

University of Mississippi

eGrove

---

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Graduate School

---

2012

## Given: F(A Great Love + a Missing Body)

Emily Anne Barnes

Follow this and additional works at: <https://egrove.olemiss.edu/etd>



Part of the [Fine Arts Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Barnes, Emily Anne, "Given: F(A Great Love + a Missing Body)" (2012). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 45.

<https://egrove.olemiss.edu/etd/45>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of eGrove. For more information, please contact [egrove@olemiss.edu](mailto:egrove@olemiss.edu).

GIVEN:

*f(A great love + A missing body)*

A Thesis  
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements  
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts  
in the Department of English  
The University of Mississippi

by

EMILEIGH BARNES

May 2012

Copyright Emileigh Barnes 2012

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

## ABSTRACT

*Given: f(A great love + A missing body)* is a collection of poems in four sections that takes love and mathematics at its core. The lyric and narrative poems navigate an affair between a female narrator and her lover. The math is positioned with the verse in the way an ekphrastic poem might be positioned next to the art upon which it is based. The connection and alienation of the form fractures the poem, but it also serves as a metaphor for the competing forces of two people in love. And the goal of each is pursuit of the sublime.

Although the narrator arrives at the poems from a place of disorientation, as she considers the height and collapse of the relationship a narrative web begins to appear, and the mathematical principles upon which the poems are based begin to resonate with her understanding of love.

## DEDICATION

For my father, with his tail aloft. And for my mother, for her math.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to my committee, Dr. Ann Fisher-Wirth, Beth Ann Fennelly, and Dr. Mary Hayes. In addition, a warm thanks to Gary Short for his generosity as a reader, from my first workshop through my thesis defense. I offer my overly earnest, American appreciation to Anthony Caleshu and Gerard Donovan, who welcomed me during my semester abroad at Plymouth University. Thanks, too, to Clay, for hanging these poems outside his cubicle at General Electric. And to my poetic peers, Josh Davis and Josh Fomon: What would I have done without your careful eyes?

Some of these poems appeared in the chapbook *Given*, published by Dancing Girl Press. Many thanks as well to these publications, in which the following poems appeared, sometimes in slightly different form:

*BathHouse*: “Equanimity,” “What Grows”

*CutBank*: “Simplifying Expressions”

*Cricket Online Review*: “Stress Test”

*Meridian*: “Proof of Life II”

*Strange Machine*: “Triptych,” “The Rapture Within You’ Poem,” “Introduction to Light,” “Orion”

*Word For/Word*: “Line of Symmetry,” “Love Poem in Binary”

Finally, my deepest appreciation to Matthew and to Molly. You are my inspiration. I love you.

## ORDER OF OPERATIONS

Abstract	ii
Dedication	iii
Acknowledgments	iv

### I.

There Were Many Things . . . . .	1
Principia Mathematica . . . . .	3
Slope, Intercept . . . . .	4
Limits . . . . .	5
Friday Afternoon . . . . .	6
Non-linear Progression. . . . .	7
The Law of Small Numbers . . . . .	8
Line of Best Fit . . . . .	9
Line of Symmetry . . . . .	10
Things That Can Be Felt . . . . .	11

### II.

Wild Year . . . . .	13
Using Properties of Congruent Figures . . . . .	14
Proof of Life I. . . . .	15
Secret Year . . . . .	16
$7 \pm 2$ Kaleidoscopic Views of Summer . . . . .	17
The Evening Ended with a Story . . . . .	19
Triptych . . . . .	20
Spillway . . . . .	22
What Grows Inside You . . . . .	23
Matter and Motion . . . . .	24
Stress Test . . . . .	25
Love Poem in Binary . . . . .	26
Proof of Life II . . . . .	27
The Evening Ended with a Story . . . . .	28

### III.

If, Then . . . . .	30
Hypnogram . . . . .	32
Reconciliation of the Ineffable . . . . .	33
Newton's Laws of Motion Enacted . . . . .	34
Peace Between Us . . . . .	35
Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle . . . . .	36
FOIL . . . . .	38
Trust Exercise . . . . .	39
Your Lover Visits Chinatown . . . . .	40
A List of Inequalities . . . . .	41
Introduction to Light . . . . .	42
Biased Sampling . . . . .	43
Acceptable Loss . . . . .	44
Orion . . . . .	45
Simplifying Expressions . . . . .	46
Ordered Pairs . . . . .	47

### IV.

Inverse, Converse, and Contrapositive . . . . .	49
The Evening Ended with a Story . . . . .	51
Radical Equations . . . . .	52
For Example . . . . .	53
Missing Data Problem . . . . .	54
Proof of Life III . . . . .	55
Blood Letting . . . . .	56
Alexandra Answers . . . . .	57
Notes . . . . .	58
Vita . . . . .	59



“Lo! What a mariner love hath made me!”

—Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey

## There Were Many Things

we told before  
they happened,

like the tenderness  
of a bruise before it  
appears on skin.

From inside the cabin  
the only tell of high tide

was us tilting  
in wind.

In the wake, swans  
wagged and hissed  
as you fed them.

Sometimes in sleep  
you reached for me.  
Sometimes, not.

It was then I was alone,  
which is not the same  
as being apart.

This is what I know,

Always, the sea  
will ebb, leaving  
the mud to thirst  
and split  
in the boatlight.

I.

## Principia Mathematica<sup>1</sup>

I had a teacher once who insisted  
all things could be sorted into twos:

Two eyes, two hands, a magician and his rabbit.  
Hero and Leander, animals on the ark.

I told this to you as we ate oranges by the bay.  
The two of us on the sand, the mountains in fog.

And everything that has happened called out  
to us, and to that day and the memory of you,

drawn in like your hair to my shower's drain,  
tangled in the grate every time you appeared,

stepping out from behind the curtain, my robe  
around you. And like so many times before and since

I sat on the floor, drawing out what you left.

---

<sup>1</sup>written by Alfred North Whitehead and Bertrand Russell, a work in which the authors develop mathematics from an abstract version of set theory, finally proving that  $1+1=2$  on page 362.

## Slope, Intercept

In my inbox: *I'll admit, I invited you to the shore,  
not to look for ghosts, but to kiss you.*

Envision here: Sloping away from you,  
my dress unzips down my spine.  
This is not unlike the fast-moving  
strokes of rain across a body.

Driving out of this town at night:  
I marvel at its expanse, at the brunt  
of human strength exposed in endless  
miles of window-shining night lights,

and then awake to see I was wrong.  
What I admired were derricks,  
dark beasts bucking the ground.

Lesson: not even the earth's black  
veins can pump indefinitely.  
Every year my madrones  
give up their skins.

After you're gone,  
I remember what you said:  
*At a certain point, all I have to offer  
is apologies, and that grows tiring.*

## Limits

You held the piñata straight out  
from your chest. I hit : hit : hit : hit.  
There was no place  
in my apartment to hang it.  
The surge of candy and gew gaws,  
the hotwaxing of your lips onto me.

Earlier, on the Pacific, you angled  
your face toward the garish and extravagant  
California light and adjusted your  
notions of what it means to *go back*.

I was pulling myself against the tide  
with only my arms when you first appeared.  
Your pole dragged beside you,  
pushed its glistening, slender line  
and hook toward the tangle of my hair.

## Friday Afternoon

It was cool in the morning  
and your mouth was damp  
when you kissed me in the garage  
of my office suite.

When you answered the phone,  
hushed, I knew who it was.

I have been asked what  
you did that drew me in,  
like the swans who gathered  
as you fed them bread.  
It's an answer I do not know.

When my father was a young man  
and I was a child, he knocked down a nest

of sparrows in the yard. Their mother  
wouldn't return. So he unearthed worms,  
crushed them in his pestle,  
warmed them over the stove.

He fed them tenderly every day,  
until each one fell ill and died.

When I told you about the birds  
you asked me *was it worth it?*  
And I explained. We had no choice.

## Non-linear Progression<sup>1</sup>

Something was hidden  
in the seagrass,  
like the fox  
before our flashlight

whose fur, delicate  
between the ears, was supple  
like fruit skin;

you reminded me  
in a card, said *if only we*  
*had known*. But before  
the grass, before the fox,

my thumb rolled around  
the blister of your ear,  
the room was flushed  
where we had been together,

and there were canola fields  
which I never saw,  
but you described to me.

---

<sup>1</sup>A sequence of values that increase in a manner other than linear.



## The Law of Small Numbers<sup>1</sup>

There was the moment  
we weren't touching. Then

the moment when we were.  
I remembered it later,  
said your eyes glowed.

I said, we'd each  
swallowed fireflies.

Remember, shaking,  
just emerged from the bay.  
You took a piece of my hair

and sucked it in your mouth,  
drew the brine water out  
from between the strands.

It was night, and you showed me,  
Orion's belt hung low in the sky.

A measure of distance.

---

<sup>1</sup>which expresses the possibility certain events will occur in a fixed period of time and is sometimes applied to systems with a large number of possible events, each of which is rare.

