Cradling the Fiasco

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Departmental Honors in Creative Writing

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Approved by:

[Signatures]
Cradling the Fiasco

Poems by Lynn Marie Detwiler
Fiasco (n.): a bulbous, long-necked, straw-covered bottle for wine

Fiasco (n.): a complete failure
for my family
as we travel through this continuum of breaking
and fusing.
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Falling from Christianity

I chased you through twilight’s heavy branches—the pathway lit gold by suspended lanterns—flashing, flying. We cupped our hands to the air, praising the nightlife, trying to pressure the fireflies into the pale, green glass. When we captured the light we felt whole. Knees, then chest to the ground, examining like scientists— shaking and then veiling the container in a thicket to test their desires of finding love. But we kept them too long, accepted the role of murderers, decided they weren’t as beautiful in piles at the bottom of the Mason jar.

By mid-August, we became the wild priests of summer nights. We held them by wings and squeezed their abdomens, anointing our foreheads with a smear of guts. Pores glowed neon and my skin burned, but we wore the glory of the seraphim.
We left the dim creatures twitching,  
their mates shivering in bushes and on branches, 
waiting for the stillness.

Emptied, exhausted, we sat on my back porch,  
tipped our heads back to see the untouchable—  
flecks and black space—and began to weep.
Swans

Weighed down by the fluff of tulle,
    bony bodies stretch their lines
    until you see through their skin—
blue blood ruled by a silent hum,
    a piano playing nothing incessantly,
    like broken music boxes with figurines.
Calves that used to bulge—
    now twigged and bowed,
    toes bruised and crooked,
white architecture ridden with disease:
    fishbone collars protruding from sallow flesh,
    shoulder blades strained like featherless wings,
always wanting flexibility,
    wanting a higher arabesque,
    wanting to be the prima.
They pin their chignons, waxing wisps,
    necks strained to gaze at their own beauty,
    ribs giving scaled texture to smooth torsos.
Warm-ups at the bar—arched back, a lump
    of bones, dotted spine like hidden pearls.
    And when they eat, they eat like swans
picking at their tubers.
From the Greenhouse Window

White balloon
    with a green string,
    waxen transformer—
    you're nothing
but food for bees,
    stem rigid enough
    for children to pop
    your top off.
A ghost of moonlight,
    a downy pinwheel scattering
    seeds like snow,
    your sphere could burst
on this windy night.
    Your only good is to feed
    or fly away where nobody
    can touch you.
Eva, my friend,
    you've become a recluse,
    blonde hair stuck to red
    lips, craving another hit.
You’re loaded
    to take away the pain
    of his punch, so skinny
    I can see the blue
in your wrists.
    Like a chameleon you blend
    when shoved in the corner.
    Don’t leave me at midnight
to wander that field
    of your mind.
    If only your cheeks
    were white and round
as the dandelions
    you blow, you’d float
    back down so I
    could touch you.
24 and Breakable

_Dying is easy; it’s living that scares me to death._
—Annie Lennox

Dull slivers of blue-green eyes recede
into sagging circles and heavy lids—fresh
but frail, youth in youth’s arms wilting
like walls of paper stripes and rosettes.

The radio plays her dance of new life
every morning after coffee, as she rests
her infant against her collarbone. A toddler
bobs at her right hand, buttons unclasped and messy,

blonde fuzz standing on end. One, two, three,
and he buckles in rhythm with the song.
A fraying dishrag dries his ruddy cheeks,
and Annie begins her refrain, _Walking on…_

Shivers shake her baby awake—
shell-shocked from the wintry, long
breaths through rotted sills. Over toothless
screams, the radio echoes, _Walking on…_

No choice, with eyes half-full, but to rush
out of the room, child staggering past
the quivering table, knocking bony elbows—
her blue-necked bottles… _broken glass._
Depression Glass

(Oklahoma, 1934)

Momma poured morning oats in bowls of dust,
while on the horizon thick black rollers
threatened to steal even our last breath.

