POETS
OUT LOUD
PRIZE
WINNERS

Lee Robinson
Hearsay, 2004

Janet Kaplan
The Glazier’s Country, 2003

Robert Thomas
Door to Door, 2002

Julie Sheehan
Thaw, 2001

Jenniver Clarvoe
Invisible Tender, 2000
FOR MY TEACHERS:

Marie Ponsot
Janet Abels
and
David Sinclair Birdsell
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The Early History of Photography

The first photographer’s sister spent the summer watching the leaf-imprints disappear. Just like life, she wrote to him, but a little slower; like a chemical recipe for gratitude.

Shhh, the first photographer said, hovering over the silver salts arrayed like listening devices. Don’t let the sun know what we’re doing. This is a god we can capture and he’ll never know it, never miss these little fistfuls of glitter, dumbed down.

Dear sister, you must know the miracle is in the stoppage. Motion is cheap and plentiful; standing still is what costs and costs.
Episodes in the History of Photography: Childhood, ca. 1903

(Jacques-Henri Lartigue)

I can't read yet but I still know that I am something born for happiness the flight down stone steps the air whistling the word balustrade like something the troubadours hide in their purses.

The luckiest angels the ones of gravity lick my ears like puppies. My cat jumps like a star. My red ball lifts off my nurse’s eyes aloft like a brand-new saint’s.

Gravity is my own god the one who lets me trick him the one who allows everything as long as everything lasts just a second just enough for the clicking sound of my eye giving way into the nothing the glorious the temporary surrounding my flying falling leaping beloveds who will never in my book die.
Two Math Lessons

Grade 3
What belongs with what and how
do you name it. Now that’s a math
I can do, I thought, opening to page 1,
the very beginning, the first
white crocus in the season of idea.
*The gaggle, the pride.* The happiness of that,
the ease, the luxurious narrative possibilities
of the geese, the crows, the family of smiling lions.
Until page 2: the hard birth of abstraction,
the transparent knife too heavy and sharp to use.
The practically invisible, snippy awfulness of the minus sign.
The black, gut-punching spaces opening
in the multiplication table; the utter
dannability of 8 x 9.
Now I am an astronaut cut loose from the physical ship
in my deflating silver suit, losing something
vital with every float-away, go-away,
get-away second.

Grade 9
Returning, an alien life-form, fourteen, I fell
into the open hatch door marked *Factoring Out* and found
something to love: working it out unto zero,
the weightless satisfaction, the clicking lock
of *nothing more to do.*
Episodes in the History of Photography: Girlhood, ca. 1865

(Clementina, Lady Hawarden, and Her Daughters)

All our games are purposeful; all our costumes, including the paper stars on our foreheads, actual. In and out of mother’s mind we work as hard as any twelve apostles, playing ourselves into the real, dressed up in whatever will get us there, in time, in time.
The Adventures of This Minute

This minute enters gravity
and likes it, for a while.

This minute serves up something fiendish-yellow and hollow that whistles straight over noon’s net. The officials, the clockhands, clap and call it fair.

This minute, anybody’s dog, never knows its owner’s answer to the question, what kind? But it guesses.

This minute, on a bender, seeks shelter in orange. And blazes, tulip.

This minute hollers its name just to hear it bounce against the glass and water walls of a single span of attention.

This minute, sealed in sleep’s diving bell, dreams it can retrieve its lost ducks, the arguments, from last week’s blackish waters.

This minute drops what it can’t use and then itself like something burning, paper, words.
A Man in the Early Stages of Alzheimer’s Disease Talks to His Twenty-Year-Old Daughter

And what’s your name again the father says
and she sees all at once how the ocean enters everywhere
how the rib drifts from its cage
how the eyes those fraternal twins are parted
despite all the years in the womb holding hands
how the bones of the feet go their own way
how even the neurons must leave home at last just as she
is about to.
Miracles A and B

(Mark 5:21–43: Woman Stops Bleeding; Girl Rises from the Dead)

The girl has that bluish, waiting look
I used to have before I started running
out of myself in red erasable footprints.

She doesn’t know the whole equation yet
for missing, she a single number waiting to be
added and divided on which side of the lesser-than.

