

THE NEW GIRL
A COLLECTION OF POETRY

by
ANGELA M. MEREDITH
B.S. University of Central Florida, 1999

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of English
in the College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida
Spring Term
2004

ABSTRACT

The New Girl is a collection of poems in which the poet assumes a direct, unfeigned voice. These rhythmic poems cover the deeply personal to the universal and social. The body is presented as a record of experiences both good and bad. Feminist issues pertaining to marriage, work, and sexuality are explored. Whether the poem is about a personal relationship or some aspect of society, it is likely to be multi-dimensional and suggest a duality. Overall, the poems are rooted in the spiritual and attempt to relate, with holistic honesty, a sense of reverence for the impure parts of life.

For Tim, the best friend a girl could ever have.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dear Moon	1
Church Tour, 1998	2
The Backyard	3
Parched.....	4
Morning Commute.....	6
Cat in the Birdbath	7
Weed Pulling.....	8
Girls.....	9
I Went to the Pool	11
Flower Bombs Fill the Sky	12
Barbarellas	13
O-Town.....	14
Independent Study	15
Media Blitz.....	16
Some Path	17
To Marilyn Buried Next Door	18
End of Day	19
Collecting Specimens for a Marine Science Laboratory	20
Thirsty	21
Stepsisters	22
House Warming	23
Installing a Light Fixture	24
What the Woman Says to the Girl	25
Cruelty.....	26
Renovation	27
Gathering.....	28
Beneath Loose Soil	29
The Roses Drop Their Heads One By One.....	30
The Cup.....	31
Vagabond Girl.....	32
Name Calling, a Sestina.....	33
Working as a Sales Assistant	35
Meditation.....	36
The New Girl	37

Dear Moon,

I wear you every night for my procession
back to the star I slipped so carelessly from
into the wicked embrace of a world less cosmic
and too small for the love planted in my chamber of chambers.

Dear Moon,

I have my own little moon pump, which draws in the weak,
pumps out the clean and strong; it rotates life,
never stops and lives alone in a universe that would recede and die
without its constant assurance of rhythm and rebirth.

Dear Moon,

I lack your round natural grace to float like a dancer through the sky.

Dear Moon,

I obey gravity and fall hard to the ground.

Dear Moon,

No light can protect me from this,
from my infinite stumbling towards you.

Dear Moon,

My thoughts are awkward in your hallowed space,
under your blank face, perfect page in this expanse
of glittered lace; it covers me like a veil.

Dear Moon,

I swallow you from the sky
until your light shines through me
and I am a child, sister, daughter of your line,
a celestial descendant living on the cusp of reality.

Dear Moon,

I dream you are my eyes,
that you orbit my mind,
a planet of words and letters.

Church Tour, 1998

We were cloaked in Verona,
two sisters of the soul, swimming into the summer
of life, asked to conceal our bare unwedded skin
from the painted eyes of Jesus, Mary, and the Saints
as they peered from altars embellished with gold filigree.
Mahogany and red velvet prayer stools were too pure
for our naked knees even though we donned
the silken, tarp like robes of displaced altar boys,
wore their scent over ours, twisted our bodies
through skeletal scaffolds.

The distinction was clear
between us and the naked legs and shoulders
of other women. Absent of drape and dishonor,
they were sufficiently cloaked by the husbands and children
who vouched for their skin, their breasts, and their wombs.

The Backyard

The rain stutters its message this evening,
unsure of how to explain its lack of punctuality.
As it cascades through the camphor tree
the branches wind out and beckon the sun,
immigrate through light and air;
it is a beautiful foreign invasion.

Beyond the chain-linked fence
wild potato vines hunch over American hollies
and starve them of light.
Periscope branches appear through the deluge
of misleadingly heart-shaped leaves.
The vine's only beauty are the butterflies
who hatch full-bellied from their cocoons
lucid and fitted to float on powdery wings
above the threat of that hungry monopoly,
which creeps and sprawls
for our flowering crepe myrtles and hibiscus.

