

What Beautiful

by

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This is to certify that the master's thesis of

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has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

Signatures have been redacted for privacy

For myself
and my wife.
Thank you.

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Muse, I call you Lucas

Lucas, you smell like
bologna and diesel fuel
and rubber tires and
sauerkraut, Tabasco juice
and teriyaki cous cous.

I love you and sopranos
and kiwi fruit and poetry
and you make no sense.

You make no sense

Lucas, you are a poem.

Lucas, I love you enough to
spill your blood, your semen

Lucas. I could kill you
and I might someday. Lucas,
I'm going to slit your throat—
listen to your lungs bubble.

Someday Lucas. I'm going to
stand over your body
and take a picture.

Polished Fruit

(Lucas stands skewed,
polishes a large nectarine
on his leg, left hand
buried in denim—)

*Simple things, he says, and citrus
fruit make my mouth water.*

(—rolls his head back, just
closes his eyes, sighs.)

*I feel them in my teeth,
precisely tart.*

(Darling, in a pale sundress,
comes drifting, full of subtlety,
lowers her eyes and smiles—)
“Lucas baby, are you hungry?”

Mourning Pangaea

1.

Autumn is delicious
 with flushed Sumac leaves,
 Shagbark Hickory, River Birch,
 Sycamore. Autumn is defiant
 with Butternut, Basswood, Quaking
 Aspen. Autumn is burning
 with the fury of a thunderbird.
 Autumn is delicious
 with the faint burnt aroma
 of the Great Lakes Ojibwa
 burning sage
 burning sage.

2.

the heartbeat
 the mother
 the earth

the heartbeat

beat

the mother

mother

the earth.

distant

Ojibwa drums

distant distant

Chippewa drums

Ojibwa drums

Chippewa drums

distant distant sage

Ojibwa drums

Chippewa drums

the rhythm

the heartbeat

the mother

the earth.

is it done?—

is it done?—

is it—

Little sweet tooth

I dream apple pie
dreams sweet and warm
syrup cinnamon rolls
off my fingers powdered
sugar sweet palate full
of caramel and caramel
bodies sugared in honey
dripping sex and frosted laughter
aloft on peppermint breeze
tears of mint and molasses run full
breasts firm and wet with
butterscotch chocolate coconut
toes vanilla thighs a platter
of fine tasty treats
 desert my fingers
the tickle behind my knee
me numb past the throat
loose and hinged at the groin
growing fat with lust and
hungry for the heft of
indulgence me soaked
in spittle—a tongue plunged
into an ivory cavity
tooth sharp with rotted pain.

You stink, cranky old bird

Pardon, if you would
please be kind and leave
be my potato fries
and politics. Catsup runs
piqued with surreptitious
lies and your verbose guise
drips grease threefold
rolling buttered and wide
long across your jowl—
collecting full and fetid
in your wrinkled collar.
You—persistently howling
some cretaceously horrific
spin in your hardened vein
—all dying yet somewhere
deep within—you should listen
more, I think.

Picture of an old couple

Standing on the beach—
she, holding his hand
at the sea, ankle deep
in undertow. Two waves
break. Sand and rock
and water-bone land
below, below my camera,
and the still, still lovers,
there are secrets still.

Still Life

I forgave the painter
of your dead face who brushed
ridiculous tints so thick on
your cheeks that I imagined
you flushed with some dreadful
sexuality—straining to rip
off the predictable lilac dress.
Your thin lips absurdly full,
pursed in the crease of a smile,
wet from the artist's bottled dribble,
seemed a kiss was what killed
you or maybe one triumphant swig
of butterscotch schnapps, eyelids
tinted hooker blue, brows pasted like
tootsie rolls thick on your forehead,
every last wrinkle drawn tight,
creamed over. I knew you
were gone, your bulbous toes
wrenched and spilling over
the sides of brand new heels. You
were dead, for sure, but shuffling
about in slippers somewhere else,
the hem of your tarpaulin slip dress
dusting the floor as you sauntered
through a bar, a *fine* bar, Virginia Slims
and a brandy snifter dripping from
your swollen fingers.

