



LIBRARIES

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Kamikaze commotion: poetry. 2008

Cofell, Cathryn

Madison, Wisconsin: Parallel Press, 2008

<https://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/DZ2KU2ID6STUL9A>

Copyright 2008 by the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System. All rights reserved.

For information on re-use see:

<http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/Copyright>

The libraries provide public access to a wide range of material, including online exhibits, digitized collections, archival finding aids, our catalog, online articles, and a growing range of materials in many media.

When possible, we provide rights information in catalog records, finding aids, and other metadata that accompanies collections or items. However, it is always the user's obligation to evaluate copyright and rights issues in light of their own use.

kamikaze commotion

POETRY BY CATHRYN COFELL

PARALLEL PRESS

A PARALLEL PRESS CHAPBOOK

Kamikaze Commotion

Poems by
Cathryn Cofell



PARALLEL PRESS 2008

University of Wisconsin–Madison Libraries
728 State Street
Madison, Wisconsin 53706
<http://parallelpress.library.wisc.edu>

Copyright © 2008 by the Board of Regents of
the University of Wisconsin System

All rights reserved.

ISBN: 978-1-893311-95-4

Grateful appreciation to the editors of the following journals and anthologies in which some of these poems (some in other forms) first appeared: 2000: *Here's to Humanity*; *Byline Magazine*; *Comstock Review*; *Conceit Magazine*; *Fox Cry Review*; *Free Verse*; *Hodge Podge Poetry*; *Illness & Grace*, *Terror & Transformation*; *Main Street Rag*; *Moon Journal*; *Nerve Cowboy*; *One Trick Pony*; *Page 5*; *Prose Toad*; *Rattle*; *TMP Irregular*; *Wisconsin Poets' Calendar*; and *Word Riot*.

FIRST EDITION

*For Sara. For Ann. For Sue.
For all these beautiful girls.*

How many losses does it take to stop a heart,
to lay waste to the vocabularies of desire?

—Dorianne Laux

Contents

Five Small Spoons of Green Bean Soup	08
Palm Street	10
Stuck	12
Anxiety Attack	13
Blame it on Shelly	14
God vs. Jetta	15
Still Life: Hospice	16
Nerve Damage	17
Virtual Friend	18
Capable Only of Small Things	19
Angela's Note	20
The Day Phil Hartman Died	21
These Men	22
Leaves of Grass/Suicide/Psychic Hotlines	23
Getting Inside His Head	25
Postmortem	26
O-Bitch-uary	27
What I Meant to Say Instead of <i>Drop Dead</i>	28
Return of the Living Dead	29
Ghost Ship	30
Woman as Macaroni	31
Pharmaceutica Rex	32
Kamikaze	33
How to Live	34
Punctuation	35
The Palm Reader Predicts I Will Die in My Underwear	37

Five Small Spoons of Green Bean Soup

Five thirty p.m.

Grandpa hunches, on guard at the table. Grandma cocks her loaded silver ladle, readies the first surprise shot at a delicate appetite. Beth Zurbuchen reports live from TV-9: *This Just In. Couple caught forcing five small spoons of green bean soup down granddaughter's hostage throat! Neighbor Bob saves the day (details at ten)!*

The first bullet zings over my trembling left shoulder, plummets into the gaping grand canyon soup bowl, clatters like a rock in an early grave. Beth is gone. I am back. Bob waves as he drives away. Not even Wonder Woman can save me now.

If I were old, I would know the sins of cream and pesticided produce. I could preach an organic low fat diet, commune my family with green tea and a cool spinach salad. But I am only ten, and nailed to this table til I suck down five small spoons of green bean soup.

Hands shake as I pull the bucket spoon to lips that wouldn't part for Moses, pray one last time for the crucifix to fall off the wall and bonk grandma on the head. Jesus winks, and I know this is to be my hell on earth as the first mushy caterpillar wriggles over my tongue, builds a thick cocoon in the pit of my stomach.

Six p.m.

Four small spoons of green bean soup remain.

I could go on about the horror of how green bean soup congeals as cream cools, how beans that soak too long will bloat to the top like dead bodies, how a stubborn girl who sits too long begins to shrink like Alice, grows back only when she downs four more spoons before the sun sets, before the grandparents begin to bite.

