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Wishers

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

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in

Creative Writing and Writing for the Performing Arts

by

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Committee Co-Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

For Robert

Wishers
poems

All the Same

Coffee followed bagel
Mother dressed for work.
Father straightened his tie.
The kids went to school.

Billy rested on Wednesday
morning under
six feet of rain moistened sod.

He No Longer Needs it, This Dead Man

To inform the mourners
of this change
of ownership

I've left
aerosol infused hues—
blue around green
green over red—
letters stenciled
using a cardboard sign.

I took my time
on the angel topped grave
the single white headstone.

The Day After Billy Died

Remember the earthen stairs
wrapping around the redwoods,
misnamed the Trees of Mystery?

You'd never carved
our names into trees
with a kitchen knife.

That day no other sounds
existed. Our imprints were
glossed over by rain.

Your Phone was Disconnected

Words tip down
the arteries and tendons
of my neck, past my chest,

off my fingers
and into a pool
next to the phone.

I Still Have to Drive Home

He is buried by
the 91 Freeway.
I slit the callous
off of my thumb.

A slice across
my heel throbs
in my leg.

The past year runs
down my collarbones,
I grip the black wheel
of my small green car.

The Scent of Almonds

The pinch began
in the right arm,
under the seam
of the black sleeve.
It should have been
seen much sooner.

But that's all speculation,
a discussion left
to bedrooms stripped
of light, parties
unattended, fingers
cold on the table.

Ending Spot

Feel through your folly, claw
the rip-pulled waves, the sound
that starts. Add just your stance,
moon-phased and dishonest child.
Open wide to mourning's blow.

Thirty-Five

Evening's resistant room
brought down mountains
when I was thirteen.
It was a Tuesday.

I had tried to give up.
The carpet I put my head
against was maroon and dirty.
I counted out thirty-five pills.

Hoarder

A woman sits on her sofa,
cries in the living room
about her dead son.

Large piles of Tupperware
surround her feet, reflect her face;
a room of clear empty coffins.

I cannot sleep alone.

Resurface, Drown, Repeat

My feet
push off
porous walls.

I've done
wrong here—
do they know
what I think?

The meniscus
surface arches
above my head;
my fingers grab
for morning.

Legacy

I bought a blue waterproof
mascara that matches the letters
I try to write every night.
I throw out each page,
leave my signatures unfinished.

*It's better this way, he says to me
as I toss off another, my head
upon my knees. There is time if,
just for tonight, you'll stand up
from your desk. Put the pen away.*

I take this man's hand, return to bed.
There is nothing more I can pass on
to my dead, deposited in their graves.
I peer into photos, stepping through
their framed life, out into my own.

They had left behind the same kind
of books I am building today, ones
I will leave to each of the children
I don't have, the ones who I know
will have to watch me slip away.

Elegy

I asked it to rain yesterday.
I asked it to rain so hard.
It was all I had the power for
and it could never be enough.

I stood in the middle of my house;
it's tough to keep the dust from the
sills and the floors. I kept hoping
to drown everything I had. No
room in the rooms we had bought

for much else except me
and sadness We cook together.
I plan and wash, sadness burns
and leaves. My husband watches.
He doesn't know what to say.

The Dog Asks Questions I Cannot Answer

He barks at strangers,
the light lined floor tiles.

Everyday he looks up
at me and asks

*Will we see the moon
tonight when you and I
sit together to write
letters to Him?*

I don't know,
I say.

*Will the stars be covered up?
Will these walls finally fall away?*

Maybe we shouldn't see that far
beyond this room, I answer him.

Now look,
the strangers are in our yard.

Josh

On Mountain St.
a white ambulance
keeps his empty body.

The onlookers knew him
by sight. I thought I knew
him better.

Wind pulls my hair
as the ambulance passes.

The gravel road calls
out at each corner.
Left.
Right.
Right.
Away

Pillage

Ed Herrmann narrates
the history of the Templars,
the fall of the Holy Land,
the empty rooms
of my white-walled home.

They became a standing army
with no leader, no bases,
no land to drop their armor.

Here my shoes are left
upside down in the bedroom
and I go to bed
after yet another fight.

Inside the Neighbors' House I Wonder

What did the children see,
beyond the clogged street,

expert technicians, police
tape twirling around trees?

I watched at two thirty
that morning as she was

taken; it was a Friday.
I could not look away from

his throat; the skin split free,
the red inside his chest cavity.

Things I Know

I have only myself

The strawberry blooms

A man sits up in bed

The last paragraph unsatisfied readers

Only one pen feels ok

Things should have been kept quiet

She only meant to help

Your fingers are just right

The right hug, executed poorly

No matter what they say

Light bulb slivers found in the carpet

Who is to blame for this misstep?

For the Man the Angry at Starbucks

First he threw
the chair
then the table.

The Last Time She Asked

He fantasized about escaping.
The house, a framework frayed
and torn until a door unhinged,
and fell onto the bedroom floor.