I am a coward, Jane

died in the morning
before breakfast,
damaged left hand
wild. She was mad,
eyes numb, busy
with a mouth
of drool, droning
about bacon and

*Megan needs
to go out.*

Her dog five years
dead. Jane, certain
Megan would wet
any minute now.

At dawn

I saw two men tie
a cat to the bumper
of a pickup truck
by the tail using a short
string of burlap twine.

They drove around
the parking lot howling
until it broke.

I couldn't turn away.

I just couldn't.

People at the mall

Strange things, us. Elastic
Bobbies pointing fingers
and sneering plastic
smiles. Cotton eyes
and fake ivories peek
sharp and sallow rinse
and repeat. Skeptical
cheeks gaunt and yellow
echo hollow taunts curt
enough to bleed, who knows
—I might for the hell of it
just buy it, you know.

Paper faced

I miss Philip Larkin.
I might have liked him
though I don't
read him much
anymore. Instead,
I look at his face
in old age, straight
lipped—or maybe
slightly upturned,
bald, long ears, *Hello*
Phil. I don't know
what to say. Well,
I suppose I miss Gerald
Stern too—though
he's not dead yet.

What beautiful

camo girl and her whimsy
step steps along a clumsy
bungle of tatty taps
all down the snow slick
sidewalk newly smooth
for her red keds and aquatine
stirrup pants and camo girl slips
along her bungled dance
a fever now with comic
waving here and then a terror
stare or barely less across
the street in a fine dress ms.
so-and-so seems nervous—
yes and me thinks mrs. not-
so-fast looks quite aghast
and is quite quick to look right
past camo girl and her stirrup
camo girl is no where near
but slides right past a sudden
laugh or bubbled snort is her
retort for she has found
a unicorn with jeweled eyes
and ivory thighs whose name
is Issac or Versailles and in her
mind she waves bye-bye as
off she flies in reams of silk
in clouds of milk in blueberry
skies what beautiful skies.

Girl

wearing a camo jacket,
do you see yourself
as beautiful? [I] see you
march the sidewalk
and stare at your vulgar step,
point [my] finger—[I] gape
and step out of your way.
[I] see your face pervert,
joy at once then terror-struck.
Sinewy fingers paw the hem
of your worn blouse. You
keep the stroke consistent.
You, who seem blind, smile
because you see a beautiful
thing—perhaps a girl seizing
the nape of a unicorn. [I]
cannot know what beautiful
beautiful you see.

A dirty shame, I think.

I told him not to do it,
That I'd shit myself too
from laughing so hard
and we'd be stuck out
by the tracks, hiding
in the weeds with shit
and piss in our shorts
until someone saw us
hiding in the grass,
bikes on their sides,
and would call us out—us
pleading for them to *go away!*
screaming *ok ok ok...pleeease*
don't come back here, the laughter
gone from our voices, imagine!
But he pleaded and said he *had*
to go so bad and I was laughing,
tears from laughing so hard and
I couldn't keep my breath
but was waving with my hands *wait!*
There's gotta be something! But
there wasn't and he knew it
and I knew it so he crouched
low, dropped his shorts,
and shit right there, me laughing
on the other side.

Story in
third person

I heard once
a story
about a
teenage girl,
her best friend,
and friend's dad
and something
to do with
his fetish
for watching
this young girl
dance naked—
a stripper
for ones and
maybe fives
after high
school classes.
He would lean
back deep in
the shadow
folds along
the black wall,
hidden from
her with his
booze and lit
cigarette
smoking like

her hair had
when she was
twelve and with
his daughter
at his house
for their first
overnight
party when,
after the
movie, the
two girls lit
candles and
curled by
the mantle.
That evening
while talking
about boys
and boy bands,
her brown hair
lit up on
just the tips—
a sudden
flash of gold
and yellow
flames on her
chocolate
tips. He came

rushing down
the stairs with
a towel
and he wrapped
her burning
head up well
before the
girls knew what
was really
happening—
and her hair
smoldered and
the tips singed.
Still, he held
her head to
his lap to
calm her and
shhh to them
both in their
underoos
thank you she
said and he
shhh to her
shhh to his
daughter who
was crying
now.