I will spare you the final swallows.

Five small green details at ten.

Palm Street

Up the hill past St. Mark's Catholic Church,
seven friends huddle over a shiny red go-cart,
point, point, point for position in a serious game
of Ink-a-Dink elimination.

Trudy, with elbow macaroni for hair and a plate
of metal for mouth, gets the final push-off spot,
ties her push-off sneakers, flexes her scabby big toe.

Everyone else scrambles for position.

The three brothers tuck inside like powder donuts,
Trudy's sister and I straddle the cart's fat torso,
my baby brother (tiny enough to tuck in a pocket
and forget) tucks in behind, clings to the seat back
like a wood tick and Trudy clings to him
and everyone bellers *a-ooohgha, a-ooohgha*
and we begin.

There's a trick to this slow rock, this move forward,
this hiccup over the edge. The cart rocks the crest
and rocks the crest, and rocks; we are ketchup
in a new bottle until, at last, gravity or Trudy
kicks in and the g-forces pull and we move,
we descend, we drop, we plummet, we
scream toward bottom, wind in every
pour, mill dust in our throats, eyes
in a vacuum, mouth in frozen *o*.

There's a lesson in falling.
In bending away from the curve, in
rolling away without tensing up,
without splitting a lip or wrapping
around a fire hydrant and for this time,
we all get it right.

We are bodies in groove, a flood
of pure journey, we celebrate
like Trudy's Uncle Lou when he has had
enough, we scream *a-ooohgha* one more time
and one more time after that.
We turn around, we turn back,
we pull the weight of our small world
back up that breathless hill,
back into the palm of God.

Stuck

So which commandment did I break this time? Right after confession (sins still scrawled on my palm so I wouldn't get the telling wrong too), after the *Hail Marys*, after the kneeling and the murbling, at the part where you dip your fingers into that dull cup mounted at the door, press down that pea green sponge and cross yourself and vow to never sin again.

I was all alone except for the priest
and that old lady with the bad hat (probably confessing her rage
over that other old lady with the better hat)
so I stuck them all in, all five of those little girl fingers,
I stuck the whole packet of thieves in
and scooped that holy H₂O up,

I slurped it in, swoggled it around my empty cavities
(they rolled in that divine liquid),
I swallowed it down with one big bullfrog gulp.

I waited, there in that doorway
with all those *C words*—commandment, catechism, communion—
I waited with that flat metal taste in my mouth
for the swirling wind, the blizzard of bugs,
for the church to cave in, my stomach to cave in, for wings or horns
or the guy in the big white beard,
for Jesus to come down off that cross
our CCD class varnished one Sunday afternoon
and flatten me like the first-born.

At the very least, I was sure old father what's-his-name would come out
of that confessional, that his knees would come up and the light
would go out and that big brown door would open, that he'd say
what in God's name have you done now Cathryn?

but nothing happened, until it got late
and I was in a different kind of trouble again
and I'm still waiting;

I never confessed this unholy digestion so
according to the Word of the Lord
he's in me now, stuck like constipation.

Anxiety Attack

Then the creeping starts. Teeth marks in the back
of a hand. Furry scuttle around bare toes. Cramps
deep enough to break a sweat, to drain the blood pale.
You sit on the edge, head down until the buzz stops.
Sit up slowly. Look behind, then look again.
Only the cat, her black tail swishing.
Down the street, kids should be shooting cap guns,
old women should be plopped on porch rockers
fanning their dresses and everyone's flaws, and
in the distance, a lawn mower drone. But only the cat,
her black tail. And you, looking behind.
You open a bottle of wine, no glass. Run barefoot
to the gas station to buy cigarettes, even though you haven't
cracked a pack in six years. You light one on the run back,
heart a roaring tornado. It comes. Hard.
You have never been close to death, never touched a cheek
in a coffin, yet you are certain this is how it feels
before the calm comes and the light comes—
when your car flips on the ice of a deserted county trunk
and you wake much later with your ear in your hand,
something metal running through you and the car
smelling of mercury and gasoline, and you know
everyone else is safe at home watching the weather,
waiting this out, waiting for the plow to pass.