Yellow Quaker box in hand, her disgust
pursed on her lips for company consolers,
‘cause these “charity dishes” filled the depth
of our china cabinet. Transparent
rose, bright canary, and opaque milk were
my only source of color—gold beneath
cheap green glass, the poor man’s emerald in
a time of fiscal death.
Trousseau

My breath in December is a hope chest,
keeping stories and secrets until I release them—
ribbons of white streaming from my lips pour
into your mouth. *I'm worried about our future.*

But your blithe kiss wanders
from my cheek to bottom lip, trying to soothe me.

Our winter tradition is watching car windows,
woven with ice, thaw like my mother's wedding lace,
dripping cool pearls down its bodice.
And time never lets you watch long before you must chisel
the windshield clear. *A true lady waits inside.*
Your '91 Cavalier runs louder than a purr

while I rub my warm fingertips on the pane, tracing
an outline of your face. *Even at home, diamond lines, necklaces,*
form strands along the cedar railings and icicles
fall from cracking gutters, breaking like collectable
china saucers. The streetlamps emit a false glow
on our rundown apartment—shining stones
and a glittering blanket laid over the shingles.
It’s so cold outside I’m breathless.
Ignorance

The branches they walk on are brittle
with ice—tightropes strung across sunsets—
but the cardinals never shiver or falter.

From the bedroom where I sleep alone,
I’ve watched them mate in the skinny birch,
a bright flutter of crimson and chestnut.

The black-masked male, the courtier,
places seeds in her mouth, beak-to-beak,
as we did with strawberries in our youth.

They sing a high, soft vibrato,
a dissonant chord to our disgust
with each other, our scornful remarks:

You called me *whore*. A red bullet
crashed into my window that afternoon—
a stinging sound, like your hand to my face.

*I only loved you because you’re beautiful,*
he said, breathing heavy like the red body
stunned on the porch, eyes alert, but glassy.
Kristallnacht and Now

Above the roar
of happy men in coats—
the dissonant clang and burst.

Children
in hospital dresses crossed billions
of window rivers—dragged by arms,

choking,
their slender, red feet muddied with the wet dust
of Elohim. Holding their wrists, the crude
men popped glass

like bubbles under thick boots,
laughing with elitist lust.

You’re no better. 3 a.m.,
Irish temper—
you bastard—it pulses through your fingertips,
raises your eager hand

with a lust to strike.
Again. Moonlight, puddled on the floor,
shivers off heirlooms, anything breakable—

billions—

fish scales under water—
to prove you want to

and can

draw blood, thrust my bag of bones, and bruise.
Always a slamming door, quivering

satellites, and that grin.
Our Hands, Opus Palladianum

We were elementary school psychics, reading lines across our palms, predicting babies and death dates, crying when we realized life may be too short. We could never know for sure just where creases stopped and started. The heart line—sliced by wrinkles, one cut for every true love: summer kisses and carnival rides. After recess I’d trace my fissures as if I could draw my own life in skin, sheer porcelain allowing steel blue to glow from beneath the surface . . . Stained windows seemed so holy at early morning mass, kaleidoscopic wall spots in rich, comforting colors. The complexion of too many saints caused stark white light to invade, leaving walls a jaundiced pearl. I always felt the glassy eyes
scan my place in the communion line,  
knowing if I had sinned  
too much that week. Every face  
that burned ivory sunlight  
washed me out to a marble statue.