## Line of Best Fit

Your hands touch women like you hold a wine glass.

## Line of Symmetry

Like bird wings, your ribcage lifts  
at the touch of my hand.

What I feel in my throat  
is a retelling of our story:  
the parabolic curve  
of your headlights in the field  
where I reminded you,  
here is that place:  
your body around my body.

A felled animal.

Tree limbs scatter in our yard  
as your clothing litters the floor.

As your clothing litters the floor  
tree limbs scatter in our yard:  
a felled animal.

Your body around my body.

Here is that place  
where I reminded you  
of your headlights in the field;  
the parabolic curve  
is a retelling of our story.  
What I feel in my throat:  
At the touch of my hand  
your ribcage lifts, like bird wings.

## Things That Can Be Felt

and not seen:

The trick you taught me:  
to fend off sleep,  
tickle the roof of your mouth  
with the tip of your tongue.

The first time we had sex  
it was on the floor  
and neither of us spoke.  
My skirt, orange with black  
flowers, still hung on my waist.

We slept that night in a twin-sized bed,  
in a guest house I sublet  
with fruit trees in the yard.  
I dreamed of them all night.  
Apricots, lemons, plums, nectarines.

The next day at work  
I waited for your message.  
It came in the morning:  
*the glare of last night*  
*is still ringed around me.*

II.

## Wild Year

The day is a wild animal  
here in the desert, in this town  
where people die under  
the sweltering muscle of June.

The day is uncontrolled,  
like when your father died  
without ever acknowledging that  
he had been sick, because he  
felt well enough to hunt  
out on the preserve.  
Even until the very end.

I have seen this before.

At the grocery store, on special:  
*conchas*, literally seashells, actually  
scalloped pastries that were  
dry and sweet. Also Mexican  
slang for a woman's vagina.

Yesterday the bears came  
down from the hills.  
They were spotted in town  
eating garbage in the streets.

My job was to find people  
who had seen those beasts,  
to ask them about it,  
write down what they said.

Out here the wind is dry all around  
us, and it changes how people talk.  
It changes what they see.

Everyone panics  
when water's not at hand.  
Or if they get lost as they cross  
the trails in the canyon.

## Using Properties of Congruent Figures

At seven in the morning  
on 17th and Eye:  
we meet at a parking garage  
where we have met before.

Here, where the streets  
are getting safe again,  
where we watch, quietly,  
as the sun sweats up,  
where we are getting to know  
what this feels like.

In the Mexican restaurant  
they serve you beer with your breakfast  
and your eyes are all ringed  
around and bottle-colored  
when you say you can really sense  
the *weight* of things.

If I believed in physiognomy,  
I might have replied, *here*  
*are your mothermarks,*  
or *here your eyebrows*  
*interpret your passions.*

## Proof of Life I

You may feel safe  
with your horchata  
pale as lunar dust.

But then there was the fold,  
the twist in the body.  
The garnet blush of blood.

A skein of skin and skin  
and lichen. You pulled it  
to the shore, wiped the scarlet  
clots from his eyes.

*We shouldn't have been here,*  
you said. *Together.*

First came the omens:  
the gathered snakes,  
the turbines on slow revolve,  
the derricks gathered to genuflect.

A carton of duck eggs,  
and you took one, cuffed it  
on the counter's edge.  
A slick wave of membrane.

How strange it was, when I first awoke,  
naked and alone, your covers pushed aside.



## Secret Year

E-mailing me from the Las Vegas Airport,  
you wrote that I would *love it here*  
but never said why.  
I do not love Las Vegas.

That was the year of the rabbit,  
tender and self-indulgent,  
which I read on the paper placemat  
at Amaia's Chinese.

The waitress made you laugh,  
and you touched her arm  
as you rubbed your foot  
slowly against mine.

So, too, was the rabbit your sign.  
Not the sign of your year, but the sign  
of your hour. Secret animal, is what this is called.  
It was always in secrets you most excelled.



IV.

So encompassed by fog

that I only *knew* you were there, and

when I reached for you

you were

then

V.

I stood in the doorway

slip tight around my hips

in the moment between

you reaching for me

and

me realizing you would reach for me

The Evening Ended with a Story

of you in the water, seaweed clinging  
to your arms. I asked if the tide was in or out. *Out*,  
you said. *See how the boats have turned their faces?*

## Triptych

### *I. When.*

Your chest was bared  
and smooth. There was  
one magpie, and then another.

