

Crossing the Heart, a sonnet crown

1.

At les Galeries d'Anatomie Comparée

Revelations. We marvel at rows of skeletons in glass cases. We come to Paris to speak grievances, to witness this rupture after eleven years of marriage. I stop at the case labeled *tératologie*, the study of anomalies, monsters, Siamese pig embryos in amber liquid, other mistakes. Further down containers hold tongues: a tapir; the Pyrenees bear, (extinct); lungs of an argentine fox, part of an elephant's stomach, livers of tigers and llamas.

But the glory are the brains, shocking chalk white in each individual urn. I am suddenly happy to see this, the calligraphy of hand-written labels, the urge of the 19th century to collect, as if the amassing of species, of memory, could mean we know each other. How innocent, thrilling it is. Hopeful to see jars of hearts, dissected, labeled, peeled apart.

2.

Posterior Vena Cava

Heart labeled, dissected, peeled apart, jarred: mother, sister, lover, clairvoyant. Wife. Nothing more lifts from me, I sink to the plush silt bottom, loamy with longing. No one needs me. It never works. She is the uninvited crazy cousin, who shows up at the party, bangs at the window mouthing words, like a goldfish, talking to strangers. With a torn stocking, flaming heart bleeding through tattoo. She says, *remember where you came from*. He does not know that jewels fall daily

into the sea, a sieve of holes in my side. I do not tell him about my thirst. *Oh*, she says, *trust me, he can't know what this costs you*. She's eyeing the banquet. I shouldn't let her in, but her banging will wake the children. She's weeping. Her tears could damage the house. My sweet doubt, my one sure thing, for her I walk out, leave warmth, take her hand, run. *You're free*, she says, *Let's hide*.

3.

Scorpiones

You leave warmth for freedom he says, *like a rat hiding in the walls*, where I do not sleep in the spare bedroom. He is persistent. I'm adulterous. We assemble crimes in labeled jars. He tells our children we are divorcing. Mute I hold the youngest in my arms. We watch distant lightening. It arrives too late, bursting through the house, slamming shutters. No one sleeps, we play dead. *Mommy killed hope*, he tells them, lidded, suffocating. Each morning he asks to be forgiven for what he has said.

Shaped like oars, thousands of interlocking oars, heart muscle cells contract, contract. We row steady facing backwards. He cleans the chimney, stacks firewood, shows me how to attach the bike rack. We frighten a scorpion from its hiding. He catches it in a jar, for the children to see, he says, *Good luck, you should know how to handle your friend.*

4.

l'Hôpital de Montfavet

When friends call, I say I am handling it. The children sleep only when piled into one bed. There are safe keeping secrets we shared: how to sooth them through earaches, fevers, the bout of chicken pox, the pea in the nose, the true story of the hamsters' deaths when we held them through in their first grief. We made them memorize our home phone number. Explained evil, though the world was basically good, and they were the best part of ours.

After the ambulance took him, and they took off their unused Halloween costumes, I undid Pocahontas braids, wiped away glitter from the fairy godmother's face, I longed for the closed lids over their black granite eyes, prayed for the easing of the hardest nugget of their pain: *Dad did not love us enough to want to live?* Keeping them safe from his fistful of pills.

5.

Not wanting to live. Wanting them saved. His fistful of pills.
Smashing the cake. Throwing that toy at me. *Shut the fuck up*,
he said to our ten year old daughter. I collected lists cut into
daisy chains, crowns. At apologies, he always cried. I loved
coming home to find him playing with them, whole handfuls
of wings, giddy hope. Loved the ungrieved, his crazy mother,
the raw exposed wires of his brain. He never asked me to do it.
I chose to sweep floors, loved the quiet power of the masochist.

But even on mornings with our three children crowded around us,
even the abundance of all those years it took to make a marriage,
we were never enough. Three swords in the heart mean departure.
I lifted the oars, drifted, then let my heart go to another. Milk, apples,
soap, my damnation, his failure to heal, our last list.