Parched

A Dineh Indian stole our hubcap
when the snake-waves of copper sand bit our tire,
and popped the hubcap off like a bottle top
as we hopped through the hills of road beneath Big Mountain.

He returned it once it was clear
we were the young recruits
found camping in Missouri
by two Dineh on their way
back west from D.C.
We had come to offer short,
but definite support
to his corner of cotton-dry Arizona,
its water gulped by democracy
to quench the thirst of Peabody Coal
and cha-ching.

The Dineh refused to leave the place
where nine generations of cultivation
and government sheep are traced in the sand,
and steely hubcaps were small favors from us,
the modern nomads who wandered across the country
in a musty three-woman tent and listened
to night animals scratch at the thin fabric
of our safe bubble.

Seam sealer, keep us dry.
Keep the teary moisture of Navajo country
from stinging our colonial skin.
Protect our Dineh mother who cried into our
white hearts the potential pain of being plucked
from her land and stuck in substandard living.

We begged her to fight
for her birthright
to pound flat cakes with wise fists
in her earth-dirt kitchen.
To stoke the cooking fire of matriarchy
in this small part of our expansive nation that
has been allotted to her and the ancestors
who buried their spirits in the breeze
that carves each monumental Mesa in homage to the past.

No one can own the Earth, they say.
Not even the Dineh who hunkered within
the shadowy arm of Big Mountain,
as it cast its last bit of protection upon them,
while the body of Dineh heritage
wilted,
gaspd,
and opened
its parched throat
to the wind.

Morning Commute

A man is running in long pants and flip-flops
past the convenience store past the funeral home
past the entrances to neighborhoods their faded signs
and small block homes.

Perhaps he runs from, or to, a wife, the kids, the bus to work.
Maybe he runs for a gallon of 2%.

Maybe he runs from the dead,
 stony-eyed bird on his door mat.

Maybe he runs from a swarm of indifference. From the nest
he stepped in. From the morning's uncertainties
and failures
the silent alarm
 his unresponsive lover
cat puke burnt toast
 bumper to person traffic.
There are people in those cars.

Maybe he runs from not enough pay,
not enough intimacy,
 not enough flavor in the rice tonight,
Dear. So he's running in his son's flip-flops
 and yesterday's T-shirt,
In whatever he could get into speedy-like.
First thing.
Whatever he could pretend wasn't a disguise for the day's escape.

Cat in the Birdbath

She stands upright on her tippy-toes.
Front paws rest delicately,
curve a little over the lip.
Her head stretches out and down.
She takes leisurely sips of her
bird martini, pauses
to contemplate

sky leaves

chirping

that I'm watching her?

Returns to her bird champagne,
her bird soup, garnished
with dirt. Seeds.
Insect larva.

Weed Pulling

Pink sea shrimp,
alien life form birthed
squirming from the dirt,
extra growth third
nipple, mole on the sole
of my foot. Dead woman's
hair is what I pull from her great
head, her screams muffled
by long jagged fingers trying to pull
me to the other side of green
Saint Augustine, the ethereal
kind of grass, some heavenly
martyred grass. God's
lawn, maybe. And I'm
ridding it of devil worshipers
and pagans. Single mothers and their bastard
babies all go in the garbage
can. All the junkies and tax
evaders and teenagers with semi-automatics
in their backpacks,
they are all destroyed by my hands
blistered and caked with black dirt.

Girls

1.

She says I have long spider arms and legs and that my hair is like her hair was:
long, fine strands of golden brown and that my eyes hide mysterious plans involving starlight
and pink silvery kisses. She always likes how I caress her face like I would my baby doll
and hold her cheek like the buttercup I picked with my pointy fingers and dirty nails.
She describes my hands as two deliberate hushes.

She catches me staring off, my eyes half closed, my lips turned down
and she says she sees it in me, says I have the sight and that if I see some great future disappointment
not to let it stop me from choosing pink for my room or from studying for my spelling test.
All I see is the end of my reign as child.

2.

