My Boyfriend’s Grandfather’s Neighbors Are Frederick Ruysch and Thomas Holmes
(How Frederick Ruysch Won The Potato Salad Contest Four Years Running)

I.

I reach under your shirt,
count your ribs, unzipping the intercostal space
between
the fourth and fifth ribs to
pull
out the pericardial sac. I do this
as we stand under the moonlight in the field behind your grandfather’s house;
you unzip your jacket so I can pull it out
smoothly, in one stroke, because
sweetheart, I don’t want to hurt you.

I don’t know which of us throws it
on the ground.
you don’t need that
I say
but I know you do, but more importantly
you know that I know,
I know you need everything you can get because
you snorted
formaldehyde from our neighbor’s garage.

And they know you did it.
They know they know that you that
when we were supposed to be watching their house while they vacationed at the National
Embalmers’ Conference in Las Vegas
we took the time to wrench open their locked basement door,
but the only thing down there was a washer from 1943.

II.

The only things we learned:
Frederick Ruysch's special potato salad recipe calls for a half-cup of diced phalanges.
Thomas Holmes keeps binoculars at his bedroom window so he can watch your grandparents
dress in the morning and undress in the evening.

We found your heart in the washer from 1943.
I know you won't mind. I suggested that he add it to
his potato salad for the next block party.
And I wore your ugly green jacket while I ate some.
You know that you know--
do you know what kind of love I mean?

Cutis is the Combined Term for Epidermis and Dermis

I.
When my brother died,
I peeled his skin off,
starting at the top of his scalp-
tugging gently like when we would pull perforated sheets
of pages from our coloring books,
swapping my princess for
his fire truck-
underneath, his muscles glistened as
the lights of the
morgue
shone over his pectorals,
    triceps, thighs, hamstrings, deltoids--
glistened right down to
the phalanges that I still
don’t have
    a name for.

II.

I hid his skin in my closet. Hidden amongst
pink puffy dresses,
pleated skirts in black and gray,
those petite collared shirts in
pastel shades.

And when my parents left
for the evening,
    on came-

I would slide into his boy’s skin, finally feeling at home
    in red and black boxer-briefs,
cargo shorts with enough room
    for that toad by our mother’s garden,
    a Batman t-shirt.
Standing in my dead brother’s dark room,
    looking in the mirror,
I can tuck my long, brown hair
    under
    a Reds’ baseball cap.

His skin fits
over mine
    so perfectly. His boys’ skin.
Pantagonian Toothfish Live Up To Fifty Years

I understand good old-fashioned American love,

Our grandparents smelled the dead bass under the dock when they were our age.
   I mean the same bass. with the same silver hook in its eye.
   Do you know what kind of love I mean?

Pretend that the bass isn’t there. or better yet.
Let’s pretend we are the bass;
   together we’re one bass.

   they’re rye bread crumbs, that the man feeds us,
   we don’t know this,
   we don’t know he’s a man or a shirt is what or that the criss-crossing lines of blue and
   white mate in the morning sun to plaid; social constructs are plaid, man,
   rye.

What we know is that he comes,
we eat, and he goes.
what we do every day is:
I know what you’re thinking.
Do bass really enjoy bread crumbs?

Puncture Wounds Are In Our Palms

Proven by signs
   posted
on splintered poles,
signs crucified by
   rusted staples,
   who scrape as they gesture
women want lost children.

Locked jaws and narrow eyes, paralysis, are what they lead to.

The signs say they want their children back except they forgot to write a phone number.

LOST: REWARD $25

Answers to Joey.

Black hair, brown eyes. Missing front teeth.

Green shirt, khaki shorts, no shoes.

Hearts, minds,
    squirming in chests,
    buzzing in skulls,

lost children among each other.

Slide your hand into his green shirt, Mother. Slide your hand into the incision.

Show us what you mean when you say love

with clawed fingernails scratching just over our hearts.

If you take his heart out, please do us one favor.

Please share.