She'd lined shelves with arguments
and weariness, an obstacle course
framed by the afraid. *Do it yourself?*
she asked, *No, do it for me, damn it.*

A Beggar's Sign, Suspended from a Fishing Pole

*Who am I kidding,
I'm fishing for beer.
A nickel a dime
will add to my pot
drawn from often
to drown the evening.*

Virgin Afternoon

The man makes circles
with his fourth finger
on a faux wood table.

A woman weaves into
the white ring
of her coffee mug.

His head pulls back
up to the light above:
What do you want?

Her chair falls away.
The mug tips over.
She leaves a single

swatch of blood.
His finger wipes over it,
brings it to his lips.

A Wooden Sign Jesus

Red words inked
by an unknown author
left to stand curbside.
Particleboard roadside,
a savior. This scripture
was written for me
to announce the coming—

To Worship

Sunday-worn sidewalk, turned over
under too many feet, pressed down
with the overlord orange sun.
Legs determined to carry each believer
to a church, an individual receiver,
something self-inflicted; home-grown
reflections flash in foot falls, lone
in an unrelenting heel-toe passover;
call out. Run towards. Embrace,
slowly. Drop that tear, let it splash
into the deep marks of stress relief,
cracks that break the earth-face,
split the foundations, let it slash open,
burn veins to a deep seeded belief.

The Last Day I Spent Alone

I walk in
to the candle
bought at the fair.

Strawberry hangs
alongside the eaves
at sunset tonight.

Alone on gray tile
the kitchen spreads
out of reach.

I meet Billy
again in the water
reflecting from the floor.

Our picture frames
hold the empty photos
of other families.

The breeze sweeps
the dirt and papers
and I let them all go.

Wishers

White fuzz green
stemmed dreams
long along the lawn:
plush sidewalk cushion.
Each seedpod
hardly attached,
bristling to float
away. Today
I uproot
a sole bloom,
press the white
to my lips,
tint the tips
with lipstick
usher each
afloat.

Fireworks

Outside the corner house,
in the middle of Magnolia Circle,
adults drink and children burn
their names into the air, sparklers

smoke. Orange ash floats off to singe
the edge of the lawn. Someone kicks
a fire cracker that hadn't burnt its wick,
the inert spirit left unlit. One full
ruined shell. Adults douse the remains

with the garden hose before midnight
and the final show. Long white steam
left to rot as I pull the heavy corpse
from the black trash can and peel
back the black paper, thin and wet.

I Want the Scissors to be Sharp

I want the scissors to be sharp,
the table to be level.

A decade-old snapshot
lost in the third pocket—
a creased leather wallet
a face I used to own.
One yellow corner folded over—

remember those children?

Watching a Combat Video

CNN showed it
again tonight,
the footage
filmed green,
pixilated, loud.
A black box
protected me
from the sights,
the call to engage
armed combatants
congregating, the glow
of gun fire, collapsing bodies.

You still jump
at sounds, look away
from me, look behind.
You were there,
sand filling in
your brown boots.

Trolling the Foreclosure Lists

Above our heads
a ceiling self created.
Plaster, wood, connective
tissues between the time
we have chosen to live
and the decisions we make.

Outside, strips of light
run down the Spanish tile
painted orange and brown;
each decided on to be uniform
with every other container
along the block.

Our first plant
died under the cold hose
of my attention, an object
of my affection turned black—

black: the scrubbed truth
that once, before now, this
ceiling stood on the trusses
above another family.

Blue Bench Alongside the Empty Lot

I took note of it—
a blue ornament
marker of change
in the expansive lot
of what should've grown—
if only for the twisted
left leaning iron sign,
the hope it offered.

Novocain

The welcome home
pain of a toothache,
a doorbell reminder.

The dentist told me
that it is nothing
but thought. Liar;

never said that to live
is to let roots die
so that space can be made
for the grandchildren.

I said goodbye to my family
in April, that socket won't dry.

First Sight 5 a.m.

When I push pause
on the new of today
you and I will capture
eternity in that instant,
between daylight here
and darkness there.

Zinger

Yesterday I mailed
a book to a stranger.
The postman took
my package,

told me I smelled
like a Raspberry Zinger:
a pink cream filled
cake in plastic.

They were his lunch in
high school. It cost him
two dollars to eat the pink
cake and drink a coke.

He got a girlfriend
He rode the bus to see
her. He stopped eating
Raspberry Zingers.

He forgot he liked them,
until he smelled me
in the post office.

Mood Pen

My hands shake
with a chill
that will not change

the color of my new heat
sensitive pen, a green
one I bought

at the Folger Shakespeare
where a man put
his hands all over

Richard the Third,
took a penny,
called me away.

5th Ave. and Broad St.

Seattle
Pull me in,
Hold me close.

Seattle,
open your water ways,
don't be modest.

Morning in Seattle
splashed across my cheek;
salty ears, colored eyes

Today, Seattle,
I had nothing he'd miss.