Country church

There's a church
sitting quietly outside
Riesel and here I am,
going—a candid delight;
like being towed
by my brother in that
noisy red wagon. Now
the wagon is steel
 is rust and he's married—
hardly fit to pull me
anymore in that old wagon.
So there's this church
in the country with
squeaky steps and a
wet lot that gets gravel
on your Sunday cuffs unless
you're high-stepping to God.
And inside, resting
amid the dust and age and
sun bleached souls, harvest
gold shag and avocado green,
a voice waits to preach,
to tap something deep
and hidden—waits in the
insistent stained glass, worn
pews. And it's Sunday.
I'm listening to the people
sing, that Sunday smile
on my face, cuffs

dragging along. I wonder
about my brother, about
that red wagon. I'm standing
outside wondering at the sky
which seems precisely blue.

Centering

I see Jesus in the clay—
plain and buried, staring
peppermint eyed at me
draped over a potters wheel
smelling cinnamon.

I smile and take him
in my hands like
some muddy starfish.

Hello Jesus. You look tired.

Suddenly ashamed, I wish instead
that it were Audrey Hepburn
wearing a velvet cocktail
dress and diamond tiara.

Hello Audrey. You look lovely.

Ashamed because Jesus knows
I want marijuana and absinthe
and Audrey Hepburn in white cotton
panties. Jesus knows that I want
to look the other way when I see
Jesus knows that I don't see
anymore but in the clay.

North Rush Street, Chicago

stretched warm—

caramel three long cats

rapt with sax and back

alley brass your face

hazed nails trace your

cheek flushed tango sweat

on your lip slickthatdress

press me — trance beat

salt fire amber eyes listen

with finger clipped beats

searing aural heat tug—

gin and smoke to jazz.

10:30 or so

You bit my nose,
you beautiful slut.
Licked my face
and twenty some years
felt awfully dry.
This coffee house
packed and you licking,
some merciful God
letting me bite you back
for smelling sex,
wanting dope
and you dropping
your clothes in a
staggering pile, smiling—
A cotton clad Cockapoo
bitch—pearled teeth
nibbling my candied
lobe, a dream, I know
all too well. After all,
this is just one brief act,
and you'll soon marvel
at my bland taste.

Gravy baby

Baby look, I spilled.
I spilled here on
your bib baby I drib
dribbled gravy baby
here right here near
your neck baby is a spill
of gravy—here near
the collar baby
I spilled a drip
of gravy on your
bib—it's ok baby,
right? I mean right
baby? It's still gravy
and I'm sorry sweetie
but really sugar
it's just gravy and
we're gravy and
I mean really
baby, you don't mind?

A shower

drip drip It's
dripping and we're *strip*
stripping for a dip,
sans, quite thankfully
obvious electricity
or humorless flip...
unintentionally you slip
nude—bruising your hip,
legs akimbo, the scene
lewd with kisses and bimbo
ribs, your ruby haloed
pleasing behind,
water whetting a line
down your serpentine
spine, you on your knees
and hands, laughing—free
of humility, you—simply
smiling like a child
in the tub, slick
with suds and the tips
of my fingers swimming
in puddles of you.

Quiet

I'm drunk and falling
in love with a girl
who makes me
ache and wish
she would stop
by to tuck me in—
wish she would part
my hair. It's two a.m.
and I want to call,
listen to a girl
breathe in her sleep.
I want her smell
and taste and to move
along coy and trace
her spine with one tip
of a finger and whisper
please, don't leave
... please,

After picking you up at the airport

I've missed you, your back
in the morning, smooth,
nude and stretched for
the top shelf—a black pump
or ruby flat, me peeking
at your long body—long
as a whip, the back
of your thigh leather
smooth, cotton panties
hip-low, cat pitched
in bodied yawn.

pass the gravy, baby

love me in your silk
blouse and hold close—
a stretch of old seams.
pour milk and hand
me a cookie. sugar
or molasses, honey, surprise
me with your insight .
and cranberry concern
rippled with sweet, sweet
Love just a hint bitter
on the way down. I give
thanks for this
fork and knife and fork
some buttered taters over
sweetie—papa craves
a spud. it's the butter,
punkin, that helps
grease it down. turkey
and a string bean bombshell.
come on, puddin', fill 'er up.
surprise me oh my—what
a fine casserole. I say—
to think I need pills.

