smoking  
downstairs:  
the argument  
punctuated by bursts of voices.

I can't seem to name  
this baby.





You wanted to turn cartwheels  
across this lawn  
of uniform  
green. The birds are blue

or yellow. Sky uninterrupted  
by clouds. But before the voice  
speaks, you hear the coin slip  
through the machine.  
The playground is closing.



It is a mistake to believe  
bad news travels faster  
than good, or is always  
a surprise.

Sometimes,  
cancer arrives on schedule  
as expected. The shock,

is not sudden,  
but just as fierce: unfolding

like a letter, its edges cut  
into you, its peculiar weight

holds you down.



Photographs  
of crowds,  
families don't keep me  
from loneliness. I am a collector

of these images. Some actions

are beyond control.





How strange  
    that I  
        who used to wear the white coat  
should find myself chained  
    (now at the ankles and wrists)

and suddenly able to sleep.

**Jean-François, Le Comte de Rocquemaurel**

This, the only photograph I have of you,  
is not a photograph at all.  
It's the coffee bowl your sister gave me

for my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday (always, only four  
years older than your son). In the chip  
that runs from handle to lip, there you are.

My thumb traces the exposed clay:  
I never touched your face. You dropped  
the bowl in the narrow kitchen. Obeyed

my directions then, holding the jars of jam.  
Only later did I know what you meant  
when you said I was good to marry.

## **Instinct**

He arrived fully grown,  
knowing everything he will need  
to know; I do not concern

myself with knowledge  
acquisition, shoe tying,  
geometry, using a spoon.

Still, he does not appear  
with dandelions, construction  
paper cut into hearts

or grab my hair  
with small hands.

## **Romance**

Each night I play  
fox and prince with the cockroach.  
My soft slippers are no match  
for his back. After the first night  
I learned his route: out from under  
the garbage basket, along the tub  
to the broken tile, then  
into the wall. Now I am content  
to keep him under the black basket  
with the tapping of my foot. At 2:36,  
I get up to pee. Soon, he will call me his.

## **Ritual**

At night, before bed,  
I go to my daughter,  
touch her  
five year old fingers

wound around Puffy,  
her doll. Then  
tiptoe into the baby's room.  
His sleep as light

as his four month old body:  
floating just below  
my breath. I cover his  
small feet with a blanket.

Finally, the front window—  
squint to see him perching there.

## Empty

The tree is full,  
green. More than once  
I have mistaken the leaves,  
their sharp points,  
for his beak.

He has not appeared  
for days. Now  
I wish my methods  
were more scientific.

If only I had counted,  
I could quantify  
the loss.

I would say  
he was here  
for *this* many days  
and now he is gone.





**From Breakfast to Madness**  
For Anne Sexton

### **From Breakfast to Madness**

It was late winter when I showed mother my first poem—  
copied by a shaking hand—do you see it, trembling still as I think of it?

She answered with such distance, it took a kind of cry to bring her back: *Mom,*  
*Mom, what do you think of my poem?* I wanted to write  
into her eyes the full look of motherhood: a hand held against

the dark. Have I lost my way? Mother is standing, a young poem in her  
elegant hands. My eyes wait wet without blinking, hurt now with the itch  
of too much air. I can see her, she turns and walks easily down the hall.

## **Elopement Drive**

Kayo turned the radio on to cut the silence  
in his car—soon to be mine. I wore the smart suit.  
Checked rings again, choking  
my fingers. Hands fluttering across the seat.  
His sitting close pricked; drew my skin. Left me  
raw. Flesh cooked in the heat of the car. In haste  
his belt was forgotten, leaving his pants to droop  
all day. We would giggle. But the drive was quiet,  
only the radio screamed its voiceless tunes.

### **That August at the coast**

wrapping freshly orphaned fingers  
around jam jars, gin slipping neatly  
up the sides, and you keep pointing  
out at the ocean, as if to say *there*  
and *there* and *there*. In the quiet,  
your mother visits; reaching  
with gray hands, but cannot smooth the dark  
curl stuck against your temple.  
Despite the night sweats, neither gin  
nor the summer's last sun can warm you  
out of silence. Even in company,  
your mouth gives up nothing but smooth stones.

## **The Narrow Bed**

Is the title of a poem about a poet who would climb into her first daughter's bed, while the young girl slept, and masturbate. The poem is not written down anywhere. Only the title appears in biographies. There is a letter somewhere that might refer to the poem. But this letter is not, as originally assumed, collected in a box in the attic of her old house.