Watch: she’ll flicker and go under, the floating decimal point
in her face slipping into one of the gaps, the skipped
beats, the stitches kids that age sometimes
drop, knitting the world out of sugar and idea.
I’m standing entire outside the house
of what I was. The girl is dead.

She’ll walk again in just a minute, but different:
she’ll have lost the patient look, stepping
into the red shoes just becoming her size.
Field

Scratchy itchy twenty I said I want
To get my hands in the dirt of it where
Is the middle of my life.

Up to my knees in it now at forty what
Do I know but that even the middle is nothing but edge
After edge and my life is the place where the plow blade does
Its work that is my work.
Dream Fable of Horse and Fish

The horse I am runs deeper
and deeper into the city, willingly
trading the manifold wild for the one
common herb of manifold possible tastes.
Its mane still works in the breeze like before.

The fish, out of love for the horse,
hits the hard sidewalks and finds them
very hard indeed. I ask the fish
I am: are you so sure
you can give it up: the education,
the ambitions, the plans? The fish
cries and cries its water away.
Piero I: Myth of Instead

(Legend of the True Cross: The Death of Adam)

My father when he was dying scooped up a handful of raw time and watched it glisten and drip. *Get rid of this*, he said. *Find out* what will work. So I went and knocked at the back gate of the old man’s suspicious, sumptuous past. Waited, waited in the atemporal breeze. What finally came to answer was dressed like an untouched hour, still in its white wrapping. *Listen,* I said, *here’s what I need,* handing over the list with just the one word on it. There was a silence the exact length of my father’s life. *There is no mercy like that,* it finally said. *But here’s what you get instead:* appearance, disappearance, the one green shoot. *Plant it and get out of the way.*
Episodes in the History of Photography: Storyville Brothel, New Orleans, 1912

(E.J. Bellocq)

Every ghost through here leaves a spill
 yours the polite nowhere look and god’s
 own error on your shoulders asking what
 is the future and where. Not yet scratched
 in its mirror I can tell you
   in the lightning run through my black stocking
   in the patent firestrap of my black shoe
   in the satin pillowful of money burning
   in the glass shawl I’ll break to wear.
Thank you you never fail to say and leave
 its picture splinters on the bed.
Ovidian Prayer:
On What Burns One Up

Desire for the genuine: the sun's original
Cadillac; the lover's true, light-struck
face. I want it. I want it right
now. Let my unfinished things
get born without me. Or the world
be set like a clock back to its dumb green
secret. Or let at least the moss get back
to work, cover up the scorch-marks.
Nothing Seems to Happen. Everything Sails.

Nothing seems to happen but the daily swimmings and drownings and savings of this bright, bound ocean. Everything in the room, the room itself, sails the dense, clear current, blue ship launching into the luck, future, nowhere we might or might not have, into what we assume, take on as if it had weight and we were sure of veering together into the rest of every day.
Episodes in the History of Photography: 
Mexico City, 1923–26

(Tina Modotti and Edward Weston)

1. Portrait of Her Reciting
   In the prolonged exposure
   her voice accumulates
   long vowels swinging
   consonants ticking
   my audible life is there
   waiting for itself.

   Let it wait.

2. Rooftop Photo Session
   The city below unpockets its harsh, sacred toys
   for us, but up here I’m slick as platinum paper.
   The roof tiles cook like little stoves at noon and you
   lay me out on their perfect light with a silver
   chloride blanket. It leaves a mark, a darkish sun:
   that’s me, leaving already for the big future.
   Who is taking what, the picture wants to know.
   My judas puppets, my patient holy piñatas—
   all for smashing, all for keeps.

3. Commission to Document Religious Images
   Juguete, angelito, unhappy wooden
   god, don’t forget me just because
   I’m looking right at you and starting to know your names.
4. *Letter from California*
   Blessed be nothing, she said, running
   her hand along the shine. I turned it all
   into idea, the better to own it, the better to travel.