Afternoon in Seattle
I walked along,
slowly.

I last saw Seattle
undressed before a window,
alone

Tonight in Seattle
a couple parted on the corner.

Cry, baby, cry through the stars.

Six Months Unemployed

I believe in almost.
In going to bed
early, staying up late to count
the opportunities I missed
out on; the space your arms create.

It was just yesterday that a stranger
reached to hold me like a friend
as I spooned frozen yogurt from a cup.
He called me hombre.

He had not worked in week
he said quietly, despite the blink
he stuttered into his speech.

Nor I have, compadre.
I stretched out to him
and together we knew.

Bare

There's something in *disconnected* I like.
You walk in naked. A Sunday afternoon
I leave free in case another presents himself.
The mechanical left-right of your gait.
Your bones clicking. Or the way I shut down

my open applications, sign off.
Can you gauge my mood
by my weight, my own admission?
It's something that I'd rather not
tell, but that I share with all.

The couch is worn thin and low
at opposite ends of the room
where I spend everyday
waiting and forgetting about the
warms bodies that could walk in.

I like the word *disconnected*, the finality
I feel at night where the only warmth
I wear in bed while it snows is you.

Closure

The best letters get written
by my passive mind at night.
A flourish of ink that reads
as not a name but as a drawing.

All throughout
the verbs play action
while I chase down men,
bald faceless men who know.

They've read my poems
predicted the line breaks,
heartbreaks, they reach
out gently and signal

for the lane change,
left noted on the map.
I only stand running
in the blur of directions.

The letters will get penned
the moment I give up
and forget to seal the flap.

Spring House Restaurant, Hesperia, CA

A coffee stain
turned grease stain
coffee blinds closed
cups left empty

It's a matter of moments
 a matter of moments
when skin burns salt
bitter soup splashed table

bite too quick. bottle too light.

Trains over head
Trains overheard
nothing really heard
left alone together
 alone together
 together
attached together green
seats green tables loaded
green salads for soups
hands for hands
reached across
left apart
leaving together.

The Science of Light Bulbs

Like filament, we are
entwined in the sphere
we have created together.

I can't burn hot enough.
We can't withstand the fall
to the unforgiving tile.

I can only show the room
my mistakes, illuminated
in the mornings we generate.

Sex in the Kitchen

Heat resonates
from the lower
rack of the stove

The drag
of your finger
along my leg

Will often result
in a space where
I dispose of the mask

To let your breath
blow back my hair

My Four Digit Code Starts with Two

Next door they started a neighborhood
watch. I bought an alarm system,
it beeps when I return home.

Our dog seems jealous of the security;
his stance is nervous as I enter
my four digit code every night.

The windows are open he tells me;
I know. The doors are shut, the alarm
screen flashes; I know. I know

the teenagers who stole the neighbors
TV too. They see me come and go,
and pretend I know what each thinks.

Avoiding the Dawn Light

Morning light moves
along the wall.
Brush dripped air
leaks lights.
My bed is
pushed up against
the red wall.
If I lay low enough
graphite outlined rays
might pass me by.

Pencil shading
notes the distance
across my fleshy
hip bone arcs.

Dust mites
turn in between
the pinking streaks
and work to pull me
from bed, sweep
cool against
my skin.

I'll Tell You What

While I sit across from you
I'll tell you what I'm not doing.

Not thinking of the friend
who never calls, the fish
smell coming from the freezer.

Noticing the gray hair
above my left ear.

Hating the bread-and-butter pickles
you bought—
(never ate)

My mind should stray
to the unpaid bills,
past due notices.
Instead I wonder

about the man
who must call
to tell me
I am past due.
What does he do
when he gets home at night?

And On the First Day It Rained

In the center of the room I nod
at the line across space, our families.
A smile had dawned in our hairlines.

It could have lasted as long as
you wanted to let it remain.
The years all pattered on in the rain,

pushing you and I farther than either
of us remembers. We ran a finger
over *us*, inside a circle, faced as man
and wife. In that one last moment,

you and I walk out together slowly
and watch an early rainfall drip away.

Amazing Grace

In my bathtub
below the window
your limbs float
about the foam.

I provide water, tea,
my company, while
the moisture slides,
careless, across flesh.

You fail to maintain
your composure as
I strip down into
your singularity

There's Only Here and Now

Don't lift your head yet.
Early Fall nights slip together.
Never really worth enough.

Stop, put down your hand.
Time never comes on slowly—
waiting for my fall,

not simply goodbye;
allowing summer to escape—
Sun-stripped sidewalk.

Doors pulled tightly closed,
unrequited lust right now,
Sonnets on Saturday,

sometimes, but not here.
Winter wind whipped to red.
Love's always secret.

Song Playing on a Loop

A first person
rushing of love lost,
love pursued.

She sings
of Washington Square
in the heat of June,
of what he meant
to tell her—

the circumference
of all the days before.
What she never knew.