Looking closer now, my skin has tiles,  
a mosaic of irregular shapes, shades  
of creamy tan, cracking with a bitter winter,  
branches split open to show my living color,  
red. I’m a million shards: my father,  
mother, and sister. Our flesh is getting older,  
shriveiling like our wilted passions.  
Daddy’s hands hardened from weekend repairs,  
doors that will always squeak, cracking gutters.  
Fingernails blackened by soil,  
knuckles caked, my father ages  
with his garden’s diminishing yield.  
Momma’s hands, too, are made of pain,  
exposed to dish water and scrub brushes,  
cooking meals three times a day. Her diamond,
my obsession, introduced me to her fingers, white and abrasive, my young touch playing healer. And my sister, once blessed with an artist’s hands, defined by pastels and lead-smudged fingerprints, ruined by the starving artist syndrome, worries of the “real” world. My painted handprints from kindergarten hang in the basement. I haven’t grown much since. Lines run from my wrist to my palms to my fingers, writing a fractured autobiography.
Crystallophones

My fingers glide over the chilled skeletons
of wine vessels, creating friction,
a symphony of discordant ringing—
like hand bells at the Christmas service—guiding
me into unfamiliar silence. The supernatural
squeals of small bowls and the deep, smoothness
of the bigger ones force maddening confessions
and guilt onto the candlelit table, pouring
incessant fears as steady as the resonance:
*I'm afraid* at every goodbye that I should've stayed
*just a little longer* . . . In the 1700's women in their frills,
ringed by pearls and lace, swooned
to the whining music of armonicas.
Their husbands, the great composers
of the decade, crippled by nervous fits,
darkened chords by plucking strands
of depression . . . Yet the silence
in this cafe makes my hands tingle
to create the wavering tones, layered rich
like desserts, a thrum, then rapid gush
of the estranged details: *What happens
when I die? What happens if it's tomorrow?*
Reminder

for Uncle Jim

A piece of blown glass
on burnished asphalt stops me,
as though the breath in those synthetic
pockets was a metaphor
for life’s boundaries,
the final gasp of your ash-riddled lungs.

My breath hovers in the brisk air,
then the diamond shards scatter
underneath the weight of my boots—
crunching and clinging . . .
In the frailty of ninth grade, what broke me
were my mother’s eyes,

glazed to emphasize their golden streaks,
though I already knew from classroom whispers—
How sad . . . He was such a good man.
Mother’s face loosened
my grip on the leather-strapped bag,
and I collapsed to cool linoleum.

Not wanting to hold her hand
I pressed my palms into the floor
and, for the first time, wept out loud
surrounded by my friends, his students,
who watched as mother and daughter
fiercely gripped each other.
Waiting for the Burst

Icy blackberries suspended in a warm glass—
an electric shock to lips and tongue,
condensation slithering, forming less than clear
circles like frost on windows. Dripping,
glittering, swelling until the burst—
shattering half-moons and sticky grit of sap
bleeding into Mother’s cashmere. Above the clank
of casual diners, her temper swelled
like the tumbler: Get me the manager!
Delicate sounds like little silver bells
clinked as she stood, purple hands bramble-numb,
steeping crass remarks. In the silent hum,
I could only look into her eyes—icy black
without reflection—and wonder
if she’d ever admit she needs help caring
for Dad, the grandparents, herself . . .
I waited for the inevitable burst: succumbing
to images of steam on hospital windows, the broken
responses to a diagnosis, the premature wrinkles
on my father’s face. She always tries to fix what she can’t
see: lumps, black-violet within his cold body, while I warm
my glass with heavy breaths, bursts, kindling tears.
Sea Glass

I found a faceless Mary in foaming green,
beaten smooth in the froth
   and pull
   and hiss,
the dip and twirl, the sinking. Ivory-blue abyss
ever-issuing her to the site of ancient Argentines,
palms open, where I bent to wipe the grit from her veil.
At the birth of day she gleamed and made me covet
her, nature’s figurine
   stripped of enamel,
   buffed
to a salt-frosted ghost I’d place bedside—shells
and abandoned ware flaunted by white wash
walls. In warp of moonlight, while I grind my teeth,
she looms, makes me tense and writhe in satin sheets
until I have been warmed
   like kettle milk—
   sun-flushed.
In self-reproach, I churn Exodus: “a wound for a wound,”
while yearning for the rush
   and hush
   of surf to carry me
away, remake me immaculate. Oh Mary,
tumble me smooth until I am bound.
Facing La Recoleta