5. *Rhyolite*
   Someday I’ll go to the desert and make the doorway
   explicit. But I already know there is only
   doorway, pure doorway, sometimes with a lovers’s name.
   It has other names, too: oxygen, rock. Open, locked.
Him Fishing

In this floating miniature kingdom
he is the dark upright among silver
horizontals—boat, lake, the invisible
fish he’s coaxing like coins from a giant’s pocket.
The pole bends double; his attention tightens like a lens.
The fish a sliver of shapely, unreadable thought;
his the solitude I’ve sworn out loud to protect.
Episodes in the History of Photography: The Invention of the Solarization Process, 1929

*(Lee Miller and Man Ray)*

In the darkroom his eyes rolled back like headlamps. That’s how he knew he was seeing her. Oops, she said, spilling the light out of its box, I thought you said *drop the pretense.*

You think I’ll never leave you. I’ll leave you this: the body’s bright edge brought back, the light-struck negative of the place your eye has been taking all night.

Blink or you’ll miss it when I say *I’m right here, my love.*
This Minute Q & A

Q: What spicy get-up is this minute wearing now.
Q: What is it whispering inappropriately, privately.
Q: Whom is it wrapping in its gauzy scarves.
Q: What charming foreign city is it always leaving in its heart.
Q: Under whose bed does it leave its satin dancing shoes.

A: Nobody, nobody, nobody.
A: Every single sound.
Episodes in the History of Photography:  
Bal Musette, 1931

(Brassaï)

1. Promenade
Somewhere here is the secrecy of the open heart,  
the hidden promenade of it, the whistle and shush, if  
you have ears to hear. Otherwise the eye fills up  
on desire’s empty chemical lumens: the blinking,  
scattershot surface of a whole, insular ocean.  
The tuxedo girls, the two boys sharing  
the one suit, the local butchers dancing  
in their sleep awake in the roar of a great, sweet  
privacy. What you see is the red satin herring,  
the burnt-paper fancy dress between you  
and what love looks like to itself.

11. Two Boys, One Suit
Lean way toward me, you with the seven habits  
of holy fools. There’s this to share: the skin  
we made up and call world. Put your arms  
way round me to find the difficult elements,  
even the calcium, rocking themselves away  
till the dust shines with us. What was the word  
you just blew away like chalk? Wish.
Piero II: Itinerary

(The Queen of Sheba, on Her Way to Ask Solomon
Hard Questions, Encounters Something Surprising)

My luggage crammed with gold bribes and a list
of questions like a paper-clip necklace glittering
and scratching. There were numbers, I’d heard, that know God.
I’d come to study the math, but got no further
than banging my knees on the hard edge of this,
an opaqueness, an elementary bridge between what
and what. It looks solid, but keep looking:
the molecules whistle and spin; the little trap
doors in the atoms open and shut. As solid
as hydrogen but I’ll have to walk on it anyway to drop
my passport in the water, let my picture unlock.
Is that what prayer is, unlearning the names of.
Episodes in the History of Photography: Lake George, NY, 1933

(Georgia O’Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz)

Can I unload the lake’s green light would I know where to look with the desert’s magnets pulling the blue metal in my eye.
I still know how to swim through your picture of me rock mermaid trailing silver salt crow’s feet married also to this minute. Which of my two husbands is it you gives me love’s later invitation take leave freely.
Can you picture now what I am taking leaving a kiss unhinged of all its water.
Ovidian Prayer:
On What Turns One into a Tree

Dread of another’s pressing need or just
of time’s usual, personal demands. I don’t
want to. I don’t want to at all. Let me
give away what I am by the roots. Or be what comes back
from a long falling-off. Or at least let what I drop
be an amber someone else can use.
Why Not Call It a Carriage Instead

Not exactly a mistake. Not so much dropped as *let down*, like rope from the sailor’s hand. Didn’t get very far down the multiplication table, did you, little multiplier. And then what happened, after the glue went kerflooey, just like Heraclitus says it does? But doesn’t he also say: *what was scattered gathers*. So what else have you gathered into, what else has closed you a term in its fist? You were three or four words leaving the body, express. Where did you get spoken? On the way out. What were the words? *On the way out.*

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Episodes in the History of Photography:
Honeymoon in Russia, 1942

(Margaret Bourke-White and Erskine Caldwell)

His equipment: One corduroy jacket. One ear-dictionary.
One blood-typewriter.
My equipment: Three thousand flashbulbs, individually wrapped.