There was something  
I was trying to convey.  
Instead: what I remembered,

the recipe for snow cream  
*1 can sweetened milk,*  
*4 cups ice.*

In a video, you rode  
a motorbike. The borderlands  
were red all around you.

### *II. When a body.*

Red surged in the ocean,  
opened like tea blossoms,  
like the milk in your tea.

When there was fear  
on your face, it looked like  
*I don't know you.*

Seawater warmed to us,  
or around us. Or  
in spite of us.

This is what pain looks like:

*I cannot rest when you're close to me.*

The sunfish were all openmouthed.

And writhing.

*III. When a body is missing*

Mouth to the  
earth, I sucked  
on the ground,

like the afternoon  
you succored nettles  
from my legs.

## Spillway

That every poem might be a message to you,  
a secret message you will never read. Everywhere

reservoirs are filling with rain. From your bed  
once, I called in sick, but began laughing

before I hung up the phone. A lack of consequence  
has followed us. Our first summer, when you were gone,

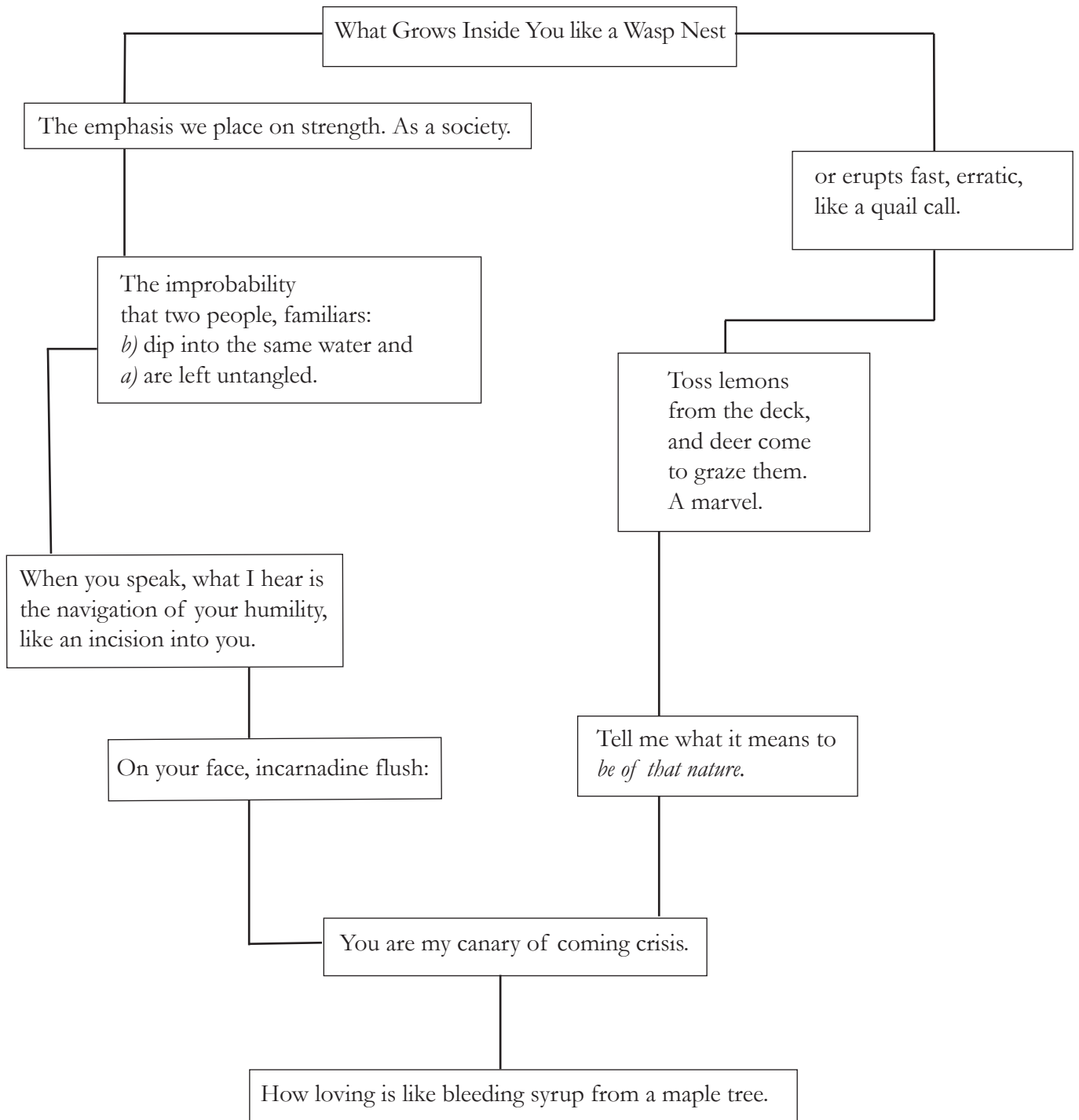
water crested the spillway, washed thousands of fossils  
out to the shore. No one had ever known they were there.