Blame it on Shelly

I saved her when I should have let her jump.
Perched there on the cusp of eighth grade,
third floor stairwell,
she was poised on that slab
of banister, legs already over,
head already dipping
to take a long cool sip from that bubbler,
to be that cold arch of water herself
cascading down a drain.

I grabbed her without thinking.

I held on.

She made me believe I was invincible,
that I had some gift like a horse whisperer
or a Sunday TV healer
but we screwed up, got the moral
of the moment all wrong.

I was that curse sealed inside
King Tut's tomb and she unleashed me,
now everyone I try to hold drops
like a water balloon, and every time
I hear that god whispering in my ear
*(this town ain't big enough
for the both of us).*

And every time I hear Shelly,
somewhere near Death Valley,
living large.

God vs. Jetta

Will all that German engineering
get me to you
on the way to your death
faster than prayer?
You, too, were once a strong German machine—
no Hitler youth, no tin can,
in full chug through days at the mill
and nights at the tavern,
now a thin rope in this crazy tug-of-war
between my little white car
and your fickle white god.
I am Godiva, naked on the back of this beast.
He invents snakes and sin
and has a wicked sense of humor,
but I've got Bob Marley on
and a full tank of gas.
You, meanwhile, Columbus,
sea legs suspended over the edge of this map.
So many miles behind and between.
Will the Jetta know when we've lost?
Will the sky blister like an old Bible movie,
the road turn to sparrow? Maybe the engine
will fail, or we'll squeal into the lot
just as your heart monitor begins to hum.
Overhead, will I hear laughter?
The chafe of raw hands.

Still Life: Hospice

After awhile, the sound of breath becomes a comfort. That and the tick tick next to the bed keeps us in sync like a junior high band. When you exhale, I can almost believe this is that dream about falling off a cliff with no trampoline, not a slow slip of blood into your brain. I can almost believe your paper skeleton will wake, face still empty of sin, body still full of compost but your eyes wide open and on fire. When you are too long quiet, nail polish left open, red carnations on the floor, black-eyed daughters snapping like peas. Their huddled bodies whisper: confessions, concessions, obsessions over whose turn to listen, to sleep in the chair, over and between the lengthening pause between each breath. Everywhere, pale bodies whisper and it makes me want to scream, *turn up your voices, God is old, he can't hear you, too many mumbled prayers, there are too many of you percolating in your separate rooms.*

I want to untie your hands, crank up the volume on this bolted-down television in this bolted-down egg timer of a tomb so loud that it jolts all the pulses, so loud that the ceiling tiles peel away to plug their ears, so loud that this flute of a man who just last week was big as a tuba sits bolt up in bed, unbolted, awake. Now there are nurses. This one to turn you like a waffle. That one to finger the slow sex of morphine. One more to cover your body with a patchwork quilt, her hands like caves. Your wife stands outside in the dark, still as a tree without leaves. There is dust on the chairs in the lounge, a bed across the hall empty now and stripped of sheets. Yesterday began so simply, over toast and poached eggs.

Nerve Damage

Tell them that, he says,
as I give him the story of old friends
who ask in the bread aisle
what's become of her and him.
Tell them I am nowhere, he says,
but right here where they left me,
positioning her broken neck
just so on the pillows and in reach
of the life she demands each day—
the cane, the coffee, the crisp cigarettes,
an unused bit of charcoal and paper—
feeding her morphine
a bit more often than he should
because she begs and begs,
because he needs it just as much.

The hardest part, he tells me,
is she still sleeps in our bed
up the stairs at the back of the house,
him carrying her dead weight,
his own wounds giving her up
again and again. *That room*
has become too small, he says,
but none of this is his to give away
so he stares all night
from a chair in the hall,
waits for the school bus to pass,
waits for the thud of news
and past due notices
before he rises, before
he carries the day back down.

Virtual Friend

We are a marriage of morse code,
click click clack
on a keyboard means
what a great blouse, where did you get it
and *aren't the stars like Peacocks tonight?*
We live in the same city
but my car was repossessed
and a man has locked you in
like Rapunzel,
you weed-whacking your hair.
I try to be your electronic prince,
attach pictures of whistling men
turning into wieners,
snippets of poems meant to enrage you
to signal S-O-S,
but I am from the wrong story.
I am naked
and don't know it,
everyone is laughing
at my jiggling flesh
as I search house to house—
have you seen my friend
with the flaming hair and daffodils?
She was right here a minute ago.
I turned to check my lipstick
and she vanished.