### **Summer Hotel, Suite I**

At the front desk, I see myself  
in chiffon, translucent—glide huge

down hospital halls. A porter in his trim  
white suit, carrying my empty black purse.

The eggs are so civilized, quiet on the plate.

## Summer Hotel, Suite II

Cinnabar paint calls out for a coat; the walls  
Chip, weather worn and beaten by electric heat

in this cold season. Confections arrive in miniature  
paper cups, swallowed whole with a chaser—

warm water from the tap. Now pink, now  
blue, but never those perfect pills. The small ones

entirely round; the shape of sleep. They are  
the colour behind my eyes.

### **Summer Hotel, Suite III**

Into a second season, shed skin collects in corners  
of this grand place. Hands rinsed rough with cheap soap,

scratch vaguely at railings climbing ever up. Beyond reflections  
in clouded mirrors my eyes stare back at a face, old,

under unforgiving light. My mouth broken into parts  
not to be woven back in this place of tea and angry meat.



## **Spreading Fall's Ashes**

All season, bouquets of daisies spilled their awful smell  
over the house. Summer's yellow and white,  
now wilted with age and brown. At the cemetery  
there are too few flowers, and the sun peeks around clouds  
to cast shadows across tombstones. You would have avoided  
them and stood, just so, to feel the last gasps of heat  
on your shoulders, uncovered against October's cold,  
and the clean scent of winter arriving on the wind.

**Back Porch: Photograph with Joy**

On the steps, again you turn yourself  
from Joy. Holding that kitten  
as if more precious than—  
I will not write these words

again, or drink from that glass again.  
She is too old. Must have folded  
this away years ago: you and the cat  
long dead. Only a handful of bones

now. I teach myself not to read  
motherhood from photographs:  
the grass rising up against the cement.  
Counsel myself

make no judgments about dirty sandals  
on small feet. Suggest instead turning  
the page to your happier days or suicide  
or poems.

## **Dreams I**

Between sleeping and waking to the phone,  
Maxine dreams of Anne. Later, she writes Anne  
does not age. How could dreaming Maxine  
imagine an older Anne? She did not  
tend to a garden overrun. Turn grandmother  
to spring's hyacinths, crocuses. Shut  
her back door nightly on thawing decay,  
delayed by winter's ice. No spring for Anne  
or tulips or Maxine's precious hay, who turned farmer  
after Anne's last fall.

## Dreams II

I do not dream of loss. Instead I dream  
Isabel is calling. The same *Mommy*  
that makes its way from nightmares or spiked  
fever. Some nights I find comfort in her  
calling. It defines; breaks my sleeplessness  
into motherhood and silence. The dream  
does not change with her aging. But each night  
her body is longer. I jump with her  
cries. Some nights I get water or rock her  
back to sleep; others, it is just my dream.  
The house goes quietly on breathing my sleep.

## **Silence**

That first night  
I blamed the neighbours' dog  
(so small & aptly named)  
Napoleon. Barking

must have scared him off;  
even my daughter is not immune.  
Why would the crow  
stay when flying

is so easy?  
But there have been more nights,  
the dog inside, and still,  
my crow did not come.

**But that was the fall**

But that was the fall when the leaves refused  
to turn, they clung to their limbs against  
a milder wind. For days I waited, face lifted,

arms swung wide, to jump in mountains  
of gold and brown. Then snow came.  
Leaves dropped and slumped wet

on the ground. More snow fell, so I moved  
inside and watched the mounds become  
blanketed burial plots and looked for spring.

## Talking

Could I lay bare my own desire? Admit  
that I cannot see your face when I close  
my eyes, but I hear your voice. Even while  
the bus lurches across the slush, my eyes  
fixed straight, I hear your voice humming next to  
my ear. Anne could do it. She could write it  
easily without counting beats with her  
fingers. She would mean it. Every awful  
word of it. And you would know that your voice  
kept her from death. Maybe I am not so  
dramatic? Or maybe your voice is not enough.

## **December Fruit**

Dressing an orange this close  
to the holiday. Placing the skin  
again; wrapping each piece torn  
rough; edges remarried over  
soft meat—my house of seeds.  
I did not want to expose  
so early. This season  
strung—glass beads  
on wire—by an amateur.  
My daughter's mouth surprised  
by the cold juice that drips  
from her chin.