On the news families canoed to town.  
The river changed from dry to green.

Your sheets were blue then, and I remember wondering  
if your other lover had picked them out. I had googled her;

I had discovered she was an expert in lithic technology.  
I misread this as *lichen*. For me, lichen will always be hers.

And yours. I dreamed we all went swimming in the lake.  
I dreamed that she hid for me, a letter in my bag.





## Matter and Motion

As a tribute, your father skinned  
his favorite bull,  
laboring over it like drawing  
a bow across a fiddle,  
scraping the fat, rubbing the skin,  
sallow, with kerosene.

One night, as he stroked it  
he discovered the fur felt  
more alive than before,  
draped over his lap, hairs responding  
under his hands' manipulations.

## Stress Test

In winter,  
cold metal does not give itself away,  
fracturing only on impact.  
This is based on  
low-temperature ductility.

In fact,  
had the Titanic's  
hull been reinforced,  
ice may never have pierced  
her steel shell.

But in space,  
metals that brush shoulders  
stick together permanently.

\*\*\*

(It was stress that drew us together, as fine strands of hair cluster  
at a shower's drain, until they are plucked or suckled away.)

## Love Poem in Binary

01010100 01001000  
01100101 01110010  
01100101 00100000  
01101001 01110011

00100000 01100001  
01101100 01110111  
01100001 01111001  
01110011 00100000

01101101 01101111  
01110010 01100101  
00100000 01110000  
01100001 01101001

01101110 00100000  
01110100 01101000  
01100001 01101110  
00100000 01110111

01100101 00100000  
01100011 01100001  
01101110 00100000  
01100001 01100011

01100011 01101111  
01110101 01101110  
01110100 00100000  
01100110 01101111

01110010 00101110<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>That you did not kill the moth, drawn in by the light in the living room.

## Proof of Life II

I know very little, but understand  
the protective grazing  
of your limbs on my torso.

And I remember the carton  
of eggs you kept in the fridge.  
You held one against my cheek.

There is, I know, a story to convey.  
Benevolence, that when a body floated up  
you pulled him to the shore,

wiped the scarlet clots from his eyes.  
The connotation of strength:  
I imagine you always trailing fifty feet

of netting in your wake: You catch it,  
whatever comes within your grasp.

## The Evening Ended with a Story

a story I couldn't stop telling, in which rain followed our car through the Anza-Borrego, a cloud of mist we thought was a funnel. It ended with us strumming peachmuscle from its pit with our fingers. The memory of the event more sensitive than the event itself.

III.

## If, Then<sup>1</sup>

Is it so hard to understand the  
nature of things, just because  
we cannot see the whole of them at once?

You were a man living in the  
most polluted city in America.  
Everyone else was afraid to  
go out in the smog. Mostly  
we didn't consider this.

I was wearing earrings bought for me  
by a boyfriend from before, and I wasn't sure  
if I should throw them away, not knowing  
if they'd been blighted or blessed.  
Under your lips.

If you hadn't offered to walk with me home.

In science, suction doesn't exist,  
it's just *pressure pushing*.  
In science, cold doesn't exist,  
it's just *less heat*.

If you hadn't reached for me under  
the stuffed moose on the wall  
of the Reykjavik Room.  
At the Alley Cat bar.  
If I hadn't forgotten my jacket  
at the coat check inside.

If you hadn't warmed  
my hands because you  
noticed they were cold,

---

<sup>1</sup>In mathematics, a conditional statement often appears in the "If . . . Then" format, meaning "If A, then B," where A is a hypothesis, and B is a conclusion. This form of statement is often used in deductive reasoning problems.

your hot breath loping  
across my palms.

Something I wanted to tell you:  
Peonies are more expensive than  
anemones are more expensive  
than hydrangeas. And so on.  
You can't know that sort of thing  
until someone explains it to you.

If you are unhappy  
with how things are,  
just close your eyes.  
All of this can be re-rendered  
through the soft lens of sleep.  
I like to meet you there,  
where I cannot guess  
what you will say next.

Is it so hard  
to understand,  
the nature of things?