Capable Only of Small Things

32-A.

Toilet paper on the spindle,
spindle on the wall.

Iron unplugged.

Stimulated by fondue.

Hand-written thank you notes,

please and *excuse me*,

on time and in the right direction.

Short hair, barber hair,

poems about powerful women,

strap-on poems to feign the girth of man.

Dreams of me, Gabriel.

Dreams of her, Lily of the Valley,

squeezed dead for boys who saw her tight jeans first.

Grief is no touch at all.

Grief is witness,

eyes like disco balls, lockjaw.

Who can do more?

Angela's Note

Lately, I've become accustomed to the way silence opens and closes around me. The cat checks my pulse until I'm wide awake, counting the seconds between blanket and bedspread, listening for a car door slam somewhere down the road.

Not even the stars beat tonight.

With no full moon, I become still as dark, squeezing these minutes beyond 50, accepting this strange fate passed from mother to daughter at dangerous speed. This is what I witnessed, why I ruminate the healing power of ceremony.

Even the clocks will stop beating tonight.

I tiptoe out of my husband's hold, pull out my pills, my drum, my purple beret. Swallow them whole as humble bread. I throw poems in the air like marigolds, weave this end gently through calloused fingers, dance the heartache naked as grass.

Will you follow the beat of breath I leave behind?

The Day Phil Hartman Died

Think about getting lost.
Staring at a map for solace,
confusing cities with rivers,
backroads with borders.

Think about a battle at breakfast.
Rising like fat in a stew,
that morning dew of fried meat
lingering for long weeks after.

Think about a broken jaw.
Set against what you meant to say,
this loss of words so trivial,
words stuck forever in your teeth.

Think about Jesus with no laugh track.
Haunting a silent drafty space,
peeing with the door open,
whole body rigid, cocked for prayer.

These Men

These strong men, so many and so generous.
They took their lives and left so much behind.
They pulled off a feat reserved for gods,
this marching band of god-like men.

They took their lives and left so much behind.
Concealed instruments revealed, played to perfection
(this marching band of god-like men),
the rhythm of rifles, revolvers, a twang of rope.

Concealed instruments revealed, played to perfection,
such notes full of wonder and left behind,
the rhythm of rifles, revolvers, a twang of rope,
two wives, two girlfriends, four children, all hidden.

Such notes full of wonder and left behind,
behind all this weeping, these black eyes and dresses,
two wives, two girlfriends, four children, all hidden.
Such small notes made more generous by one minute.

Behind all this weeping, these black eyes and dresses,
such beautiful black women they are, now made strong by
such small notes, made more generous by one minute,
by opening each morning, by blinking against the light.

Such beautiful black women they are now, made strong by
keeping their safety locked, by locking in for the left-behind,
by opening each morning, by blinking against the light
(even though they may close again against such bright light).

Keeping the safety locked, locking in for the left-behind,
they pulled off a feat reserved for gods.
Even though they may close again against such bright light.
These strong men, so many and so generous.

I treasure you I said and bang
the book I gave came up from the floor
Walt came up from the floor
came up from the blood
came up from the mud
tracked in on distracted shoes
came up from the outline of your body
propped against the foot of your bed

the outline of your body still
propped against the foot of a bed

as Walt came at me
like a hood in a deep alley
like a rabid dog
like a piece of glass on a dirt road
he came up from the dirt
without a map or footsteps on parchment

just your mother's face at the door
her hand in my face *Dear Jim*
your mother's hand in my face
Walt's book in her hand
her curled hand holding his face
her curled hand
this kamikaze motion
came at me like Jesus from the dead
this kamikaze commotion
the pages of me

I gave to you
came back from the dead

she gave it back
as if she could give it back
as if she could take that bare moment back
she couldn't bear
she couldn't bear
she pushed away and it all went away
and the book in my hands brings it back
the face in my hands brings you back.