Current

This was a silver night,
all air and cotton—
that white cotton and lap
of silver salt water
slapping birch rot
and turtle tops, wet rocks
pitched in cool blue
pools of the opaque
dervish slip—tips of
fingers dipped— a faint
girl spinning a faint
girl bemused and peach
eyes spinning drunk
or a night-dream poppy
in Sunday lemon yellow
spaghetti straps slip and
slide and a faint girl spins
like a dervish in the dervish
pool and hides in rock
or pebbled places, but
traces under the cool blue
lap, a faint girl and heavy lids
clips along, clips along
and you dare a tip—just
one bare barely tip
the taste of lie lightly in your
mouth—and the faint girl
smiles but your tip has
tripped her dervish dance
and she spins away
to hide in pebbled places—
a play— a feint.

Clown

Cartooned shoes—red
and blue catch the cuff
between finger and
thumb—pinch like
chimes and dance frantic
amid the crowd, arms
whipping the sleeves
in circles and me,
leaping foot to foot.

All seems fine

Violet finch, gray
and streaming
against the Sun
and the Sun peeks
behind one chinaberry
tree— setting.

High, liquid clouds
trickle by slow,
wean and fade,
a stole white.

and all seems fine—
frozen thawing me
leaving a sigh once,
twice

Away games

I'd seen her nude before—
flushed and laughing,
standing bare-assed—
how young we looked,
two people nude, discovering
that sex is like fortune cookies.

I made her angry, tired of her
questions—anxious like a child—
she says *it's all about pussy, isn't it?*

I think of Sioux City Sarsaparilla.
In little league, we drank one
after another and second base
had a worn picture wrinkled
under the insole of his cleat—
Some slut goddess draped across
a couch, legs pried open
for a busload of dusty boys.

She was flushed and flirting
Again when I asked to see her
naked and I had nothing
to hand her, no handkerchief
or warm chocolate bar,
when she started to cry.

Me_You

awful [boy] I was
seeking food, I was
offered a plate, I was.

Fissured

So then I've fucked up
again coming back
here proud and
while being stroked,
 you remember
and remember to kiss
and tell me lies.

A fissured you and me
lie splitting like a
Sunday log, forced open
by one steel wedge driven
by strong hands and sweat
gathering, falling with
the sledge—pneumatic.
Steady rhythm in the hands
turns the back and shoulders
all bending and roll together.
The beat and time driving
into the now obvious gap.

After an argument

on the mat, like
a pair of socks,
we lie warm
as feral cats,
tied together.

Wicker Chair

1.

It was some time later
 that I remembered hearing
 you ask, "You can breathe
 now. Can you eat?" Girl,
 almost-mother of our
 nearly-child, five days
 of pause bled through my skin
 and I sat lightly still, fragile
 in a wicker chair while
 you took the test.
You are a lovely girl.

2.

[I] said nothing,
 ()
 frozen and [you] asked,
 girl: You can breathe now. Can you eat?
boy: ,,I love you
 girl: I know
 (eyes closed,
 he can feel her
 in his teeth.)
boy: I love you
 girl:
boy: Ok...ok

Consider this my apology

I'm sorry for running
out after you'd gone down
in your basement—you
should know that I expected
less—it was for the way
that you saw me.

I'm married to a girl
and she's as lovely
as a field of cotton or Easter
bonnet and I have to tell her
about you—more, I think,
than I have already, for
I picture you, not often—
and because my wife smiles
like a poet or yellow daffodil.

Mourning []

1.

This was night
 cloaked in patience
 and while staring
 at our Formosa Straight,
 the taste of lie
 ran heavy in my mouth.
 A thickness, a curdled
 tiring. Deep waters passed.

2.