If I hadn't told you,  
*this is a decision you  
have to make.*

If I hadn't said then,  
*I can't tell you what to do.*



## Hypnogram

You were asleep,  
so I whispered  
a story: a story  
in which I was twenty,  
and I loved  
another man as he  
sorted through  
a pile of clothes  
on his bed.  
“I’d offer them to you,”  
he said, “but  
she wore a size 2.”  
The joke, of course,  
was the humiliation,  
which I unpeeled  
across the duvet  
like an apple.  
And your breath  
remained heavy.

## Reconciliation of the Ineffable

At seven thirty in the morning we sipped Picon Punch from cracked glasses at the Basque hotel where we'd become accustomed to meeting + where the owner offered to walk me home, through the quiet, bedraggled sections of downtown. I remember the taste, burnt + citrus, better than anything else that day.

We sat, with our glasses in front of us, with those dusky drinks, which we nursed.

The word we picked, for that morning + for the closeness of our bodies + for the beans and bread and pickled tongue and fries which streamed by in the strange succession of all our dreamlike encounters was *austere*.

You said, *even though I know I don't get to say it*

*I want you still.* Before it all, before I walked under the vibrating, green-canvas awning, I was waiting with the backs of my arms on the stucco façade. In every direction I looked, debris swirled through street, magical + dust-covered.

Newton's Laws of Motion Enacted

I.

You were headed  
to the city,  
but not until  
you *had to*.

Loose cigarettes  
in your shirt pocket,  
and I smelled them.

II.

The smell of tobacco in your hair,  
you put one hand on either side of me.

When the bird hit the window  
we thought it was a ball. We thought  
there was a game outside.

III.

Once, I made a list  
of all our breakfasts together:  
apricots, toast, Jack and gingers,  
honey, butter cookies, Brie.  
We ate together in bed, and then you  
stepped out onto the porch.

Always,  
the smoke  
trailed in  
behind you.

## Peace Between Us

You glued my face onto a still from *Independence Day*,  
knowing I liked the movie but was embarrassed to admit it.

It was a picture you found online, me in a green dress,  
and you put it on my desk when you flew home for vacation.

Of all the things you could have loved  
you admired most my dresses.

The afternoon before you were gone, we laced Twinkies with fireworks  
then recorded their flight. They exploded across the yard.

The sound scared the pigeons, but not enough to keep  
them away. They flocked and hovered over our crumbled cakes.

Then, because everything else was closed  
I ate pan-fried noodles for the Fourth of July.

My fortune cookie said *do not mistake  
temptation for desire*. I threw it away.

I never asked about her, but I did ask two questions  
on the phone: *What were you teased about as a child?*

And *what's the worst thing that ever happened to you?*

## Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle<sup>1</sup>

What you are and  
are not capable of.

You started by counting  
backward from a hundred

and didn't rest  
until you finished.

This is not about  
our instruments,

not a question  
of our methods.

This is a problem with  
the *way* we perceive.

I brought you a puppet we made  
from a cereal box,

and you wanted to know  
where to hide it at home.

You had one leg splayed  
over Kern County's red rock.

Your silhouette fire in the  
nightmoving sky, fire, and

the radiant heat  
from the desert floor,

---

<sup>1</sup>Which states that it is impossible to know both the exact position and exact velocity of an object at the same time.

the fever of your  
hand on my arm.

The river skulked  
in the canyon below.

At some point that night,  
you disappeared

in the direction from  
which you first emerged,

And I measured  
as you left.

Uncertainty is inherent  
in the nature of things.

It is true, the faster you moved,  
the less certain I was of where

you were, exactly.

## FOIL

*To multiply two binomials, find the sum of the products of:  
the first terms, the outer terms, the inner terms, the  
last terms.*

(Thistles in all directions + The sting on my fingers and in my feet)(You ran your tongue over each burn slowly + It didn't help, but I asked you not to stop) =

(Thistles across the footpath)(Your tongue on me) + (Everywhere, thistles)(and no help. I asked you not to stop) + (My fingers and my feet, flaring)(and you ran your tongue over them) + (That aching in my hands)(without relief, but I had asked for you)

## Trust Exercise

Preparing to kiss me underwater:

*I'll hold you down, you say,*

*until you give the signal.*

You don't say what the signal is.



## Your Lover Visits Chinatown

She hadn't been on my mind  
until I thought I saw her  
inspecting a tea pot printed  
with fish, swirling across  
its porcelain belly.

I followed her.  
By the mildewed signs,  
through the gunmetal alleys.  
I followed, even when I saw  
it wasn't her after all.

