

## TRAIN

A black umbrella opens in my chest.

How fast the landscape trickles by,  
I'm trying to understand  
what would break first if I jumped from this boxcar.

Through the window,  
mountains of graffiti, rocks, and hunchback fences,  
a three-wheeler,  
yellow, red, and forgotten  
among the rubble.

There is a man behind me,  
a black Southern gent,  
talking to someone he loves.  
He's started humming something now,  
gentle as Georgia.

I want him to choke.

There is a foreigner to my left;  
I don't think he can read this.  
If I knew any of that lover language,  
I'd write . . . "Are you reading this?"  
He smells like a fire pit of dehydrated embers,  
like one or all of my ex-flames.

I want his euro-techno headphones to explode into him.

Diagonally—a stupid-beautiful young girl

in slender boots that I would use to ride horses.

I want her to get pregnant, lost, fat,  
yellow then red then forgotten.

And then me—

among the heaps of pebble, web and gang names,  
with a shirt reading “Can i hold you?”

Tears smuggling the luster from my cheeks—  
turpentine to mahogany.

I only weep in profoundly public places  
where no one dares ask.

If they did,

I'd swallow hard,

like a grade-school blow job,

like your first funeral.

I'd swallow hard and tell them to piss off

or

something pleasant,

as long as I could blow my snot

into their palm pilots.

You see,

there is a tiny retired maestro

inside my skin.  
The grand orchestra plays on  
with no regard for him.

He's squatting on track six,  
plucking other empty notes,  
using playbills as toilet tissue.

My poor minor chord friend . . .  
I've taken track seven again.

When I get to where I'm going  
I'm sure I'll pull out a quarter or two  
from a phone booth in the Northwest,  
looking for an answer,  
finding only an abandoned G-clef.

I am dressed in layers of trains.  
I showed up  
with no pulse in my voice,  
loose change,  
stark naked.

My heart, calling from a phone booth  
in the rain.

## THE PICKLING

Blinking at the ceiling,  
a sterile voice told me it just didn't take.  
There was still a pitter-patter.  
The fleshy onion plummets to the stew below.

I wanted you then.

Before you ever thought money or war or women,  
I laid on the examining bench  
with all my useless hopes:  
baseball cards in spokes,  
teaching you music theory,  
un-punishing you against time.

I put my hand to my womb  
as if it were a garden hose running dry—  
as if the perennials would never come again.

## WHY WE ARE DIFFERENT

You like peppers.  
I do not.

The girl you love is still alive,  
you call her *home*. That is not her name—but that is what  
you call her.

You're attracted to edge and class.  
I like things that flow in tatters.

I drop what I'm doing to pick up your phone call.  
You drop my phone calls to watch television, or maybe  
masturbate,  
or think about filling out a job application.  
(I don't intend that to sound mean.)

You wake up early and I don't understand why.  
Tears well in my eyes when I sit near lakes  
and you don't understand why.

My voice cracks when I say certain things  
and you don't notice.  
You are in the background of a lot of pictures;  
I notice.

You tell me I trust adjectives too much.

I tell you, you trust in not enough.

I am messy. There are clothes scattered over my bathroom floor.  
I haven't fully unpacked from a trip I've long since returned from.  
You. You are tidy. Your underwear matches your mouth,  
elastic and initialed.

You don't own many possessions;  
in a way, I admire it.  
I keep everything,  
even empty Sweet and Low packets,  
even a penis-shaped water bottle that leaks  
and does not serve its purpose  
as a water bottle.

You exercise...  
that is funny.

Your kiss is uncertain.  
I didn't know you were holding back on purpose. I thought  
your tonsils were shy.  
I breathed on your lips.  
You probably just thought I was out of shape and panting.

I want to be a vampire.  
That statement will frighten you.

You don't like my long hair and I know it.  
I don't like your short hair, I told you.

I tell  
much more  
than you  
ever  
do.

You're better at games,  
except for Red Rover; I am the best at that,  
running full-speed to break myself or someone else.

You pick on me when I get poetic.  
I pulled over to weep when you read the line,  
"held each other like stolen televisions."

You preach.  
I sing in the choir.  
Once I read you a prayer;  
you said it was weird.

You find no humor in breast feeding.  
I say "that is funny" in place of actually laughing.

Your mom and dad.  
My mom and dad.

When you get nervous, you pull away.  
I get mad that traveling alone didn't make you nervous,  
like it would me.

I never went to prom.

You never had track marks.

I doubt you'd ever find a pale girl as pretty as I do,  
though I will never like eggs.

When showering at night,  
you do it before everyone is asleep as not to wake them up.  
I get clean when I feel I need to. Water isn't that loud.

I don't know if you lie to me.  
I am full of stupid hope.

We'll never be lovers,  
we know this.  
Still I want your heart in a penny pouch.  
You love my midriff.  
I'm thinking of aprons now. . . .  
and so the story goes.

When I ask what you like about me,  
you say I am fun.  
It pisses me off.

You seldom ask what I like about you.  
I never realized that, until now.  
I like your quiet. . . .  
lavender bread in cellophane.

You said my eyes are sad  
and it is really beautiful

how badly  
I want happiness.

Sorry I never wore my red shoes. I was nervous.

You think you can fix everything.  
I have no bones on purpose.

Last night you said, "I built a fire,  
I could keep it going but I think I'll let it go out."