



A loose thread snag that instigates the fray,  
an encyclopedic library book that is missing every odd page,  
a CD you borrowed just to find out  
all the songs you never heard have already been erased.  
Simplicity gets lost in the maze,  
Exits where the sign says Entrance

There is a reason we don't ask for directions.

## Only One Reason Was Given for Goodbye

Fragile  
as this broken eggshell  
of a yellow warbler, valentine  
pink and blotchy brown,  
jagged, serrated edges, with  
white peeking out like the  
innards of flooring tiles, so  
brittle life  
must barely have been contained  
within. I lay  
the shell beside

the stiffened, tissue-paper-delicate  
wings of a  
butterfly mounted on a popsicle stick X.  
spiked through the thorax with a pin  
before her wings could gain  
their full color—still  
damp, wrinkled, barely  
able to flutter for a heartbeat,  
ragged, bluish things with  
violet vein etchings these  
wings now conceal the

crumbling photo of a  
once treasured, rare phenomenon: your  
smile: a liquid thing  
splashed over your face smoothing lips,  
rippling eye corners, expanding usually  
fair cheeks flushed,  
your eyes, shining with rainbow resonance,  
barely visible now,  
ruted, chipped, and broken  
by handmade wrinkles worn into paper

the photo is folded over a rejected  
Christmas ornament, ovate  
as that warbler egg,  
like us this ornament  
failed before its first

Christmas, imperfect with  
scratched glass and crooked hook,  
tossed into the trashcan outside  
a department store, and now

tucked in beside  
a rolled condom, torn  
just slightly,  
the flesh-feel and color lingering in  
a useless, unused item, that  
the corkscrew of my mind transforms into  
a icon of something so easily taken  
for granted. . .perhaps gold  
would have made a better symbol  
but would have been even more  
useless. . . .

I've wrapped everything  
in tissue tied  
with a single strand that  
somehow survived, a rope worn thin as  
the jokes and promises given  
once upon a time.  
tucked inside a  
matchbox stamped  
FRAGILE  
from every angle.

## Self-Loathing is the Afterthought

First I choose the method(s)—  
nothing too Colonel Mustard-in-the-kitchen-with-the-knife corny—  
then I choose the order.  
Not a random process, a meticulous design  
checks them off one, by one,  
by one...

Order: the method should fit the individual.

Gets-decapitated-by-industrial-fan writes out the one blue, one green eyed girl.  
Goes-crazy-and-guts-himself should be cool-headed with snakeskin boots  
because it's unexpected  
(unless suicide read more dramatically in a Generals shoes).  
Raped-and-beaten-to-death can't be a girl—  
cliché and boring—  
but maybe a young man,  
if the setting is prison,  
or a performing arts academy.  
Problem characters, those with a mind separate from mine,  
go first. Their elimination triggers  
the freedom rush of running on endorphins.

Order: most expendable narrows the field for first place.

Who is the most apparent threat, drama queen, or cutthroat with enemies?  
Will the pulse run quicker if I choose the biggest symbol, fool, or hero?  
This victim might glean the most tears  
because he's innocent, a poet, newlywed, or sixteen and should never have been  
a soldier.  
Who will the audience expect to be killed?  
Who don't they expect, or want, to see hanging from that third story balcony.  
Who lives is also important—  
a parent, friend, thug with a grudge,  
the innocent bystander, an oaf the hero needs to bump into  
might be the deciding factor.

Order: mechanical means placing a number to every body.

Who has which skills and where do they come into play?  
Are they plot essential or just helpful?  
Which lover should die first, which troop should John Doe be placed into?

Who I like most doesn't matter,  
and excitement is a momentary inconvenience.  
The arrangement might follow an obvious chronology—  
intensifying the drama or linking a chain of acquaintances—  
or a arbitrary system may be chose—  
order in disguise,  
a preplanned surprise ending.

The one perk of being a writer,  
you choose who lives/dies,  
experience the psychotic thrill  
of absolute control,  
manipulating an audience,  
evoking torture/cheers,  
This thrill the average person, even average artists,  
never feels:  
like assuming the role of  
A ruler, a general,  
A serial killer,  
God.

## A Relationship That Never Existed

Our tongues never tried to tie a knot  
entwined in the space between lips  
as they part, suck, nuzzle neck flesh  
and tit. I never licked sweat  
from your chest, or felt the firm squeeze  
of your fingers kneading  
the moist clay of my breasts.  
You never kissed my thigh. I never groped.  
There were no giggle, wrestle, shove into  
bed moments; no soaked seaweed-strands  
of hair plastered against forehead  
during groaning midnight throes.  
You never left plum and apple  
splotches, never chained me to the bed  
post, or accepted tiger pride scratches.  
I never even sucked, never stroked,  
never listened to your heaving breath  
in the silence of early morning  
swathed in wet sheets and  
satisfaction.