I have reviled and adored  
every woman I meet  
who resembles her  
or shares her name.  
I have craved

more than anything to know  
her laugh. I have wanted to ask,  
and I have in my sleep,  
*Do you know who I am?*  
*Do you recognize my name?*

A List of Inequalities

The moth of hair in your eyes.      You put one hand on either side of me.

The plumskin river,      gloss as we rowed across it.

A water snake pulled      loose from his skin.

In the beginning, in love      we drank only Mexican beers,

and there were hot dry towns where we spent the night      neon lights against your collarbone.

How can a place so dry      exist in such proximity to the sea? That's what you asked.

The warmth      and the hardness I always found at the pit of you.

Because you were there when I was dreaming      at first, I did not ache awakening.

## Introduction to Light

The lush of rope-and-saltwater burn  
across your body: an opening bud:  
You, in bloom.

Then the body's ability to swallow  
its own wounds, like a starfish gutted  
and regrowing on the ocean floor.<sup>1</sup>

When we swam in the ocean  
I saw your body split by liquid horizon,  
filtered through water's lens  
and you were two discrete parts of yourself:  
the breathing and the treading.

---

<sup>1</sup>Plato wrote that people were once all two-faced and four-armed and four-legged.  
Their power was so great that Zeus cut them in half.  
And that is why we search for our other.

## Biased Sampling

I do not know good lichen from bad lichen, but I know  
how to love it on beauty alone. Green against grey rock.

As a child, each year I sold wrapping paper,  
a fundraiser to benefit local schools. And when

my grandmother moved into a one-story  
home I helped sort her things,

found one hundred and sixty rolls  
in the closet of her craft room.

It's beautiful to love someone  
that much. It's sickening.

*In seven years, you once said.  
In seven years, I've never felt this with her.*

The first time you left me,  
I didn't see your message,

so I sent you one myself. *Today has been long.  
And lonely.* You said, *I'm so sorry.* And I asked you why.

In my grandmother's wrappings I found every color,  
every trend from 1986 on, and she wanted them all.

She said it felt like dying to let them go.  
I comforted her, but she was right.

She was dying.  
There was nothing I could do.

You told me once that you had to go back,  
because you loved her. And she deserved it.

But I have always thought  
you replaced me instead.

In science, to love something is to understand it.

## Acceptable Loss

You weren't here for the flood, and so you never saw:  
when the water began to rise all the animals knew,

fidgiting in their fields. We had seen this before  
in the moments before an earthquake or a tornado

touching down. When the rains first came,  
the earthworms emerged, glistened

onto the streets, where you helped me  
for hours, carrying them safely to dryer ground.

But as soon as we had finished there were  
hundreds more, and we gave up on the task,

left them distorted and thrashing, blind  
to their fate on the sidewalk and the road.

An acceptable loss. You said. And you  
were gone, later, when the water

filled the fields. You had left,  
and didn't know: As farmers

prepared to set their livestock  
free, word came from insurance

that no man could claim he had lost his pigs,  
unless he could show their bodies had drowned.

Some of the farmers let them go anyway,  
loosed them into the woods

for whatever they may find in the wild.  
Some kept them caged, watched them

struggle to swim, until they couldn't anymore,  
and they sank into the mud.

## Orion

You calculated the distance from one place  
to another using stars. What that said was:

*I'm still leaving.* Looking into that dark matter  
meant seeing back in time,

before the burn of our skin,  
before the hierophantic burst of fire.

And yes, even though it rained all week,  
the hills dripped off yellow and parched as always.

In the ocean, water tessellated around us:  
You said *there's a storm coming*. You kissed me, and I breathed in.

## Simplifying Expressions

### *Commutative*

(Having mixed two Grasshoppers)(exotic green light spilled onto your arms.)

=

(On your arms that strange fluorescence)(In you hands two glasses. And you offered me one.)

### *Associative*

(There is a comparison to be made about the sweet and bitter of all things)The weight of what we carry.

=

The sweet and bitter of all things(The comparisons we have made, and the weight of what we carry.)

### *Substitution*

Your sugar cube warped by steaming water(I feel both that you are completely mine and that I've never held any part of you.)

=

The pressing weight of your hipbone(I feel both that you are completely mine and that I've never held any part of you.)

### *Zero*

The sickening burden of hope(0) = 0(The sickening burden of hope) = 0

## Ordered Pairs

Of the many things you warmed for me; on the train  
you fed me chocolate from your mouth.

Watching me change dresses  
in the rain, in the car,

*I hadn't noticed*, is what you said  
as you thumbed my ribmark.