## **The Sound of Your Voice**

Long-fingered words scratch at my throat. I am hoarse with desire for talk and the snow keeps falling. February is long, and the birds keep singing their terrible song outside my window. There is so much silence here. I see that now too familiar show, looped endlessly, on television and in my waking dream; about a woman who sits and waits until her mouth dries and she can no longer sleep. I tell myself I am not that crazy woman, because she believes words reach people. Each night, I stand silently over her bed to watch my baby sleep.

## **Suicide's House**

I built my room at the end of the long hall  
running north away from sunshine. But warm,  
warm like being wrapped in mother's mink. Music  
hung hazy for the construction. That October  
afternoon. When the room was built, the plans rolled,  
signed, I turned the key in the lock and left it  
stabbing the air.

## Photograph

The changing blue sky,  
the new yellow-green leaves  
and the black crow,

as he fumbles  
around the branches.

He hops first up  
then down; his wing  
jutting for balance.

It takes quite a while  
to sort himself out.

Turning himself  
like a dog  
to find the good spot  
on the pillow.

## **The Big Confession**

The truth is it is easier to look elsewhere. Easier to build a wall  
and another and a third and on until you stand alone, hoping for silence  
in your room. But then you need to tell someone. So you paint

your walls with the madness of other women. Layer their stories  
over your walls until there are voices  
and not one of them is yours. You can curl up  
on the sofa you rescued, dragged in, to sit next to the lamp

your mother brought as a house-warming gift; tuck your feet  
under a blanket knit by a friend; open a bottle of wine,  
sip slowly until the glass is empty;  
the words blur on the page. The truth is,

it wasn't just the summer I turned twenty-four  
that I spent searching my hands for signs of crazy.

## Dinner

Right now

(as the water for the potatoes  
comes to the boil)

in the baby's giggles  
& bubbles—his response

to his sister's endless monologue:  
her talk a rise and fall  
of the day's notes—  
I can forget

the crow  
who will not be in our tree tonight  
probably not tomorrow  
or the night after.

Here, in the kitchen,  
at the back of the house  
I can think my family  
is complete.

## Set

You were always the builder  
of rooms; the setting of chairs.  
You sorted flowers and checked  
lights. Everything in its place  
for me to walk through. Now  
I see it (I ignored it before—  
the specter of you proceeding  
me); you gathered each minute,  
opened it carefully, put the world  
in its place. Minute after hour,  
day into always, I walked  
into rooms waiting for me  
to arrive.

## **Domesticity**

Late wasps are making their way  
into the kitchen: through shut windows,

the door sealed tight against  
October's cold and rain. Saturday,

Mark caught the first, walking  
across the floor

under the breakfast table, a slow  
creeping crumb, barely

perceptible. Sunday I killed another,  
had made it to the counter; appeared

faded next to the butter. Its wings  
too transparent. Like paper, folded

askew across the slender back. Still,  
it's something: a last message from last season.

## **On Writing**

She is not Charlotte, that spider watching me from the corner of the room. Stuck between wall and ceiling, the perfect view. I cannot look at her. What if she has moved? Maybe she is counting legs. How long do spiders live?



## **The Early Arrival of Spring**

I hold my daughter's hand when she walks,  
nervous, through the kitchen. Ants have gathered  
early on the counter. I press them under  
finger points and sweep them into the sink—to blanch  
under hot water. Only after do I think about the Buddha.

## **Prince Arthur**

Someone has put soap in the fountain  
by the restaurant. The water falls  
into its own lather; foam penned  
with brick. Constant harmonica  
scores each encounter. Any spare  
change?

## Truth

The first time I saw him  
he was in someone else's tree.  
I was looking out  
someone else's second floor window

across the street. The leaves  
hadn't begun to bud. It was late  
afternoon and already  
the sky was getting dark.

I think it was snowing.

I remember thinking  
how strange it was  
to see a single crow  
at eye-level.

A few days later  
when he appeared in my tree  
I wondered  
how he knew where to find me.

## Mid-Marriage

Tonight after we make love (an awful term, conjuring an hour of late night arts and crafts, where the fold and pleat of limbs is rendered no more than flimsy paper, cranes wrapped origami tight) I slip from our warmed bed to try and write a better metaphor. Yours of course is the true poem about these fourteen years: coffee ready when I awake. The kitchen floor, still cold, holds toast crumbs, fusili bits turned hard again, all crunch and stick before the broom, rough under our bare feet. Your stubbled kiss sour against my cheek. Old hat. No shy smile accompanies the trace sweat of last night.