But two quarters in a casino jukebox  
buys a Chris Cornell moment  
to remind me of how we got lost  
in U-turns and city park signs  
when I offered you a ride home,  
the windshield iced silver  
thick as fog because I couldn't  
find the defrost. Both stomach and heart  
flipped when you answered my text,  
and when you didn't shrug me off  
as I lay my head upon your shoulder  
while ridding a cramped Chicago elevator.  
But we didn't speak about it.  
We talked about the weather and French  
quizzes, current events, religious fascism.  
You called yourself God—your  
inside joke—and I believed you  
when you insisted you knew me

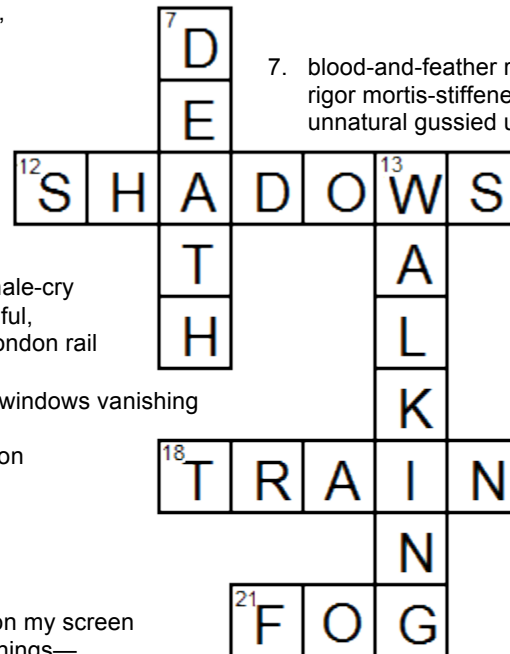
better than I ever could  
know myself.

Now, I watch from the far side  
of a railway bench  
as your lashes cast a fluttering  
spider web lattice of shadow upon pale skin.  
Yellow jackets buzz  
at closed trashcan lids  
and wild geese honk  
hungry in the distance,  
as you doze, waiting on a train  
bound for Chicago,  
one year after our first visit,  
it's easier to answer "fuck no"  
when someone asks if we are  
together.



## Crossword Puzzle of Ideas Filling in Cranial Spaces

12. a crop circle of lamplight glows upon the dusky wall;  
silence buzzes like a dial tone harmonizing  
with the scritch of my pencil as it crosses blades  
with its own slender shadow,  
etching spiral doodles onto pristine paper;  
in the depths of memory I watch a spider web lattice  
of shadow shiver and tremble against pallid skin,  
lashes fluttering prior to wakefulness—a boy so helpless  
in sleep that I could kiss him,  
but don't. . . .



7. blood-and-feather remains of a songbird smashed on the roadside;  
rigor mortis-stiffened aunt Sarah in Barbie doll  
unnatural gussied up beauty of lace and makeup overload;

a TV statistic; a preferred existence to a tunnel  
of time in bleak desolation of mental decay. . .  
I am reminded of the inevitable  
as I look into the glazed eyes of a friend,  
bloodshot, zombified, intoxication simulating decease  
as he slurredly apologizes for behavior that will be  
forgotten by the time the sun's long shadows  
touch earth.

18. I want to drown in the long, whale-cry  
whistle of a train, cliché mournful,  
that I never heard riding the London rail  
or into skyscraper Chicago,  
the last few rows of corporate windows vanishing  
among clouds of smog  
only a lavender and pink beacon  
winks through.

13. my car is close to metaphorically  
deceased. In the shop the blasted machine  
does me little good at the moment.  
I long for walking distance or reliable  
public transportation in Midwest America.  
how long would it take to walk ten miles  
to Cape Girardeau. . . ?  
maybe three, four hours.  
frost on the windows makes me think twice.

21. I want to write of the photo on my screen  
for a second—and of other things—  
wispy edges of frosted  
willow branches glittering like tinsel strands  
in the blurry glow of fog choked pond lights  
and a silvered moon reflection:  
snapshot expression of night and silence.

21. an exclamation of frustration,  
a hipster substitute for *cool*,  
a bleep, dash, or blank space,  
a sexual act,  
a word inserted at random by college English majors  
aiming for shock effect,  
a Friend's Unanticipated Comment Kindling a flush of hope,  
in the memory of summer honeysuckle air and guitar tunes,  
when I said I was leaving early to write poetry.  
"Go fucking do it!" he exclaimed,  
backslap celebrating this decision as if I were some guy  
intending to get laid,  
or maybe on the brink of a breakthrough invention.  
he suggested  
we could read new originals together at open mic next week.

For an instant I felt like a writer. . . a poet. . . included  
as a part of something bigger