The unshaved spot on my thigh,  
my milked-up skin a gesture.

Later, my arm across your pillow,  
and you were sleeping, or seemed to be.

Now I speak to you in private:



IV.

*Inverse, Converse, and Contrapositive: Context*

Dragged

like a boat across a sandbar. That day,  
a crocus burned into the mud.

I had a kipper,  
picked apart by the tendrils,

and I smelled it, soaking in brine,  
rinsing itself of the river.

So often, with water,  
the motion toward clean,

the lessening of some thing  
that was before.

I sought you:  
your mouth on my neck.

One more time you stretched  
my legs apart

*Inverse, Converse, and Contrapositive: Example*

*Statement:* You said you were coming, and you were bringing cherry cordials.

*Converse:* You had cherry cordials in your bag, and you were already underway.

*Inverse:* But then, No. No syrupy afternoon.

*Contrapositive:* The acid taste of your absence, the honeyed language of being alone.

## The Evening Ended with a Story

in which seabirds bathed  
and spread their wings.  
You were with them, magnificent,  
before you were gone.

You, the bright meteor  
flaring light on my face,  
light I felt but never saw because  
I blinked as it passed.

You, the sundress I lost  
at the beach, the flowered  
dress I never replaced.  
No pattern has been as lovely  
as the memory of the first.

I knew a woman who wished  
to be encased by you,  
as with the papery wings  
around a garlic clove.

I knew a woman who quivered  
at the touch of your mouth  
the way fish seem to shiver  
beneath the surface of the sea.

## Radical Equations

Let me be clear. Some things still are:  
the windswept efficiency  
of mornings by the bay,  
the slow rock of fog.

If I don't hear from you for weeks  
and a round, black spider sashays  
across the porch, I say it is  
your signature.

You might have said, *just tell me*  
*and I'll come for you,*  
or *I counted every strand*  
*of her hair that strayed onto*  
*onto my pillow last night.*

Even now, rockfish resist  
my airward pull, twist and thrash  
their poison spines —

Until they don't.  
I hope you're the same.  
I hope that you aren't.

For Example

I filled a jar with  
wild strawberries:  
each was tart and pale  
at its core. I cannot choose.

You were asleep,  
a shirt over your eyes,  
which does not matter

except it was you,  
and I remember.  
You brought me an ice pop

from the fridge,  
and then another  
after the first.

They effloresced  
in your hands.  
Your hands

have laid themselves  
bare across my skin.

## Missing Data Problem

The lemons grow back,  
each year with thicker skins,  
thinning out the fruit  
season after season.

Oh yes, the ever-changing  
membrane between jealousy  
and loneliness.

### Proof of Life III

I know very little, but I understand,  
the potential envenomation  
of every thing, When the snakes gathered,  
their thick throats pulsed.

What resonates within us  
before we know why:  
*You can tell if they're poison  
by looking at their eyes.*  
But hope you never  
get close enough to know.

Once we stole fireflies  
from their thrumming cloud,  
and I fed them through your lips,  
and you fed them through my lips.  
And our eyes glowed the whole way home.



## Blood Letting

Remember how gems harden,  
nursed inside the earth's crust?

Yes, we owe our lives  
to the violent forces that created us.

That unsew us.  
I had a lover once. I had a lover

who was there until he was not.  
I am waiting for your message.

I am still waiting for your message.

Alexandra Answers

Math is a meditation on love,  
a force unknown and mythical.

Once, a man blew air onto my palms:  
He noticed they were cold, but I hadn't told him.

There is a beauty in competing forces,  
and in futility and prediction.

All there is, is knowing. Or wonder.  
If we're lucky we can explain why.

We have only what we are given.  
So we take it, and we expand.

## NOTES

p 51 “seabirds bathed / and spread their wings,” is from the Old English poem “The Seafarer.”

## VITA

Emileigh Barnes grew up in Oxford, Mississippi. She graduated with honors and high distinction from the University of Iowa, where she served as editor-in-chief of *The Daily Iowan*, was a runner-up in the 2008 Hearst spot-news competition, and was named one of UWire's "100 Most Promising Young Journalists." As a graduate student at the University of Mississippi, she won both an honors scholarship and a dissertation fellowship. She also served as poetry editor of the *Yalobusha Review*, student coordinator for the Grisham Visiting Writers Series, and design architect of Oxford's chapter of *100,000 Poets for Change*. She is a member of Phi Beta Kappa, Phi Kappa Phi, and Kappa Tau Alpha.