  Eight cameras, one for each workday, one for his dreams.
  My eyes’ heavy jewelry leaning toward the magnets in his hair.
  The war, both wars, the tripod I can’t get steady.
Ovidian Prayer:
On What Turns One into Stone

The future coming at me with its claws out. The mirror saying: did you forget? I want it to stop. I want it to stop for always. Let the statue of me offer its arms to the snow. Let the slow-mo of my heart get me nowhere. Let it take forever and a day to get there.
This Minute’s Stuff

In this minute’s jewelry box
all the zero-shaped things
fit you like your very own numbers.

Peek open this minute’s purse, built like a lung
to allow and allow: the compact between you and it,
the eye-sized mirror you know a little something in.

Rummage this minute’s closet,
xylophoning the hangers of the future’s fancy dresses
already given clean away.

This minute’s medicine cabinet opens and shuts heartwise.
Its heart medicine tastes like the rough, dissolving salts
licked off your beloved’s photograph.

Under this minute’s bed you can juggle all you like.
Dust is no object but a process you can understand
with every cell of your juggling hand.

Slink past this minute’s swap meet.
You can hear its familiar voice shouting
*Up for grabs, all of it.*
Ovidian Psalm:
On What Turns One into a Bird

(Procne and Philomel)

The betrayer built into every cell; the trap-door in all the sidewalks. Take what you want, I’ll never not tell, even when my tongue makes way for the scissors of the empty air. Even falling I’ll still wear the story in red letters on my shirt and everyone will know our real name is fly-by-day, fly-by-night.
Piero III: Weight

(Solomon, Meeting the Queen in the Temple,
Acknowledges Certain Construction Problems)

And Solomon left all the vessels unweighed, because
they were exceeding many: neither was the weight in
the brass found out. —I Kings 7:48

Well, it is after all a kind of immortality,
the blank numbers riddling the house I built
to keep all this bright nothing in; the gilded
interior like a mind where the alphabetic noises go
at night. And, yes, always the one piece
that refuses, the resistant incalculable thing I can’t
do anything with but hope for a while it holds my weight.
Episodes in the History of Photography: Paris Street, n.d.

(Eugène Atget)

Hold your eye open like god’s: the people come and go like breath, like fingerprints in salt solution. The city is never not under construction, but the houses stay: patient animals, sleepers turning, private and hard at work.

The waking have one world in common. Sleepers meanwhile turn aside, each into a darkness of his own.

*  
Even a soul submerged in sleep is hard at work, and helps make something of the world.

Work

(*Sayings of the Desert Fathers/Photographs of Robert ParkeHarrison*)

1. Of Humility
   Haven't you already disappeared.
   Make it work.
   Make it flower.

2. Of Quiet
   Learn how to say: there is no one here besides me
   and the absolute noise.
   I remember water, the pendulum
   sound of it.

3. That One Ought to Live Soberly
   The sky is too large and thoughts scatter like
   photons. Why I don't go outside.
   The garden is plugged in so I
   can keep my eyes down.

4. Of Self-Restraint
   Some people can't handle the silence and insist
   on flying nowhere, nowhere.
   Toward is the thing I like
   to dream of best.
5. Of Love
   I live alone because of the single-mindedness of angels,
   the thousand thousand white desert flies. Even
   just one man has too many intentions, all of
   them dear.
   I bring a little something to the crash site and leave it
   there. I am not disappointed.

6. That One Ought to Pray Without Ceasing
   Stay where you are and disappear a little more.
   How far can this thing go. How far
   can anything go.

7. Of Discretion
   Wear yourself down to nothing, you'll never be as jobless
   as the angels, secure in their continual, invisible
   churn. Maintain just sufficient hunger and work to
   keep it alight.
   Who made the world and then unmade it with light.
   I ride my homemade bicycle in between.

8. Of Perfecting
   What is there left to do: become only fire.
   I can build my way there
   hammering on water.

9. Of Patience
   My thoughts rake me over.
   Why does it seem that I am always just finishing
   raking up what's left of the world.
10. That One Ought Not to Possess Anything
   Forget your name, already empty.
   I like the wasted look of things and that
   is my kingdom.