Getting Inside His Head

We thought we could polarize his brain,
but it was like ironing corduroy.
We could heat him up and flatten him out
all we wanted,
but he was still those hills and valleys.

We thought we could apply logic,
but it was like automated customer service.
We could push those touch-tone buttons
all we wanted,
but he was continual loop, message on hold.

We thought we could ignore him,
but it was like letting a campfire smolder.
We could douse him, we could turn away
all we wanted,
but he was inferno amidst such ripe kindling.

We thought we could save him,
but it was like stopping a speeding locomotive.
We could kneel and push, flail and pray
all we wanted,
but he was no Clark Kent, one bullet did the trick.

Postmortem

For a \$1.65 a line you can say
anything you want about the dead—
how he had a long list of friends,
a brilliant career as an explorer,
anything except the truth

about living full as a scarecrow,
about dying hollow in a motel tub.

You can do anything you want
with an urn full of ash—
flung over some sacred space,
pedestaled in marble,
anything except the urge

to leave it behind in a closet,
to shake it empty like a fist.

In lieu of flowers
that will come anyway
and never stop living—
his wife wants a sign,
any fluorescent neon will do,

an upset rug in the hall,
a burglar with a familiar grin.

But she's too busy looking
down, listening for the wrong
voice, and the message
she needs is a hurricane—
it will cost her too much.

O-Bitch-uary

It's not about the familiar faces—the old women I confuse
with grandmothers (smelling of pumpkin and Lysol, I bet),
the plump ladies caught cutting onions at the sink
(so many caught exactly like this), the men who hung on
past death (farmers mostly, one who poured concrete),
the babies still born and unborn, three teens
wrapped around a guardrail brilliant as Reebok.
No, not for the age of the dead or the endless column inches,
not at all for the permanence of this Life
& Style section, this daily C-4.

It's the sameness, the yawn, the flat cola taste, the
[insert name here] died
unexpectedly / after a heroic / quietly in his sleep,
the gone long preceded-bys,
the every survived-by devoted wife / child / brother
(the in-laws always parenthesized as if less alive),
the greatly be missed.

And the fear of saying the “it” out loud
as if the survived-bys were naked on a turnpike flaccid and flapping:
he killed himself ok he was a coward / quickly (*we whisper*)
thank god / she drove too fast we begged her to stop /
just a baby (*sweet jesus*) so shriveled and blue. . .

This will be us then, eternal mediocrity clipped
for a scrapbook, stored forever on microfiche.
Shredding for a bird cage.

We could presume ourselves in 100 words or less,
but would it be [flatulence? fiction?] a foolish waste of ink?
Would anyone bother to find that file, resurrect
a second draft? No. Too numb
sipping highballs, buying coffins for ashes—
this is no time for your dumbest joke,
your fumbling encounters, your passion plum lip liner,
no presses will stop to say
all our poetry is buried and gone,
someone stupendous is dead.

What I Meant to Say Instead of Drop Dead

I like how my red hair sparks
the flint of your body
to bonfire.

I sneak into dingy bars
across your state line
and order scotch

on the rocks;

sip after sip
reminds me

of your fiery cold lips.

I drive back and forth
across that line

listening to the same song.

Desperate for the last note.

Desperate to begin again.

When the tank runs dry

I sob,

I beat my head red
against the window.

Tomorrow, I will buy

every bottle of Revlon's

Deep Burgundy, Permanent,

and throw away

the rubber gloves.

I want to spread this stain

on the all of my skin

like your liquid heart.

Return of the Living Dead

Movie zombies are more alive than him,
even with their clothes in tatters,
covered in foul earth and fungus,
even knowing they must smell awful
because everyone screams
and runs away.

And why can't they put their arms down?
They didn't die this way,
they were folded like shirts in a drawer,
but still they come at you outstretched,
to engulf you with one hug.

The movie undead close in more fully vivid
with that technicolor and dolby digital sound
than the man on the other side of this
greenhouse glass who looks sorta
like my ex-husband, except he's
50 pounds lighter and his teeth are wired
(which you'd expect of a corpse),
and he is smiling.

I gave up on B-movies and Christianity
because the dead never stayed dead,
because, frankly, once we put someone
in the ground shouldn't they stay?
Now here he is after
all those years in a tomb,
but there's no fooling me,
even with the sun shafting
and his arms full of daisies, I know
inside that shop it's rancid, I know
the blossoms weep and pray.

