

## Paper

I am made from paper  
fold an airplane, I fly for real  
Crumple into missile, seems more substantial  
than I feel  
Paper  
Paper  
Paper

Paper, with a message  
lost to disappearing ink  
Strike a match, I curl to ash  
in the kitchen sink  
Paper  
Paper  
Paper

Cut from folded paper  
Into dolls, joined at the fist  
a string of dolls each like the other  
girls you kissed  
Paper

I am made from paper  
fragile husk, paper thin  
So lightly here I disappear  
on a breath of wind  
Paper  
Paper  
Paper

## Loyalty

Back when we were friends she had a lover who was once an extra  
in a Woody Allen film, it might have been Manhattan  
I never got to meet him. He was swept away  
That was exhibit A of how she inspired passion  
Exhibit B changed frequently, C was mythical  
and she was an unreliable narrator  
I don't know if she wanted me to know she was wanted  
Or if she wanted me to hate her  
But I was hard to shake  
I was hard to shake  
I was hard to shake  
You can't fake this kind of loyalty  
Heartbreak and a copper snake  
And the familiar ache of intoxicating cruelty  
Made me hard to shake  
I was hard to shake  
I was hard to shake

Back then I could live on a little cash  
And what I found in the trash, it didn't take a lot  
I was keeping company with anyone who'd let me  
I was tough. I needed nothing, I gave more than I got  
and no one owed me anything, it didn't matter  
I knew I could depend on my devotion and my sacrifice  
and the luxury of righteousness, but that was long ago  
And all of it was just a waste of artifice  
But I was hard to shake  
I was hard to shake  
I was hard to shake  
You can't fake this kind of loyalty  
Heartbreak and a copper snake  
And the familiar ache of condescending cruelty  
Made me hard to shake  
I was hard to shake  
I was hard to shake

The story of a boy, this was long before  
He led me to the floor while the band played MacArthur Park  
The song went on and on and on, we fell into each other  
The mystery of his touch became familiar in the half dark  
And it felt like a beginning, a prelude to what?  
It was a prelude to nothing, it was just a moment.  
After it was over I was still lonely and haunted  
And I was still terrified by everything I wanted  
But I was hard to shake  
I was hard to shake  
I was hard to shake  
You just can't fake this kind of loyalty  
Heartbreak and a copper snake  
And the familiar ache of intoxicating beauty  
Made me hard to shake  
I was hard to shake  
I was hard to shake  
You can't fake this kind of loyalty  
Heartbreak and a copper snake  
And the familiar ache of godforsaken cruelty  
Made me hard to shake

## **Bluebird**

They stitched my empty ribcage closed  
and left me up here on subsidy.  
The birds come back year after year  
With blood red breasts they build a nest high in the hollow tree  
I'll wait by my window watching  
To catch the moment hatchlings  
leave the nest  
Bluebird, happiness  
Bluebird

On the first day of my war  
I floated above Normandy  
Whole battalions bloomed up there  
to dreamlike choirs of rifle fire and heavy artillery,  
I was the one to snag a tree  
and hang there helplessly  
with a shattered chest  
Bluebird, happiness  
Bluebird, happiness

My father fought at Amiens  
I heard his stories as a kid  
Then my war broke so I signed on  
To prove my worth and claim my birthright like my father did  
Bluebirds leave the nest, float through the air  
On a wing, a prayer  
And all the rest  
Bluebird, happiness  
Bluebird, happiness  
Bluebird, happiness

## **Being Her Child**

Her eyes are not windows. They are small blue stones  
Her touch is bone on bone where she stops and I begin  
There are rules but I don't know them. I'm careful, often wrong  
But her dependable disappointment in me is curiously comforting  
There is never enough, no promise of more  
She smolders, she has dignity  
She watches over me with abiding indifference  
That I take as proof of her superiority  
Draw a line  
Draw a line  
Draw a line

After she dies I go by my dreams  
Recurring ones, windows into memory  
And vivid ones with sirens, flashing lights, a cast of thousands  
Playing out an astonishingly honest drama  
There are times when the past floods through the future  
I'm wearing her clothes but maybe I shouldn't be  
I find a paint box full of small blue stones  
I find an old photograph that looks like me  
Draw a line  
Draw a line  
Draw a line

A heart beats for exactly a lifetime  
When hers stops everything moves too fast, for a while  
And then later, it moves too slow while I try to learn  
How to unsolve the puzzle of being her child

## Lucy Remembers Her Father

He would have raised a hundred kids, for a built in audience  
But mother had had enough of him before I was even born  
So I am the only one, running out and riding shotgun  
when he pulls up to pick me up, leaning on the horn

Who in the world is that, banging on the piano keys?  
Dad's house is full of strangers playing tune after tune.  
My father knows the harmonies, everybody sings along.  
When he laughs Dad's eyes are crescent moons

We were rich in dogs and cats and shade trees  
Poor in existential angst and solitude  
Rich in mosquito bites, moths around the porch light  
Poor in pop culture TV news

When he planted this tree it was just a twig and so was I  
Willow was his word for me, so he chose a willow tree  
And look now how it's grown so high, all the years gone by  
Sheltering and waving, remember me

We were rich in colored pencils, brown paper bags  
Poor in long distance calls and cruises  
Rich in homegrown tomatoes and river rocks  
Poor in family feuds and excuses  
We were rich in books and strangers on the porch steps  
Poor in political influence  
We were rich in wood smoke, dust bunnies, mouse traps  
Poor in pedigree and regrets

He would have raised a hundred kids, he loved to have an audience  
But I was the only one

## Strange Boy

A strange boy became a strange man  
He forgot the combination to his bicycle lock  
So he talked his way into having to stay  
then he could not turn back  
he could not turn back the clock