It is my wedding day and I am nine and have been waiting for years for this day.
My purple sari floats around my small bird ribs, and my arms,
two dry twigs, are all I have to carry bread and water.

I'm getting married because my first baby
tooth came in up top, glistening pearl-like and ominous,
leaving my soul exposed, idle in the middle of the road,
hanging from a Buddha tree by a thin silk string,
a group of starving men lying beneath.

And so my family saved their money to pay the marriage fee
and the shaggy three-legged dog appeared.
He smelled like dirt and rotten meat
and under his fur crawled his skin,
silvery black and lecherous.
He was the one that would save me,
bring my soul back into place, this mangy dog,
my husband.

3.

A boy grabbed my breast at school today.
He seemed forced to follow his fixation,
to feel my body pushing up a doughy mound beneath my T-shirt.
It was his for a moment and I said nothing,
just stood there like the statue of Juliet in Verona
where all the tourist go to have their picture taken
with their hand on her worn out breast.
A rite for finding or keeping true love?
Don't know. Can't remember.
But it sure looks smaller than the other one now.

4.

I walk down the corridor into the humid airport lobby,
feel my newly permed hair, pubic like and all too bouncy,
coil on my head and form loosely around my thick glasses
as I look through the pink plastic frames, suck in my stomach
and search the crowd for my dad, his new wife, and her kids,
including a girl about my age.

All the while I'm conscious of the leotard I wear under my clothes
to help suck in the fat, a trick my own mother taught me,
indoctrinating me into the fat life then sending me here to Florida
to live with my fat father and his new family,
but I already know what's about to happen:

He'll do things to prove it.

Tattoo their names on his forearm,
flower over others to make room.

It's the sort of temporary permanence that can make one question the presence of bones,
question that this is really air in the airport and not sugar white sand
filling every wrinkle and nostril and gap
between father and daughter.

Then I see them all standing there looking straight from the beach
and I bumble over with my unfortunate hair
and one soft bag full of yesterday.

5.

It was my tenth birthday and it started with the first birthday ritual.
Mom woke me with the Happy Birthday song
and a quiet breakfast with her and my brothers.
Games and kisses.

Then the soldiers dressed in wedding gowns and
fluorescent wigs broke the door down.
Smelling like sweat, liquor, and smoke,
they were a swinging rotary of fists and boots,
their eyes like small caramelized onions.

They tore mom's dress off, pounded her the way I'd been warned about.
The way they do most of us and one could be my father,
maybe the one that came for me, a little scrap he could chew on.
And I could feel him gnawing at my belly from the inside,
the brutal razor of him and I wailed and cried until I was numb
and he was a figure obstructing light. I was not me
and the soldier in white was not himself either,
we weren't there, him dying into me,
me reaching for a tether of gold,
the soft hand of death saving me.

I Went to the Pool

on Sunday.

I went to the pool with my husband.

Other people went to the pool with their children and wives.

They went to the pool with their mothers and brothers and friends.

Ladies went to the pool together and spoke with certainty
about hurricanes of men sweeping up the coast.

A grandmother and grandfather went to the pool
with their three-year-old granddaughter and group fed her grapes
at the pool's tiled edge. A father went to the pool
to look for a new mother for his lonely son;
"I forgot my sunscreen, do you mind?"
he asked the string bikini.

I went to the pool on Sunday,
and many went with me into the aqua blue
clouded with families rising up to the doughy swirled sky,
cut again and again by shrieks and splashes.

Flower Bombs Fill the Sky

smoke fills our
lungs, our eyes are
squinted: this is a form of communication.
A distant whale call piercing
one summer night, a scream lights
the sky, breaks the darkness for a moment.
A gun shot says, *hello*,
says, *I'm here*. We play war,
play bombing our front yards and the black streets,
we celebrate and communicate
and don't remember what for.

July 4, 2003

Barbarellas

The girls with the black eyeliner,
the black boots and bare legs,
the girls with the punk rock,
the girls with the electric buzz,
they strum their guitars
like six string clitorises.
Beneath their baby doll dresses lives a rhythm.