6.

I don't give a damn about his failure to heal or his list
of my betrayals. I won't listen to his plea for more money,
or visit the hospital. For a while I wanted to spoon feed him
pure pain, every detail when I had to tell our son what his father
had done. *But this was a perfect day*. Our son would forever
hate the word *perfect*. He hated the word *alone*. *Rage always wins*,
he said. He talked about wars, the endless absurd and he hated me.
the dark angel, his mother, the messenger you kill. I'd made

a selfish choice. He wanted his father back, before sin,
which was not our failure to stay naked, but the reverse: the insult
of perfection, the parent, who giving the child freedom to go empty-
handed, gorges himself on the underworld. The son will follow
searching for the dark seed inside him, not yet knowing the new
moon, perfect imprint, nor how strong his arms will grow.

7.

Mare Tranquillitatis

To get perfect footprints, when Neil Armstrong walked on the moon, they say Stanley Kubrick staged a fake landing in a studio with 4 CIA guys who would soon die. Later, Kubrick turned paranoid with his time bomb of family secrets. Our son fears growing up, getting a job, his body turning into a man's. In airports, he's terrified of arrows, gates, codes, the closed anti-chambers and tunnels of the heart. We find conspiracy in everything. There's the other shooter, the grassy knoll, Roswell, and this real betrayal, my falling in love with some other. He listens to his father: my affair is

not love, it is just my personal neediness, my narcissistic yearning. Perhaps he's right. Look at the blown apart landscape of marriage, fragmented secrets. Who wants perfect vision, a mind overgrown and wild with uncertainty? It's better when there's a bad guy. The film in his head, what he most fears, is true. It happened. We returned from the moon only to live in a cave of shadows, just bend and drink.

8.

Grotte de Font-de Gaume, Dordogne

We are in a cave, it could be the moon, where reindeer bend to drink, on the walls, a composition of bison, a lone woolly mammoth. We want to know who made these choices, shamans, artists, deeply coded rituals. We want to know who he was. Or she. We love how the oval on the chest of the bison means the animal is pregnant, not mis-drawn with her large belly. We love the forms of women generous bending over, the graffiti of a woman's sex, the moist cave walls, a Sistine chapel

of wild horses. If only we could remember the whole story. All muscles are carved in memory, how we crawled deep into the cave with only a lantern of animal fat clenched in our teeth. When we love, we want to carry the burden of gossip and god. But we live in an age past the moral world. Values are slogans written on t-shirts tourists buy as lights for someone we believe waits for us through the dark.

9.

Autel á la Foudre

The light makes us believe, wading through the dark,
the sky branching into earth, where sand turns to black glass,
fuses the place of entrance; you inside me, *Fulgar Conditum*.
Here lightening was buried. Now we know it can happen.
We are liquid, glazed, all morning dazed by our blessing
and wounded by it. The Romans worshipped these places.
All life coming from one ecstatic embrace of earth and sky.
We know it returns to strike again and again on the raised

ferromagnetic earth. We know the iron taste of blood,
felt the hard bolt and heard thunder's moan. We hold
the wound when love made us brave. We don't know
what to believe, have no gods left, and come
with crossed hearts, sun broken skin, bearing broken
vows, no clear future, faithless, true to ourselves.

10.

Port-au-Prince

With broken vows, no clear future, we buried their mother
in the time of insurgents and wailing. No one could dig a single
grave with so many dying and the country on strike. We paid guards
to keep her body safe. My mother's mother gave her body to science,
medical school students, and nine months later her ashes returned
to us in a coffee jar of ambivalence. My daughter says we are just dirt
in the end. I watch her heart beat in the pool of skin on her chest—
I set it going, carried it buried inside me. Through miracle, magic,

voodoo, we find the perfect suffering. Couple, so it will fall into place.
The puzzle of our dead returned and ready to love again in what's
most broken. We can never leave. Even revolution is another way
of staying home. A fashion for subversion. We imprison and are imprisoned.
You will die in the wilderness where animals feast on your flesh—
you tell me this when we are naked, tracing the map of scars.

