Cleansing

I.
That summer he touched me,
we moved to a new house.
Mother sorted through broken toys,
old clothes, items—
let me be scourged and
scoured, cleaned,
devoured!—all this
memory
handed out in little gift bags—
if I would not die,
then my childhood
was to be quartered
and distributed, afterwards
forgotten. I had no problem
letting go.

II.
The day we moved
Mother gave me a shower
for the first time in years.

At my breasts, the length
of my legs,
she marveled.
Christmas Song for No One in Particular

Of my living room:
white walls & cold tiles &
wicker seats: the Christmas tree,
forgotten lights: square
of the ceiling, pin lights
on each corner, chandelier
swinging overhead reflected
on the picture window:
wooden panels, doorframes—
one enters and exits
after the other: just
outside, the pig sliced
vertically
from his neck down
to his rump—
my father slices fish
in the morning:
some poor man after
some accident or other
finds himself on a table—dead
—and some poor man
slices him open—
like my father, fish.
Let me tell you when
I am most accessible: It is 2008,
and my heels click against floorboards
of a house that would burn down
the following year, I am wearing
to keep me warm some-
thing resembling a painter’s
smock, big white buttons
resting against jutting-out
collarbones, cheekbones
jutting-out when I bump them
against aunt
after aunt, the final
being the one who burns
down with the house
the next year. I do not remember
what she wore that year,
but I remember what her daughter wore
when she entered my home in ’09:
long blue dress
that hung off her frame
so deliciously: *I loved her
dress*—my final words
to her: she died
with the house. We keep
quiet about these things now.
The day my aunt & cousin died
they were found tangled
beneath rubble—perhaps the collapsed
roof—remains of floorboards—
perhaps whatever remained—
the house
sliced from its head to its rump—
they were found
only to be sliced
like fish:
clavicles to pubis
only to confirm collapsed airways.
As if the roof
was not enough. We know
enough. Let me tell you
when I am most vulnerable:
last night—half-empty
tables, soiled napkins, half-
empty bottles of wine,
the waiter
picking at a hole in his vest,
ice cubes melting
in a glass sweating
onto the tablecloth, forming
rings & rings—& names
of the dead
reverberating from the hollows
of our chests, echoing through
the blue of air, and what
I really mean to say:
we spoke only of people
who had left us,
and of aloneness:
my uncle’s sadness a blooming
bruise on Christmas Eve,
another scar to join stars:
three years down but still
the vice grip of mourning
will not let him go—how
he blames the lights!
We keep them shut now,
leave the trees
to sigh in the dark, waiting
for moonlight to slice through the night
if only to illuminate them.

**Triptych**

i.

Curtain of dust
billowing
by the open
window,
cobwebs blooming
on a yellow wall;
cabinet door
creaking, hanging  
by its hinge;  
orchid  
creeping into  
the room, sole  
inhabitant; doorknob in need  
of replacement, bulbs  
flickering on cue,  
symphony  
of light.

ii.

We could not pronounce her dead  
even when she stopped  
breathing. Stubborn heart  
could not see suffering. The lung  
understood. It collapsed  
when it should.

iii.

In a box—  
this woman’s clothing:  
Chinese-patterned pantsuit,  
floral dresses,  
pairs of glasses  
unused for years,  
lace veil,  
several pairs of tube socks,  
that violet dress  
we eventually buried her in—  
this woman’s  
remains:  
a bracelet, rings.
Where

“... there is no there there.”
—Gertrude Stein

How everything
Begins:
A grain unfolds
Into
Everything.

The slightest breeze rends
A dandelion. Its seeds
Join the oscillating wind
Without memory
Of ever being whole.

How everything
Begins
To look: gas
And gold. How
Everyone begins
To see.
The stars we see at night are dead.

Grandmother releases
her final breath, joins else
things, empty space:
From where I am:
this smattering
of the discrete—father,
mother, bed; brother,
wallpaper; aunt,
she; caretaker—from where
I am: father, again, against

Doorframe: this
smattering, this
constellation. We are all light—
Years apart.

The stars we see at night are
Dead: the stars we see at night
Here is distance. We have many words for it. I like to call it else. The tiniest fraction of space is our constellation of electrons between palms, or else things, here. Distance. Hairline fracture, sliver of naked skin: tell me you are here. Tell me this distance is but else. Tell me the kerchief peeking from your clenched fist is as blue as I imagine it to be. My eyes no longer gauge things as well. If I close them you might disappear and I will not find you, lost in empty spaces. Hairline fracture, sliver of naked skin: the where where you stand an improbable floorboard creaking counterpoints to the sound of longing.

Or is it—
What is it called—
Scientifically, I mean.

Instructional: find the star Closest to the tip Of the church’s cross. Its flickering Is older than the bruise Of memory. What remains
Are scars in the sky,
Patches of healed
Violence scabbing over,
Finding their way
To sight.

Instructional:
Find the dent
In the air
Where the seed
Of a dandelion
Imprints its memory.

Counterpoints
to the sound of longing:
I cannot hold you now, I can’t
not hold you now.

The boy in his sandbox
scoops heaps into his bucket.
A grain unfolds
into everything.
The seed of a dandelion
finds its way home.