*Buenos Aires, 2010*

I. *Requiescat in Pace*

The wishes of this stone-blown little girl
are gone, yet she waits on the yellow-pink
globe of stained glass turning mother-of-pearl
blue. No blood runs here, just stone—dried out ink
that once scribed a city. Wing-tipped shadows
slant upward, revealing the thin pathway
to cockroaches, spray-paint, and these fallow
grounds. Mausoleums, stretched tall, decay
into the rust of sky. Granite chambers,
mere inches apart, make me walk heavy
in my bones, as if I’ve been bound by pine
trees and coffins. Broken walkways levy
death on us, and behind the barred, gray walls,
the Virgin Mother etched in window jewels.
II. The Viewing

Mary’s face, and I’m back in Johnsonburg, prayer card gripped tight between my thumbs. His corpse dressed in hunting flannel, the lipstick-hard mouth pinned to smirk—the gold, velvet lamps warped his image, and mine. I was only ten, and forced to take my place on the kneeler where I gaped, pretending to say Amens and Our Fathers. So close to his skin, more than I’d like to be, perhaps more than I should have been. They assumed I was grieving my great uncle, but I was terrified of becoming a death doll, of the seething sour smell so unlike my home. The faux lilies, the silence of lace and pillows...
III. *I will return and I will be millions.*

—Eva Perón

Her golden expression convinces me
there’s an unseen warmth in these hazy clouds.
She’s crowned for motherhood, haloed with down
for final rest. She’s the soul behind He,
like our affectionate Evita turned
activist from radio actress, laid
behind this marble door with floral braids
of illusive stone, weaved with bulbs infirm
as velvet. The silhouettes at sunset
sprawl and flatten by the gates, ceramic
bowls of milk left for the smoldering eyes
that squint, orange and hungry—feral cats
given sparkling china stars and planets.
Tourists admire as kittens lap up the skies.
IV. Reflection

Tawny cats, still starving, bury their heads
in straw, below women of copper green
covered in fruitless vines marking their dead.

Stone dogs guard the nursing mother screened
in ivy—one child clinging to her breast,
the firstborn already overgrown. Hung

by cypress branches, a reflection recessed
into sky: taken off the cross, a young

Christ. Is it strange to believe that concrete
angels have feathers? Leaving earthly margins
behind as He did, I will let go, be free

from fearing the intangible, lend skin

and my image to these windows. For I

realize that I’m young, but not too young to die.
Pantheistic Celebration

—after Louis Comfort Tiffany

Magnolias rise from a tomb in Brooklyn,

wet fingerlings stretched wide, reconciling

with creamy pockets. Royal morning thins,

and glides into the heavens, gold clinging

to wet fingerlings stretched wide, reconciling

with mottled mountains. Irises, molten,

roll up for the heavens, the gold clinging,

petal tips sacrifice an aged red-violet—bold

as mottled mountains. Irises, molten

with newborn lilac and traces of rose,

burn their tips, bleeding jewel tones. The bold

sprigs of emerald and banks of mud life glow

like newborn cheeks, round with traces of rose.

Land parts for the river, a serpent, watery,

darting from emerald banks with a pulsing glow,

tapering, yet pooling—a placid plea,
before land will part for the serpent. Water with a sheen the color of sunny icebergs flows into the valley, pools, placid water—a feathery gray-blue—mockingbirds with cream pockets. The royal morning thins as magnolias rise from a tomb in Brooklyn.
Van Gogh Plays God