11.

When we are naked, we map wreckage, scars. We brace each other for the skidding sideways, loosing everything, risky love. The ground sheer black ice, deep transparent, —I am in free fall from my children, my name, my work, bruised, mute. Your hands sign a language reminding me how lonely I've been. Nothing else is. Everything changes suddenly— the world will burst into blossom, the valley carpeted with the debris of cherries. But that hope comes

late, on the other side of winter. First survive: the hushed steps in the woods, passing places where we made love, hearing someone speak your name, holding perfectly still through the ache— the way I did sometimes when you were here— waiting for the heart to stop grasping, learning not to fear the fall.

12.

Inch'Allah

In the fall, I stop grasping, *so be it*. Fear glides into darkness, winter closes in. Your absence reminds me of the many ways of faith, that neither God nor the idea of god exhausts infinity, uses up touch, shortens the halfway distance between two points, nor can it stop whispering oasis, and the heart will not stop beating when you think it should. We met in the hours before dawn. I learned the cave of your shoulders, tasted a hundred rivers

you crossed on horseback, agate black waters, licked rose alabaster you mined from canyons with ice. Always parting, I will hold the yolk of our days inside me through frozen forests, nothing will warm me, not even the light coming back, spring storms. That faith could be this relentless, there must be a reason, you will return, there are rules of the game.

13.

I don't know the rules of the game. I watch my son play rugby; he's just learning. He's been told to hit hard with his mass because suddenly in the 14th year of his life he's grown into a man. I see him in Batman's cape. I see him sleeping with soft totems of safety. I see him in Rome, in my arms, strangers squeezing his fat legs, proclaiming, *Gladiatore!* He hesitates to tackle. What if he's too gentle for this world? Outside this stadium forces are amassing, out of control.

He senses but does not ask about the nameless battles I wage. Overhead long-winged planes hover in circles. On the hills stand the ruins of an ancient fortress. Other fathers run along the sides shouting instructions. My son carefully watches the smile on my face when I speak of love. A talisman. All the while, his father rages in a distant city.

14.

Late love

We are old. We have left behind the rage of cities. As a talisman, we gather up missed times, meals you made from freshly hunted meat. I want you when I was still bearing children, the Amazon I was. I would hold you in my womb. Fierce, but careless, if I found you then, I would have missed you. Once watching a friend play ultimate Frisbee, an older player, over thirty—(are you smiling?)— he had what the young lack: economy, grace, placed himself in each moment. Sometimes I see what you most fear I will see: your age,

the body imperfect. In Buenos Aires, the woman who gave up everything for tango told me, *Look at the shoes, you can tell by his feet. When he's good enough you become the gift.* She refused the young ones, wanted only to dance with one old man, half her height, and I laughed when she pointed him out. But then as their anatomies rowed together, I marveled. This late life revelation, the best coming last.

15.

We are at the *Galeries d'Anatomie comparée*, marvel of rows.
We are hearts dissected, labeled, peeled apart. We are mothers.
We leave warmth. We are free and hiding. We are friends.
We wanted too much. We are his fistful of pills. We are lists
and failures. We are healed. We trade perfect unreal moon landings
for the imperfect, for strong arms. We are on the moon with Kubrick.
We are in a cave, where reindeer bend to drink. We stand at a Roman
shrine for lighting. We believe we can wait.

We have no clear future, faithless. We are true to ourselves.
We are naked. We are a map of scars. We wait for the heart to stop
grasping, to learn to be fearless. We are the fall. We do not know
the rules of the game. We are sons and fathers. We have left rage,
traveled from cities. We are old. We are where we will love
well enough. We are on time at last. A marvel, a revelation.