*I love you of course
 now rest silly rest
 and did I tell you I saw
 mr. at the grocery store
 and mrs. insists that yes,
 the strawberries are soft,
 but next year ...oh...
 next year they're going to be
 perfect because of the
 rain and— are you listening?*

3.

the distance is audible

Erosion

Mom, tender and mindful
of my father, bent me
over her knee—ass
white as Dover cliffs, me
biting my lip as she lay wicked
english onto the paddle.
Her arm struck as the tide,
waves crashing on Dover.
Swinging, she cried cool
and I, wet from my mother's
eyes, knelt at the break.

I will show you home

You are my Alice,
a dreamy addict,
red—sometimes blue
or something nearer to
the lovely Dorothy even—
who, wonderfully lost
and wholly bemused,
skipped on. You're kitsch
and pop, a Shirley Temple
cyclone of buttered curls
and barmy tea parties and
my obsession is to watch—
as a lesser part the Toto
or dancing poppy—you slip
through me like butterscotch
schnapps—curiously strong
and dusted in sugar, my lips
broken in a glazed grin.
No ruby clicks or looking glass.
Rather, step through me—
for you must be awfully tired.

My Father's Poem

1.

My father can field strip
a .45 in fifteen seconds,
buys his socks in gross,
carries a pen and pocket knife
day after day. Clockwork,
my father, a fine Swiss
wristwatch or German
coffee pot—acutely defined,
stainless and surgically precise.

2.

I was thinking *don't fail*
to grab the suit jacket in case
my father died during the rush
home. His heart nearly stopped.
He would insist that I dress
for the occasion.

3.

Nearly home, my father
points to a field of windmills
west of the interstate.
They stand silent, anxious
even, bleached and unmoving.
“They look like flowers there,”
he says, “maybe even daisies.”

Ricochet

9.11.01 – 11:30pm – Iowa

Sex bleeds through the floor
and I imagine them naked,
wholly engaged—teeth bare,
eyes sewn shut, pleasure full
until the walls shake with grief.
And on the sidewalk, a laugh
followed by another—sharp
and sudden among friends crisp
with a virgin doubt, scamper
around the corner, a laden trail
of titter and pause disappearing
among the mortar, among the panes
and stoops, leaving only a ricochet
of mourning. The night lies
as a light cotton sheet tucked
about a dreaming baby
startled and suddenly awake.

Something sweet

Lucas: (*after dinner, sipping
a glass of bitter port.*) Darling,

Darling: (*with a finger of cream
whispers,*) –mmm.
(*a deliberate taste.*) ,, yes?

Lucas: How was it? Your tuna?

Darling: It's mahi-mahi.

Lucas: Mahi-mahi. Tuna.

Darling:

Lucas: How was it?

Darling: Baby, shall we
have something sweet?

Lucas: And your tuna?

Darling: (*sigh.*) Predictable.

Lucas: The tuna?

Darling: Mahi-mahi.

Lucas: ,,

Darling: (*glances at Lucas,
sips her cream.*) Shall we?

Lucas:

Silkweed

taste the spring flowers wild mouth
and breathe bluebonnets black-eyed
susan's pink evening primrose peace
and possibly quiet and sit on the still
she in love with him in love with her
in time braving tips and toes and tip toes
and toe tips tapping skin and him sitting
filled with some liquid grace
resting his head on the windshield
with a smile she wore a tee braless
and was not shame nor pride and he tried
not to notice by staring at the sun
in indirect ways burning with a smooth heat
 and the wind makes love to the trees
 and the world seems full of beautiful things
lovers rest and dream and smile
while shading the sun with one
nubile hand and feel drawn to whisper
in ash tones or bubble like stones
in a stream or silkweed harmonies
hitching the wind and seem not to exhale
 and the lovers continue to love
 and the world seems full of mythical things
and the lovers laugh and kiss and his
hand lands lightly on her velvet thigh
and she smiles a starfish smile of bliss
or cardinal blush against the pure blue sky
 and the lovers continue to love
 and the wind makes love to the trees
and the world seems full of beautiful things
and the world seems full of beautiful things