—after *Starry Night Over the Rhone*

An absinthe-induced skyline
imposes perfection in a blur.
Burdened with a modest red
at the bottom of the woman’s dress,
she clutches her lover’s arm.
Their hunched shadows are sharp and
sturdy in the strokes of wind—
their hardships, over.
Glassy royal waters roll, inconstant,
as pillars of light ascend
from his green-bronze
and stretch toward a bruised sky. Stars
fizzle in oily smudges. Yellow-orange blotches
of town light shroud labeled buildings.
until they become peaks of indigo mountains.
And the line the lovers walk on—
a fine tip separating the ideal from the real—
created for them by the shaking hands
of a man painting in layers,
always dissatisfied.
Don't be fooled by his insanity,
his wishes that the world were this pristine.
Just look at his life:
anxiety tore at his flesh
with a shot to the head—
like a subject of his own paintings,
a cornflower-blue body
limp over strands of copper wheat.
And yet, who wouldn't choose
to paint one's life over again
every time a loved one is lost
or the hope that gold will save, fades?
In those last loveless hours,
he wished to grasp someone,

to stroke a woman’s pearl white skin—

his stars in the black of midnight.
Broken Minnesang

—after an untitled painting at the Met

Flow blue china slivers
  mosaic the dining room floor—
anxious fingertips of a housewife.
  Cobalt flowers omitting petals and stems,
    half-houses, little silver birds without legs . . .

Fifty-three beats per second
  ruptured on canvas—winged texture
of oil on oil, crude black and white shards
  with flimsy glimmers of living indigo.
    Spilled milk plaster and fluttering—on dirty floors . . .
Fish Bowl Vision

All we know is trapped in glass impressions—
cystic sea bulbs pulsing with translucent hearts.
Curiosity has no consequence, needs no discretion.

Through media screens we form real-world obsessions—
drink, smoke, sex, curse, steal. Pixels are fine art.
All we know is trapped in glass impressions.

Museum cases, poised, beckon no questions.
Fingerprinted revolutions and innovations impart
no need for curiosity. The consequence is our discretion.

We've replaced sweet, stale leather bindings in recession
with page-free technology counterparts.
Even literature's trapped in glass impressions

instead of dusty shelves. Thinking we must capture expression
through the fisheye lens, everyone's now photo-smart.
When curiosity has no consequence, we lose discretion
in choices and venial confessions—
how we've raised our families, shunned our God. Chaos starts
with what we know, trapping in glass impressions
all curiosity, the consequence of no discretion.
Semi-Translucent

My neighbor read poetry to me
by a wall of windows—barely limitless—
chandelier spots mingling with stars,
oak legs superimposed on the backyard forest—
a portrait to hang on each branch.

I forget his name. Curving towards the earth
in a recliner like crushed velvet, he wrote new life—
his daughter, his granddaughter. A little too
sentimental, though his wrinkling
forehead illustrated a story I admired more.

A fragile glare from above his spectacles
urged me to critique pieces he created in hospitals,
in factories. I’d nod politely. He’d pause to search,
scan the outside, when I could only see a never-ending room
with the sky’s lambent ivory platter hovering over his bald

head. Maybe he was looking further than I, waiting
for his daughter, at three feet tall, to materialize
in the reflection that had stayed the same for 45 years—
Warhol’s empty bottles on soda shop counters,
waiting for copper-oxide nickels.
From the inside, he couldn’t touch color—
breathing green or crooked brown—
but he always tried . . .
In glass cages, old birds perch and gaze
and wait for more.
Cradling the Fiasco