11. That Nothing Ought to Be Done For Show
   The secret life the only work. Hidden from what,
   from whom.
   No one can see me here, waiting between
   the two bells, the pronouns.

12. Of Fortitude
   I wove them for a year, and when my room got too
   crowded, I burned them all and started again.
   That’s how much I need the work.
   Yes, it is dirty, the work, but I only sometimes get tired flying
   the preterite’s stubborn, oxygenated kites.

13. Of Contemplation
   Press this up against your heart: I am not here.
   My contraptions flower. Even here
   there is something.
The Life of the Verbs

begins when you feel it slow down and start stopping:
the grab-wheel, the what-if wheel,
the where-is-it wheel, the clench-wheel.
It slows down and undoes and what enters
is only the life of the verbs. Beginning with open,
beginning with offer, beginning again and again with allow.
The verbs whoosh through you, laughing like neutrinos,
asking what are you made of? Asking, exiting.
February

Cure

(Minor Characters from the Gospel of Mark)

Dumb spirit deaf spirit spirit dirt
Muscles into all the rooms in my throat
Throws my mind in the fire
Holds my head under water too long.

Is it me this bully must be
What else could so knot up my tongue’s white cords
Jam the upper roadways of my ears
Lock down my eyes’ cranky metal gates?

Be opened does someone actually say it and what
do I see
Men like trees walking
Trees like men kissing
Water like girls sleeping
Girls like water talking.

It doesn’t need to be any clearer the way I’ve been always entire.
It Turns Out

It turns out that no children is the unlooked-for adventure. My hours, unhooked, breathing, from the blood machine, beat and flutter like new little lungs and hearts as seen by special sonography.

My hours, honorably discharged after training for an 18-year war that never happened, drop their rifles. How light, light, stepping out of their like-new camo suits, which, I gather, still let you be seen through to.

The life of my hours unbuckles into present tense. I walk and walk in its bright blue shoes.
That the Gospels Are Motion Studies

Look at his continual busman’s holiday: ferrying himself and the multitudes from coast to salt-leprous coast; jumpstarting the batteries in the lungs left running overnight; setting the motors in the stalled retinas whirring—Christ the roving mechanic, rewiring the minute’s moving parts.

Christ the method actor turns faster than the speed of film. Even the extras jolt into their cures, dropping frames on their way to an anonymous, useful afterwards: she rose and ministered unto them. He picked up his bed and went home.
The Untamed Thing

Allow somehow for the untamed thing.
Shy, slippery. Severed, whole, severe.
Who brought it? It brought itself,
as the ocean does and does. It brings itself.

You be the silent farmer playing up the ground
for its harrow music, made half of dirt
and half of the metal attentions, turning.
Skim off the what you would.
What's left is the untamed thing,
which you will forget, you can't help it, into its verbs.
This Minute Reads a Little
New Testament at Bedtime

It always likes the miracle parts, the double axles
and triple lutzes on time’s ice. Ten! Ten! Ten!
it shouts, holding up its score cards.
But it also like the lulls and pools in between,
the lexical acreage, the koans. Hold still,
it says to itself, and let the Wisteria Sermon climb you.
It never fails to get sad when things inevitably go to pieces—
the dumb cops, the smarmy prosecutors, the perp walk
leading always to the same last thirsty room.
But wait, wait. Something in purely reflective clothing
is well on its way. Something to point
to the emptied place and laugh its blinding laugh.
Wrapped up in that raiment, this minute puts out the light.
The Saints’ Minute Calendar

Monday they wear this minute’s rhinestones and elbow-length lavender gloves.
Tuesday they ride this minute’s faulty fire engine, whooping.
Wednesday they pole-vault the police barricades into this minute’s parking lot of roses.
Thursday they pirouette in this minute’s wheelchair.
Friday they ignore the odd clicking sound under this minute’s hood and step on the gas.
Saturday they stay home and sew this minute’s initials into the collars of their flight suits.
Sunday they sleep in and pull this minute’s covers over their heads. The grammar of their dreams is nothing but verbs and adverbs.
Edge

1.
Sit right at the edge, legs dangling
over. Learn to love the air’s empty
decisions, having nothing to do with you.
Heels bouncing heartbeats off the cliff wall:
that’s the edge. A little copper-colored
lightning braceletting the sky: that’s chatter,
gone missing quickly in the cobalt. A few weedy
shrubs pushing out of the rock gaps, what
are they? Blood noise. The industry of breath.