## Mid-September

On the day we drive her to university,  
more than a decade from now, I will pause

by the trunk of the car, my hands suddenly  
free of the computer or lamp or bag

stuffed with last minute sweaters. I will remember  
this evening—light making its way

through the trees to our plates, shining  
across dinner's stain. We read poems aloud,

Isabel says: *Sonnet 2 I really like you  
but I can't afford to come home right now.*

Outside, yellow begins, the leaves cannot hold  
their green. Today is only Tuesday.

There is nothing special about that.

## Scene

Turned up against the fence, resting  
on its narrow lip: the ground giving way,  
just an inch. From where you stand,

you could touch it. Reach up  
to the top of the basin, maybe  
even a handle. Something—

the colour of your jacket, which is  
brighter—catches me  
off guard, as you consider

your found red boat. Wondering:  
will it sink in that puddle; hold the dog  
all the way home? And someone  
added a wheel.

## Photograph

She does not know the poem—  
my daughter, just turned  
four. I could read it to her.  
I am waiting until she is old

enough to feel as I do. As if  
a mother passes her tastes on  
along with the shape of eyes,  
the mouth's expression.

She does not know the poem  
and yet there, as the air fills  
with—not rain, no—  
mist, she stands.

The red wheelbarrow  
turned against the fence.  
She looks on, something  
depends on it.

## Memory

My brother stands, knees bent,  
as he rides. A slow surf

across the yard of brick,  
clay; our orange wheelbarrow

his curved board. My arms lift,  
push an awkward ocean

for him. Already playing  
mother, I hold the handles tight,

grip against the shifting of his weight.



## Work

I have set myself this task:  
imagine a new wheelbarrow.  
Not merely a new location, different

weather, on a construction site, empty  
just in time for dinner. An entirely  
new creature. Of course

the barrow, the one wheel is allowed  
and the shape would remain. But apart  
from that, nothing is similar.

Here's what I have so far: Look,  
a wheelbarrow and it's green.



**Walking With William Carlos Williams**

His hands are neither punctuation nor depiction  
but swoops of extravagance, fluttering

toward me. I have to keep  
my arms close. Mostly,

he walks in short bursts, but will,  
on occasion, slow to gather his thoughts.

\* \* \*

*I say:*

Imagine if oranges grew in Paris! Just think  
of blossoms floating by small boats on grand ponds

or a single tree tended on Rue de Seine. Its lush green  
leaves against the smell of diesel, sewer grates. The sound of a straw broom

rasping the curb, running water and discarded pips.  
Not to mention the colour—so shocking

against the Haussmann blocks, and shop girls  
hastening to work.

*He says:*

yes, but  
would they be good  
enough to eat?

\* \* \*

[Theory of Relativity #1]

William's hair reminds me of someone.  
Taller, perhaps in a vest or a jacket

with a zipper. Yes, and with puppets,  
smart jazz, people dropping by

for short visits. Happy. Everyone happy  
all the time and William there always

at twelve o'clock.

\* \* \*

William likes his own jokes.

So much so, that he has to actively resist  
the urge to slap me on the back when he tells them.

I can sense his need to encourage  
my laughter, he wants to help me develop

a sense of humour. He forgoes  
decorum and steady breathing

for deep-bellied laughter. Sometimes,  
I think it's all just too dramatic.

\* \* \*

*William says*

I enjoy walking with you  
like this in the late morning. Here, take my arm.

Smell the smoke. Someone is burning raked leaves.

I was thinking, on my way to work,  
About our walk last week.  
I might have been wrong.

Isn't that Mrs. Paterson's cat? He shouldn't be out.

I do so like talking with you.

\* \* \*

You have to remember  
William is an American.

Oh sure he's the right kind;  
always coming down  
on our side of things.

But sometimes he missteps.  
Misjudges the breadth of his shoulders,  
the pitch of his voice.

We have to be patient with William.  
He's still learning the language.

\* \* \*

[Theory of Relativity #2]

William's hair reminds me of science;  
the way I want to touch it, feel the electricity

at the ends; the near weight of it, constantly  
shifting beneath my fingers as if it matters

more than the distance around this block.

\* \* \*

I do not think  
William likes where I live.

Wrought iron  
tangled with Boston creeper;

paint flaked on the stairs,  
the ugly pink door.

\* \* \*

My personal theory of the brilliance of  
the red wheelbarrow poem—

it's like that joke:

*How many surrealists does it take to screw in a light bulb?  
Fish.*

Only, it's not surreal.  
Even though there are chickens,  
there isn't enough water in a drop of rain  
to support even a small fish.

And hearing the joke only occasionally makes me want to cry.