For Adam

The perfumes of velvet-skinned grapes
linger in the slender emerald necks
of potbelly Bocksbeutels and the plump lips
of ports. In this humidity, their smooth
bodies stay cool enough that I press
them against my cheek—and I’m drunk
without a taste, though I may be drunk
off memories . . . the rows of grapes
and vines in Argentina, purple pressed
lipstick of Malbec, or that black-necked
bottle’s lustrous curves. My skin’s smoother
than the taste, or so my boyfriend says, lips
numbly pressing against my lips,
his green eyes glassy, “love-drunk,”
but I think it’s the bottles that cause this smooth
talk. I’m fixed on the one with stains like grape
petals, lucid and dripping down the neck—
it’s almost a work of art, and I’m impressed
with my collection, round shadows pressed
onto the wall—framed: Bordeaux-colored lips
of the Girl with the Pearl Earring, chardonnay necks.
These are the things pompous drunks
confer in bistros, but I’m alone in my room dreaming of grapes,
glass, and you. I’m no drunk. I just like the smoothness
of a 1974 Inglenook bottle. I try to smooth
the slightly yellowed and wrinkled label, feel its weight press
down on my palm. I like to cradle the fiasco that held Tuscan grapes,
pretending I’ve been to Italy, seen the experienced lips
of glass blowers round the flask’s bottom—drunk
off their own craft. The purple blemishes on thick-necked
bottles remind me of nights spent necking
when I was younger. Now, I have someone to smooth
my hair, drive me home when I’m drunk
and giggling too much, someone to press
tightly in my arms, and to tell me I have beautiful lips,
though they’re often chapped like raisins, not fleshy grapes.

Our kiss is Gustav Klimt’s: necks yearning, pressing
our smooth bodies into a scene of tangled gold, my lips
in a drunken dream—the color of juicy grapes.
Young Cranberries

Like ivory lights on bushes
after a protective coat of snow,
the flimsy branches glazed from impact,
and the drops of early winter stilled
in a mid-air rain. My vision was sheltered
by a thin film after my head hit the ground.
I lay plastered to the glossy land
in a downy blue snowsuit. Mother’s muted
laughter continued through the picture window
as the neighbor’s dog chased me
up the icy drive. I left my scarlet mitten digging
into the plow’s pile, almost persistent . . .
Harvesters of buoyant cranberry fields
flood and sand their crop to protect
sweetness from frost. Some years they rise
in triumphant red to speckle the waters
and match autumn’s trees. But if there’s too much sand,

or too much rain prevents pollination

of the honeybees, the yield can sour

and bruise like skin, humanity unripened . . .

A jolt through my bones, harsh impact of mirror

and flesh, left me broken—black, blue, and yellow.

Wrapped up in a plush blanket, I no longer wanted
to play in the snow. Inside there’s steam to veil

and protect me from the hardening frost.
Abella: Beekeeper

She folds molten sunshine—honey dipper of stainless steel rolling to balance sacs of glass. Dewdrop sweat, her fiery glitter on tangerine cheeks, grows round and fat, hand-blown and ready to shatter. She breathes shape into the opaque and transparent, coercing red-hot nectar, and squeezing vases, bulbs, and jars. Wafting from the pit, hand-me-down scents . . .

waking to warm sugar.

Abella licks honey from glossy combs: *No, no cariña, espera.* She stirs miel and caramel in her barrio home only on holidays—a recipe, a secret straight from the keeper of bees.
Stained Arizona Sky  
_for Maria Chona_

Rolling lush Indian figs  
in the desert grains,  
we satisfy ourselves, our growing  
bodies.

The spider shimmies over  
hot stones,  
chanting a lullaby to only me as I rest  
from fetching water. Callused  
palms pressed to dust,  
my brother’s silhouette  
shivers  
against the humid sunset.

Looking west toward  
the rusted crags,  
he darts for the overhang,  
a rush of dark silk  
diffusing behind him.

Falling on cracked knees  
he tilts his head  
to a fading sky—  
gold bleeding
into royal blue—

then trembles,
garbles his speech.

*I remember when that was me.*

But now he’s in the glory,
waking dreams
that Elder Brother has gifted under

    a slivered moon.

    I stumble

over the land to get to him.

Guttural

    screaming echoes deep in his

    bronze chest.

I hold his thrashing head

    until he ceases

    and his black eyes water.

He hastens toward the village,

    and I follow, my pounding

    footsteps

    less urgent, like the patient

    drum

    underneath rhythmic stories,

    chanted around

    tongues—

wild and orange.
Shiny Surfaces

I once saw myself in soup bowls
   and blank TV screens,
in patent leather shoes
   and Christmas bulbs.
Blinded by life’s shiny rarities—
   my face in pots and pans,
grandpa’s in a picture frame—
   because a child works in this way.