Ghost Ship

For two years I walked your plank,
weeping when no one was looking:
into the laundry, the cat, into all the west winds,
quietly cursing every passing engine for passing,
for being loud, for having
the kind of combustion that can compel
at such an unstoppable pace
while I stood alone on deck
with my bin of recycling, failed treasure maps
and glass bottles, flattened tin cans.

For two years I crushed those cans,
deliberately and with my bare hands: even when
a sliver of silver broke loose and leapt at me
I kept crushing until every hollow
cylinder was smashed and the floor
around me was round with blood.

And then I stopped. And then I let the noise
pass through. And then I let your sails unfurl,
snap loose and flap like gulls out to sea. And then
I stuttered forward like an old woman's cane,
poking at the empty space I needed to fill
before I filled it and yes, filling it eventually.

Then you came back. Now, here I am
again, thinking of the heaven
I prayed to as a girl on my knees,
wondering what I did to get so far
from that nightdress, those folded hands,
those nights of unwavering faith,
those fat sticky angels smiling down.

Woman as Macaroni

I am packed in this
crazy world so tight
I can't tell which hand
is mine

whose lock of hair
tickles the cup
of my back locked
in this fetal

position so long
my knees and
breasts are
Siamese twins

who can hear each
other's bent nightmares
but don't listen.
We cower in plastic

blank faces peer in
their reflections the same
we're all dying
slugs on a stovetop

waiting waiting
an end to this.
Mourn me first
if you can find me.

Pharmaceutica Rex

I wake with a jolt, think my husband left
the TV on again but the sound comes
from the bathroom,
a low rumble like an earthquake
or a plane taking off
and there's a muffled scratching,
buried alive scratching,
and that prehistoric *scraw! scraw!*
like a bird circling its prey,
a timbre so inhuman
that my own throat claws
scraw scraw right with it,
because a beast who can make
that kind of ruckus
will gnaw off her own leg to escape
and will come, straight after me:
will rip right through my small son
who is waking, now,
and the still snoring husband.
It will come for me
and there will be no one else
to blame for the aftermath, it was no one
but me who filled that medicine chest
with this disregard
for precautionary labels, for one too many
treatments, for daily over-dosing
and serious side effects, I wanted only
to feel better or nothing, to escape
this miserable me.
So here it comes, my cure:
I hear the mirror shatter as
the cabinet explodes open and all the air
sucks back as if the whole house
is holding its last breath.

Kamikaze

After he died we turned
the power off and the noise
got better for awhile

but then summer came
and even though we kept
all the windows closed
some small hole crept open

and we began to fill with moths
and fireflies and creatures
too small to name

until a million thrumming wings
beat a symphony in every pore
and we pulsed inside out
fluorescent from forfeit.

Giving in was giving up but
it was right before the end
that light that brilliant light.

How to Live

Breathe in and out.
Often as goosebumps.
Caulk your bones.
Cellophane your sinuses.
Don't eat your cashew toes.
Buy frog slippers and watch them do the merengue.
Vacation in Cancun or in your mind.
Melt all the ice cubes in your freezer.
Make and melt more.
Press nose people on the bathroom window.
Ask your grandmother to pray for you.
Pray for yourself.
Kiss all the light fixtures in the house.
Listen to the cat's fur whisper to the sun.
Feel the heat giggle back.
Drink a mug of peppermint schnapps and read T. S. Eliot
out loud until your throat crawls south like a tired white heron.
Bottle the layers of your pale skin.
Peel back the layers of your dark anger
and smile at the pulp underneath.
Sing with the oranges.
Just sing.

Punctuation

You need a period at the end.

This from a friend who knows finality
is the last thing we need these days.

This hailstorm of abrupt endings.

No shelter for miles.

No tampon super enough to absorb
all the red flowing from our bodies.

Running from our words.

*You need a comma here, and here,
or the line gets confused.*

I tell her I can extend a sentence like Faulkner,
Manson, a morphine drip, but it doesn't slow this
toboggan or the slope we're on and besides,
that line was crossed a long time ago
and they just keep stumbling over it,
the dicks, the dictators,
the dogs with their dogma, the dealers
and demagogues, the doctors who declare
this white count isn't normal,
the dead friends who disagreed.