\* \* \*

Talking to William about his work, I say:

Yes, I understand why you're sensitive about—

No, no one likes to be criticized.

Yes, I think addressing this whole thing could be—

Look. You've started the damn manuscript with a condemnation of the people who condemn you. And that's fine—I suppose—except you've set it up like it's an argument, but, you're the only one who's talking. You're making up both sides. This just isn't fair.

Yes, yes as a matter of fact I do see the irony.

\* \* \*

Actually, I have only the one photograph of William. Close. Taken from slightly above.

He appears to be leaning into the camera, almost menacingly. The sun shines

on the trees and William wearing his coat, the open collar: a concession to the afternoon.

\* \* \*

William doesn't know  
I'm writing all this down.

Or does know and doesn't want to see it.  
Or wants to see it but doesn't think I'll show him.

Or knows I want to show him but is afraid I'll ask his opinion.  
And he has an opinion but doesn't want to tell me,

because he's afraid he'll hurt my feelings.  
William can be so thoughtful sometimes. Even when his thoughts are unkind.

\* \* \*

[Theory of Relativity #3]

William reminds me of Einstein;  
although Einstein was German and shaped the world

differently. There is something about the care  
and economy of his equation that suggests

he was not a fussy man, except maybe with his hair.

\* \* \*

Of course William's hair doesn't look anything like Einstein's

William is not vain. Sometimes  
he parts his hair on the other side, or forgets  
to wash it, thinking of something else in the shower.

\* \* \*



You may want to lean in on William's middle name  
drawing out the CAR-los until you sound  
like a pirate with two good eyes, just to remind him

of his childhood, his mother. Perhaps  
you want to know how his first language affects him.  
I do not.

\* \* \*

William does not often refer to his mother.  
This might be because the memory of her is too painful.

I like to think it's because he doesn't want to  
fix a single image of her in his mind;

allowing his first, long ago, woman  
the freedom she deserves. Either way,

I try to keep quiet while he is thinking of her.

\* \* \*

William arrives early on Christmas Eve and takes  
no notice of the miniature amaryllis

I have been keeping since November, hoping  
it would flower on time. Suddenly

like a gift, it offered two stems:  
while the first is already spent, the other

has five blooms; like five sunsets  
when the weather promises to be good tomorrow.

Even so, William moves to the window. *It's not so cold  
now, with the snow.* He won't say it, but I know he's worried,  
I'm going to make him recite another damn poem.

\* \* \*

I can't believe you're angry.  
I mean it makes sense doesn't it?

One of your parents must have been Spanish  
for you to end up with Carlos.

Of course I didn't make it up.  
How could you say such a thing!

\* \* \*

I don't like the way William wears his pants  
these days. They're too short, expose his ankles,  
especially when he sits—one leg bent  
resting on the opposite knee. I can't stop myself  
from checking if his socks are winking back at me.

\* \* \*

William and I prefer to eat our pizza outside  
on the bench, with our backs to the traffic.

This affords us the best view  
Of thin men in leather jackets

and women smoking short cigarettes, hair buoyed  
by enormous determination. This, says William,

his hand sweeping in front of us,  
is the best argument against travel.

## Joy

Imagine how foolish I felt  
tonight, when he  
returned. Foolish for thinking  
he'd gone. Silly, almost

giddy, at the sight of him  
there in our tree, early evening,  
my baby on his way to sleep.  
The way he lifted

the day, from laundry and  
tears and bath time and lunch,  
gave it a shine; the sun appearing  
just in time to set.

## My Good-Bye Poem

Spring comes through your kitchen's open window,  
and I can't tell if it stirs or carries  
this thin smell of dust. Still, winter lingers  
at baseboards and in shadowed spots  
along the street. I balance you,  
move to the opposite room, talking,  
nothing, fingers quick at edges. I want to collect  
the afternoon. Every piece, this apartment—  
you—light across the table, ashtray, used  
books falling on the shelf; tuck it all in  
my coat pocket. Hold it against Saturday,  
when I will be trying to remember  
the angle of your face measured by the sun.

## **My birthday**

Alone with toast, orange juice,  
four pigeons on the roof next door;  
huddled close together to keep warm  
although it is mid-July. With honey

to spread thick, I listen to my chewing,  
the oscillating fan. When I look again,  
more birds – seven, now eight –  
and still more arriving, flying off.

Birds coming from overhead, beyond  
the trees. Here, crumbs in my lap,  
honey making its way down my fingers:  
*well this is something.*