A lonely boy became a lonely man  
I gave him a poem for a valentine  
He wrote suggestions and corrections  
in the margins  
margins in red ballpoint pen

A moody boy became a moody man  
He brought me whiskey then took it back  
so we drank to ambiguity  
with water

water from the tap

A cynical boy became a cynical man  
He had elbows and eyebrows and excuses  
and I had all the time in the world  
to contemplate  
contemplate my bruises

A strange man became a stranger  
He stayed up all night to watch me sleep  
He was gone at dawn but a fleet of paper airplanes  
Had crashed  
Crashed into the sheets

## **Coyote Highway**

There's a dry creek that runs through this part of town  
I call it the coyote highway.  
At night they follow it down from the hills and into my neighborhood  
I hear their cries up the block and I let time stand still.  
It reminds me of something I wish I could tell you  
but it's not that kind of memory

I took Jay for his x-ray the morning of my birthday  
There would be no more bargaining  
On the way home he went to the market for oysters to make me dinner  
Are you sure, I said. I don't mind...  
and Jay said, no, we've been planning this for a long time  
So he built a fire on the beach  
From driftwood and crumpled pages of The Irish Examiner  
He roasted corn and potatoes in the coals  
and played his guitar until dawn.  
Coyotes were calling from up the creek  
Seven weeks later he was gone

No one remembered my birthday this year  
The day came and went, another circle around the sun  
And there will be another and another until it's done  
Will anyone remember then?  
Say it doesn't matter. Say there is always a beginning and an end  
There is always a story  
Last night I heard them calling on the coyote highway  
Voices rising through my dream until I woke and wound the window open to hear better  
Farther away than they sound I know, but I wonder  
Are they getting closer?

## Understudy

Mother, I'm your fondest fear, your darkest dream, your understudy  
Your last best chance to get it right, beat me bloody

Silent with my hand locked to your hand like jets refueling in flight  
Matching you step for step, how can I do nothing right?

Mother watch me walk away in heels so high the pavement's bending  
Your telephone will ring and ring but you won't want to know the ending

## Il Ne M'aimera Jamais (He Will Never Love Me)

I went to his house and took off my dress  
and stayed for three days. What a mess.  
Back on the street, in the window displays  
I saw a man give a mannequin a withering gaze  
Il ne m'aimera jamais

I said it was love as if that would explain  
why I fell for familiar disdain  
Back on the street in the cold light of day  
a little girl danced while her dad turned away  
Il ne m'aimera jamais

I went to his house, slept in his bed  
my little black dress, over my head  
Back on the street by the sidewalk cafe  
A man fed the birds but the birds flew away  
Il ne m'aimera jamais

## Story

He was late and I was angry  
because I was suspicious  
but instead of apology or excuse  
He told me this story

When he was a boy his father took him to Africa,  
it was not a holiday but instead a quest  
to find the uncle who had vanished into Lagos  
leaving no address.

One broken trail led to another  
they walked deep into the dark chaos of the city  
through beggars, stench of rotting fish and trash  
He watched his father for clues

How do you find your way in a place like that?  
they were hopelessly lost in the unbearable heat  
when his father cried out and fell to his knees in the dirty street

and his heart stopped

He was nine years old in the slums of Lagos.  
He watched barefoot children swarm to strip his father's shoes,  
and watch, his wallet, and clothes, his hat  
and sunglasses, maps and scraps of paper with numbers on them.

Later he watched a man with a cart take away the body  
but said nothing.  
The sun went down and he walked in the dark.  
He was afraid to stop. He didn't cry.

When the sun came up he traded his shirt for a loaf of bread.  
He traded his shoes for fruit.  
He watched boys begging and stealing, and he learned to do it.  
Days or weeks passed. He was not unhappy. He found his way. He saved himself.

You can't be American, he said, and hope to disappear,  
even in the unmapped maze of Lagos.  
Eventually they came looking. At first he hid from them.  
Then he let himself remember.

So he went home to his mother, to running water,  
to a bed, to food on a table,  
to New York City. He didn't think about his father  
until many years later

And now, he said, I think about my father all the time  
Am I the age that he was then? How old would he be now?  
Who would he be if he had lived?  
Who would I be if I hadn't been found?

And who is anyone really? What use is trust?  
Can having replace wanting? Or are we just pulled  
From place to place without closure or relief?  
Is anything stronger than grief?

And we sat a long moment caught in each other's gaze.  
In my mind we are still there, lost in questions without answers  
although we each moved on, drawn to something bright and new  
that looked beautiful from far away

## **Luminary**

Someday we'll meet again on Jane Street  
Will you remember, will you bend for a kiss  
How's it going to feel, seeing you for real  
After all the years I've been avoiding this?  
And will we go by Goldmine Jake's for old time's sake  
If I'm hoping for something I hope I know better  
Is the paradox lost on you, the bestselling author who  
can't even write me a letter?

But that's just my side of the story, what's yours?  
Every mile, every road leading you back to Jane Street  
You've been living with yourself, in sickness and in health,  
For better or worse, overflowing, incomplete,  
And focused and brilliant and destined for fame  
Rising star, then notable, then luminary  
When you look back from where you came  
Do we seem breathtakingly ordinary?

Do do do do do do  
Luminary  
Do do do do do do  
Back to Jane Street

If I'm honest I'd say you were forthright and real  
and mysterious, gifted and complicated  
When I couldn't rescue you, I felt like a fool  
So I tried to believe it was you I hated  
But now I see it was me  
For instance, how long since I walked down Jane Street?  
Unless I wanted to find the Sunday Times  
And read into your success my defeat

Do do do do do do  
Complicated  
Do do do do do do  
Walk down Jane Street  
Do do do do do do  
Luminary  
Do do do do do do  
Back to Jane Street