Love their metallic music
and the band posters with the three grimacing
like sirens from the side of yourself
you always hide—
the one that likes damage.

Stricken to stillness because they're not that good,
because it's not their music that holds us here,
it's them and the fact that they don't care about us
and that we want to make them better.

O-town

I watch crows circle
luminescent white lace clouds
far above the small pine grove in my backyard.
Like lost balloons they float on Florida cross winds.
They drift like so many here.

I paint my reflection on wings
of Boeing 747s as they tote travelers
heavy with time from bitter sweet summer,
from suffocating humidity
and lightning sunshine.

I will stay for now.
Where crows circle and nest,
I'll watch a glowing blue sky transform
into a wrath of gray thunder,

listen to the roar of leaving,
calculate my own agenda,
my own departure from this place,
where only scavengers take flight.

Independent Study

I left with cold, crinkle-cut French fries.
We sat at a round table,
beers congregating in perspiration.
Slowly we drank Stein's "Is Dead,"
did our best Hemingway and Fitzgerald.
Leaned back in our chairs, shared cigarettes over war,
poetry, the car trouble epidemic that seemed to be spreading
among us, a male colleague's pornographic picture.
There was talk about Derrida and aporias.
I wrote this poem in my head.
Ordered a grilled mahi sandwich and fries to go.
Licked salt from my fingers as I cruised the expressway,
throwing coins out the window towards home.

Media Blitz

Privatize my mind, body, and soul.
Go ahead and take them.
The taking means nothing.
Commercialize me and my desires and fears and thoughts,
you know you have them in print and online, in Technicolor fineness
and perfection and imperfection, but this isn't real.
This doesn't matter. This is only an illusion.
No, it's real. It's reality. It's a lie.
Does it matter? Is it matter? Is it energy or space or the unused part of the brain?
Is it dormant or alive and functioning right now?
It's plastic. It's glass. I'm biting it with my teeth as a test.
Is it real or imitation, or real or imitation, or real?
It's a commercial break. It's a story, a movie, a death, a life; it's a true story.
A fictionalized true story based on actual events, but not really true or real.
Although it really happened somewhere somehow, but not exactly like this or that.
It's Jerusalem. It's Orlando. It's the Great Wall of China.
It's a buffet dinner. It's a stoplight, blinking.
It's a highway pileup, a house fire burning to the ground, donations accepted here.
It's school kids selling candy bars at the grocery store
at the door for a trip to Barcelona or the Midwest.
It's a baby suckling its first meal from plastic.
It's our replacement. It's a clone. It's not. It's real. It's an alien. We are aliens.
It's a conspiracy about oil and I use that in my car.
It's real. It's not. It's war. It's peace.
It's okay or not. It's air travel and ground travel and new bombs
and we need them, but no one else can have them. We are bombs,
new bombs falling, exploding, collapsing, dying. We are dying.
Bombs are real or not real. It's war or not war, or hope, or fear,
or a game we sell and buy on the market, and there's not a recession, or is there?
And there is one, because I'm unemployed (again) and I'm on the market,
and I'm important. I'm different. I'm unique.
I'm none of that. I'm just like you.
We are real or not real. We are true or not true.

Some Path

The sidewalk I walk
goes past block homes and
pitched roofs and two
or one car garages,
dead grass, sand pits,
exposed tree roots,
or perfect green yards of sod.
Before the sidewalk I walk,
the houses line up together
all equal in terms of concrete,
some beleaguered,
their eaves limp with wood rot or termites,
some perverse in their bubble gum pink
or tangerine orange paint
and homeowner installed accoutrements:
moldy latticework, a thoroughly rusted shed.
No children play on the sidewalk I walk,
puzzled as it is with great staggering cracks.

To Marilyn Buried Next Door

When I first learned you were there,
that you had been there all along,
I felt that you had been watching me
and I wondered what I was doing when you arrived.
Did you, in your maternal stillness,
know that I dwelt beyond our mutual fence?
When he slipped the cord around your neck,
did the soft cadence of my voice or the loud trance
of the radio disturb your death silence?
When your eyes, his eyes, rolled back to before
did you think I might hear your quiet parting
and come with a hand to keep you here?

