Storyteller

There is a story inside of her,
but her brother bribed her,
said he’d play Monopoly with her,
if she kept her damn mouth shut.
So she lay sweating
in the blue of night,
staring at the popcorn ceiling,
waiting for the blade to fall,
shining silver like stars,
slicing through her neck
cleaner than a butcher's cut.
Some nights she would give birth
to a boy with butterfly wings,
or litters of suckling kittens,
begging for the milk
in the middle of the moon.
She doesn't dream anymore,
keeps her mouth shut.

Jane Doe

I can never remember
why sometimes
I splay each one open
like a formaldehyde-soaked frog
in high school biology.
The last one bled a river of garnets
from the hole over her heart –
Christ's own wine,
her chest cavity becoming
a holy chalice
from which I was not worthy
to drink.
I wanted to hold on
to her hand,
but it remained cradled
in a small snow-drift,
the pads of her fingers
growing blue ice.

Forgetting Five

When your soft eyes slip
beneath the surface of a dream,
I begin my nightly rounds,

inspect each element of my memory,
looking for gaps
I must fill in before you wake.

Night falling, I stare out the window
at the one shaggy auburn tree
by the black pond.

I cradle each memory gently,
turn it over in my palm,
notice the way the filtered moonlight hits it.

I contort images and smells
to fit the holes that the wind blows through
until I realize that I can’t remember being five.

A whole year gone, with only small infrequent blips --
a red rubber kickball, a pale blue hallway,
something yellow in the corner of my senses.

Lima, Ohio

After a slow rain,
the fallow ground spits out
earthworms
which stink of fish --
I cannot step over the cracks
in the skewed sidewalk
without killing the worms,
who clearly do not understand
the danger.
Unsettling as well
are the buzzards that circle
and swoop
above the tree-line,
waiting for something to die.
I wait too, for anything
to stir the sultry air,
knock down a few cobwebs
on its way in
or out.

The Fortunate One

I.

Tumbling
Like a graceless sparrow,
I lie on my back and stare
At something resembling sky,
Except today it is robin-egg blue,
Nothing like the usual gritty
Smoke-and-ash gray
Filtering through every crack
In every windowpane,
Darkening each room in each house
As if storms were always blowing in,
Never moving out.
Today there is a strange bright sun
Where the black hole used to be,
And flowers tucked into the empty spaces
Where old men used to sit and stare.

II.

The local tarot reader opens her shop
For the first time in eighty-four days.
Her long crackled nails and yellowing hair
Always scared away the children—
Their mothers and half-wit fathers too.
But today she seats herself like a gypsy queen
Gnarled hands folded over the major arcana.
People line up for ten city blocks to see her,
For what can this sky possibly mean?
This brightness in the clouds worries them,
But to me it is no omen,
Rather a beckoning,
A call to come forth,
To climb the luscious breast-like curves
Of the hills that were once too lonesome to consider.

My Other Car is a Rolls Royce
In one of my parallel-universe lives
there is a pretty, polished version of me
with well-manicured nails
on slender white fingers,
hands that have never seen
a single day of work,
a body sculpted of pale cream marble,
with firm apple-breasts and a trim waistline.

But I have neither the time
nor the inclination
for quantum physics,
so I make do with what I have before me:
eyes that all but disappear
behind the glasses that I've had to wear
since the fourth grade.

Hands that never lost their baby fat,
palms always wet with anxiety,
nails chipped and worn down
from doing six loads of dishes per day
in a kitchen that never stays clean.

Breasts that droop like half-filled water balloons
and a belly that lies beside me in bed
like an obedient puppy.

But my eyes?
They've seen things you'll never get to
in places that you'll never go.

My hands have done more hard labor
than a chain gang on the highway,
but they have also
cradled the fragile head of a newborn,
closed the eyes of the dead.
These hands have healed.
My breasts and belly
were not always a wasteland
of dimpled skin and extra flesh –
but twice this body has grown
and given life,
leaving me with
a well-cushioned lap,
perfect to rock-a-by those babies,

Scavenger

Don't eat so much.

My own voice creeps
from the corners of my mouth,

but I don't notice
because I am stuffing my face full,

ink running down my chin,
dripping onto the pitted linoleum.

I am a scavenger and feed
on the rise and fall of words,

shove pages torn from books and magazines,
poems printed on cheap copy-paper,

into the gnawing void at the center of me,
until finally, sated,

I wipe my mouth with the back of my hand