2.
Did you know: the alleged edges and surfaces of things
consist of electromagnetic fields only.
Unplug them and your hand goes right through, nothing
much mixing with nothing much else. Physical,
but not the way you’d thought. Like that verb the human

3.
Be opened, but don’t tell anyone,
Christ kept saying. It spills over, however.
I can’t not tell. No edges is my name
for God, while I must ride the raw edge,
the this-minute, the vegetal light, the seems.
Piero IV: Camera

( Constantine’s Dream )

All night I can hear the world hum,
a refrigerator door left open somewhere, the cold
rush of I promise you this wasting itself

around the minor constellations. Something the color
of new ice silted up with an old idea
rockets into your dream: the one about

the war and no blood left under your nails,
the one in which everything tilts because of your weight.
I look straight into the camera. There is nothing to want.
Episodes in the History of Photography: Wall, Chicago, 1948

(Aaron Siskind)

I built my eye a house in the unmakings where intention unzips its long silk coat and lets out the accident it always carries the soft grenade in its heart pocket. Here the oxygen blooms awry and here the water slides its knife and here the forgiven local gods walk their steadfast entropic walk saying there is no abandonment just the varied unending attentions some personal some not. Here the goddess of the water stain shakes the box of alphabets in her arms and says come and get it. Dust-letter fire-letter let me read you while I can silently first then out loud.
Two Cities

I’ve come to think of them in terms of throngs, of hosts, of biblically-proportioned gangs of perpetual potentialities, massing and agitating but light, like bubbles leaving boiling water.

An electron-weight urban populace, as densely arrayed as the residents of Mexico City! Of Nairobi! Of Beijing! Of midtown Manhattan at noontime, an almost corpuscular jostling.

I’ve long lost sight, among those several billion bobbing heads, of the one or two I used to harangue on the spirit phone: *Come on now, darling, please don’t dawdle.*

They’re off spinning their spirit careers in the busy spirit city, with spirit sweethearts and spirit apartments of their own.

Every so often, though, I do get a card, handwritten fresh in grief’s old vein-colored inks.

I read it over, drop it in the recycling bin, look out the window at the biological city, and surprise myself saying, *Thank you, who never did get born. Thank you just the same.*
The Natural History of This Minute

1. Its Minerals
Streaked with iron and salt, something
you can heft but can you get
inside it, the geode you’ll have to break,
the handful of jacks you’ll have
to scatter to know.

2. Its Vegetables
Lean in: you’ll hear the conversion machines
heat up everything like love. You’ll hear
the run of light’s sugars and the eating of light’s
bread. You’ll hear them thinking and what they think
is: oh, so that’s what you, your listening, sound like.

3. Its Animals
Like plants: geotropic, photo-
tropic, both at once, and with full assent.
Yes and yes, they say. They also sleep
their yes, asking without knowing: just
a little more. They keep inventing
the equation I desire x and the magnet
forward motion you are riding now.
Episodes in the History of Photography:
Home, ca. 1970

(Diane Arbus)

Where am I at home with the gravity-strafoed
dirt saints arriving at now gradually
in pieces like identical triplets woozy and grateful
with delay. With the circus girl shiny with invisibility
swallowing nothing but her own platinum edge.
With the scandalous detailed christs turning
$x$ into $\gamma$ because they know themselves well
enough. Come on I say in each one’s ear.

Let’s walk light’s plank its single
fraying footbridge. Let’s open the jack-knife
at its heart and be like anyone
the specific errors of our ways.
What Sustains

The local stations of the more and less solid.
The doubts of the introspective centurions,
like intermittent nailheads in their porous faith,
providing the structural integrity, the narrative jolt.

Whatever it is, it also flirts away, skirts away, high heels spinning.
It plays, it mercies. Carries a crumpled, clean, summer-weight sadness
down at the bottom of its purse where the loose beads click
and the coins settle for nothing but themselves.