Twenty years later, I’m surrounded
   by quick breaths from infants,
the warmth of their peach-fuzz heads,
   widening eyes in undefined color.
Reaching for the sterling
   charms around my neck, they guard
the faux crystals and pearls, fascinated
   by reflective vision.

Permanent scars and blotchy freckles
   cover my pale skin, an after-sun
appearance, chlorine or summer
   sweat’s exposure. As a teenager
I finally learned erasers couldn’t rid me
of my flaws, but everything magnified
under the bathroom glass, lights
or adolescence warping self-image.

In a room full of plastic toys, children
prefer a mirror, kitchen utensils,
car keys, and ceiling fans. Their world
expands in luster. When I look
into these objects, I see unfinished metal,
pieces of a practical world.
But their eyes are burnished, glittering . . .
beholding raw beauty for the first time.
Treasures

Papa prefers to taste the sea,
    while I collect the shiny souvenirs.
His back is hunched in pursuit
    of hard, wet bulges under dampened sand;
shells like glassy half-bottles under burning
    daylight. When I’d bend to fill my pail with round,
foaming greens, frosted blues, and sometimes a lemon
    or two, a few gems would shift. They grew long, angular
legs and scuttled from granulated caverns,
    causing us to heave with laughter,
my sides aching, and his hearty chuckle breaking
    the sound of waves. We traveled the line
of surf and beach off the Maryland coast, yellow boots
    in muddy suction rendering me in need of saving.
Papa’s experienced hands pulled me from the muck
like the blue crabs we hunted (though I looked for
a brilliant red in naivety). And when we reached
the dock winding perpendicular to our house,
we’d spill the fragile harvest onto the weathered
wood, rolling them between our fingers under gray
water, and leaving them to glisten in lamplight
like tiny lighthouse beacons.
Mother-Daughter Medium

The sky quivers with His touch—images
echo and capillaries wrinkle clouds. Wavering
cityscapes fall to fuzzy tree lines, the world overexposed—
an evolution of passersby to ghosts.
Even before phone calls, I know.
You know. Stillness turns us vintage
yellow, cripples us among the swift gatherings

of urbanites as neon ambulances warp
like cartoons, and the squealing green of flat-lining
becomes reality. Without seeing me for weeks,
only conjuring my face in windows, you know every plea
I make to God—I wonder if she needs me
as much as I need her. Our minds, as if torqued
by gravity, try to fill in the blanks—the blind

love rooted in a mother-daughter . . . and on some damp
nights, we feel full. After rain speckles windshields, clouds
become invisible, and together we drive into that blur
of sky and highway, there’s something that stirs
between us, something bigger, pulling us while stars burst
into great interrogation lamps
shaped like our gaping mouths.
Funny Jar in the Corning Museum of Glass

*Lord, how many things there are in this world of which Diogenes hath no need!*

—Diogenes of Sinope

Egg blue and red velvet whimsies
stuffed into translucence—the stilled life of a child,
hundreds of frivolous “finnimbruns.” Limbs of a flimsy
burlap and cotton doll wave wild
goodbyes—*Your crooked, red lips can’t smile.*

Behind, a proud paper Siamese cat
hunches its back, ready to pounce on a cigar
box. Or is that an ivory glove next to the Chinese finger trap?
Junk dances, *trembles*, in the light of camera stars
popping off the anti-flash case. Fingerprinted postcards,
torn Spanish fans, bottle caps left after quenching
a traveler’s thirst, were once scattered on tables,
once cluttered toy chests. Compressed under a French
teapot lined gold and a teal Merry Christmas label,
another hand—cold plastic—reaches, unable
to grasp its counterpart of woven skin. Teeth
that used to chatter and jive, a red balloon,
and a 1943 steel cent regress beneath
the oddities. A plastic flower, deprived of bloom
mimics the life of springtime and June’s
gaudiness . . . What could you have bought
with that penny?