*A colon? she asks. Do you really want
that kind of emphasis?*

Jesus, I say, who asked for it: what happened
to our soft semi-colon ways, so many
winking eyes gone out; let me whisper
(and not from fear, but awe)
in the shelter of a thousand parentheses:
and if the phone rings again at three a.m.
how about you give me back
my ellipses until all this oomph is still?

Some rules aren't meant to be broken,
she says, and because I am corrected
often I fear she is right.
But suppose we abandoned this
biblical ballast, our bodies grown wild
with run-on, our throats ripe
with the grammar of thieves?
What could possibly happen
worse than this,
what could be more punctured?

The Palm Reader Predicts I Will Die in My Underwear

So I never take my clothes off anymore.
Never sleep naked or alone, something so
transparent in both, a cold draft that enters
when you get up to pee or check for noise.
There's an ease in always being dressed, in
never seeing your own breasts sag in reflection,
in hiding from your own end like a rabbit.

I will be caught on a wash day. It will be
a Wednesday, in the middle, on the edge,
a slice of ham, the creamy center. I will be
young and unfilled. Not yet fifty and in
my Jockey's, face scrubbed with panic,
arms soaping at the sink. The coroner will come
like the cable guy, will finger my neck,
will mutter *so many wrinkles for someone so young*
and my husband, hovering near the tub, will say
she smiled a lot, even when she didn't mean it
and it will all make sense at once,
the alabaster skin, the dripping panties, the grin.

My husband won't know where to go with me
because I never could decide on just one
place to be. He will burn me,
he will keep me awhile near
the back door in the turtle blue teapot,
waiting, in death as in life,
for the precise moment to take me for a drive,
to spill me at every stop.
Or he will sell the house with me still in it.
A proper haunting,
a ghost who doesn't know she's a ghost.



Cathryn's work can be found in *Prairie Schooner*, *Laurel Review*, *Phoebe*, *MARGIE*, *Slipstream*, *Nerve Cowboy*, and many others. She is the recipient of two Pushcart Prize nominations, the Jade Ring, and the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters Outstanding Poem award for two consecutive years. She has four previous chapbooks: *Her Religion*, from Hodge Podge Press; *Tiny Little Crushes*, from Lockout Press; *Roadkill*, through the Neville Public Museum; and *Sweet Curdle*, from Marsh River Editions. Cathryn is a passionate advocate for the arts, having served as an advisor to the governor of Wisconsin for the creation of a state poet laureate, as founding chair of the Wisconsin Poet Laureate Commission, on the board of the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets, and as a pro-arts voice wherever she'll be heard. She is a frequent keynote speaker, workshop facilitator, and guest poet at venues throughout Wisconsin, but calls Appleton home.

PARALLEL PRESS POETS

Marilyn Annucci • E.J. Bergmann • Harriet Brown
Charles Cantrell • Robin Chapman • Cathryn Cofell • Temple Cone
Francine Conley • Paul Dickey • CX Dillhunt • Heather Dubrow
Gwen Ebert • Barbara Edelman • Susan Elbe • Karl Elder
R. Virgil Ellis • Jean Feraca • Jim Ferris • Doug Flaherty
Allison Funk • Max Garland • Ted Genoways • John Graber
Richard Hedderman • Rick Hilles • Karla Huston • Catherine Jagoe
Diane Kerr • Carl Lindner • Sharon F. McDermott • Mary Mercier
Corey Mesler • Stephen Murabito • John D. Niles • Elizabeth Oness
Roger Pfingston • Andrea Potos • Eve Robillard
James Silas Rogers • Michael Salcman • Carmine Sarracino
Shoshauna Shy • Judith Sornberger • Judith Strasser
Alison Townsend • Dennis Trudell • Tisha Turk
Ron Wallace • Timothy Walsh • Matt Welter
Katharine Whitcomb • J.D. Whitney • Mason Williams



Parallel Press

University of Wisconsin–Madison Libraries

<http://parallelpres.library.wisc.edu>

ISBN: 978-1-893311-95-4