The riches of this nothing, the wastrel gleam of it.
The poor throat empty at its center, singing-saying: feed.
Riches

In the very midst of my riches,
the gold gravel silting up in the future’s little corners,
I begin to wonder: where can I start to strip it?
How much can I set loose in the near-zero gravity
of whatever my life floats in, the aqueous, imageless
process I dream up as God’s mind?

Let’s see: no cat, no kids, no dog. But what about the man
ticking like fire beside me, the shining
track of privacy running parallel to mine?

Him I will love with my whole disappearing act.
Him I will love with the clock talking its trash in my throat.
Him I will love the length of my unspooling ordinal numbers.
Him I will love jangling the bracelets of minutes stacked
all the way, all the way, up both arms.
Red Canoe

Be what we are a goings-on going where.
Easily upset readily uprighted.
Be the lesson we are sworn and built to learn
how to borrow lightness faithfully until we are it.
Episodes in the History of Photography: 
Shell, 1990
(Aaron Rose)

What are the verbs of the place: the eye's mercury slide down the ossicular sheen, the vertebral silk. The slide of everything you love along the calcium road, the solarized road.

Every object here a purse full of minutes, the purse with the rip in its seam. What you see is the spill, gold dust and tin dust. The sound would be that of a single heart in its cartilage, yours.
Ovidian Love Poem

_Baucis saw Philemon come into leaf,
and Philemon saw Baucis put forth leaves.
Then . . . while it was allowed them,
they spoke and answered one another's speech . . .
(Ovid, _Metamorphoses_, book V)

Love let us see the tree in each other
speak this minute's green speech
our mouths the oak & linden
leaves they were always bent on being.

Ovid, _Metamorphoses_, tr. Charles Martin, Norton, 2004
What to Do with This Minute

Turn this minute loose.
No fingerprints, no marks.
No black paint carrying your name
or the name you think this minute endures.
This minute is without its name and itching to be gone.
And you, to live it, let it.
Like That

Any of night’s rushing
edgeless noises—rain,
traffic, wind—can do it:
unbraid me from the hard knot,
the hook knot, the gut-punch
wakeup that remembers
its lead medicine: *this ends.*
How does it work? The way a shirt
left out in the rain for years
becomes rain. Becomes years.
Becomes what unmakes it
in every axle of fabric, x
by x. So each pixel
of listening loosens, flickering,
blinking: a field of
losing, alight. Let me
be undone by everything like that.
Cambium

1. In botany, the layer of tissue between the bark and wood, from which new wood and bark develop.

Remarkable, isn’t it, that we’ve imagined a right to pursue happiness, pursue it like the bad god after the girl who’d rather be a tree than give over. So pursue the tree. Pursue the leaves. Pursue the bark beneath which lies the little lab of change, unseen, making and making and bringing the new out of nothing, it seems, but itself. From where, from where, I want to know, my pursuit seized up and my hand at something like rest on the bark that bites me.

2. A bodily fluid formerly supposed to repair waste of tissue.

It’s that formerly supposed that breaks my heart a little: another good idea we had to give up. But as for the heart, does it not in fact waste a bit, if not break, and what else does the repairs but our good and ultimately unworkable ideas: the Dutch kid’s finger keeping back the watery end of the world?
3. An exchange of property.

I was never much for volleyball, especially all that slapping up against the tender skin of the inner forearms—whose idea was it to have it sting so much? But even I can see the implications of a game in which to have and to give away are a single motion. Spike it! I hear my teammates shouting. Spike it straight into everyone else’s emptying hands.
Piero V: Invention

(Torture of the Prisoner and Discovery of the True Cross)

1.
I threw my heart, stuffed with its alien intelligence, down a well: tell me. I pulled my heart, that starveling, up by the hair: tell me where you buried it, the last of the genuine thing.

2.
I kept thinking: this can’t be it, the leftover junk of all the everyday torments. How will I know it from the plain geometry of the clenched hand opening always at last against its will?

3.
I’d imagined when I found it the world would spin shut, perfected as a gold egg. But my invention crashed and sputtered in its carbon arc, like the too-bright precision accident of any particular life.

4.
Later, the nails, the last ideas, floated up empty as new syringes. I melted them down, mixed them in with all the other gleaming, stubborn insistences. All but one, which I threw in the sea: give your inventions away.