All along, while your eyes dimmed to almond slivers
and your breath disappeared into your crone body, I was near to you
chopping vegetables for dinner or having my first sip of coffee.
I was alive. I was finishing up a kiss or starting something new.
The cat was calling for lunch and I was ignoring her
and he was digging a hole and you were swaddled and waiting
for the final tumble, your boy's boot at your back and me
out back parting the moist Florida dirt
for the season's last lily.

End of day

A regular person
wrapped
in a white bath towel,
sits, legs crossed at the knees,
on a cushioned toilet seat lid
listening to bathwater
struggle down the drain.

Collecting Specimens for a Marine Science Laboratory

I carry the pole net and you carry the white buckets;
we walk to the edge,
step behind the white cement orbs that line the park,
an alternative to posts, I think.

We stand on top of a cement wall that keeps the Indian River in place.
Our heads and bodies lean a little over the edge.
You walk on, past the stony hissing turtle and

I soon follow down the pier that lies like a map upon the river.
I walk by your systematic throwing of the cast net,
and its empty clutches, to the end of the pier

where someone carved “vampire country this way” and an arrow pointing
to the ghostly needle fish that swim around the end
and look up from the river knowingly.

Thirsty

You and I,
our legs entwined
on the overstuffed olive-green couch
as we read and the sun drips like honey
through the sheers that hang
on the picture window.

You and a *National Geographic*
about the Proboscis monkey and
its unusually large nose.
My nose in a book about “writing down the bones”
and I’m feeling for mine;
dog-earing the chapters of particular importance.

Although it is hard to discern,
sitting here in one of your T-shirts,
making saucy eyes at you,
which are meant to convince
you to go out
and come back
with another bottle of red wine.

“For dinner” I say,
but really it’s for my deep thirst
for all that cannot be found
in crushed, fermented grapes.

Stepsisters

We were staying in the purple room with the twin beds
with the low white headboards giggling,
spasmodic over the man who thought we couldn't see
him hiding in the darkened corner.

How funny.

You snorting laughter, rooting the pillow with your nose like a piglet in the dirt,
inhaling fragments of lint until you had to leave to find the source of all being.

And me? I hid your pillows

and laughed into the bed linens

so you wouldn't guess that you were about to break your nose

diving into the headboard and truly bleed for the first time,

which was enough to sober me up

for a few minutes

while you snuck down to the basement and dug your way out of that big house,

which still lurks on the corner where families meet and divide,

judiciously sucking up whomever goes by.

House Warming

Friends, a couple,
married.

The one, manic, bi-
polar.

Comfortably unstable.

The other,
removed,
dead in the eye ink well to hell,
or is it just the slow asphyxiation of his soul?

Heartfelt emotions are plastic party beads
placed around my neck.

A Spiderman party hat—
the thief's crown
with the day stuck neatly in their pockets.

Everything is perfectly manufactured
and fresh with the builder's prints.

The trees
removed
to achieve levity,
but not balance.

The house,
a stump of stucco
and mail order decorations,
invites the estranged (that would be me)
and the strange alike
to witness its coming out.

Its first gesture?

An unsmiling hello
and directions
to the iced down
Bud Light,
which did not replace
the hope (hope being the used car salesperson of all emotions)
I lost upon arrival.

Installing a Light Fixture

We bought it at a home store,
brought the stained glass,
bowl-like fixture home
to cover the wires that hung
like two tails
from the ceiling.

You stripped the wires back;
I held the tools,
 handed things up.
Held you on the ladder,
touched your inner thigh.

Then my turn,
screw the bulbs in.
 You hold me,
nuzzle my side.
We balance.

Then the test:
Flip the breaker
 ...giddy with light.

What the Woman Says to the Girl

I'm sorry that you had to lie with the dog, curled in his favorite spot,
dressed in baby doll clothes but still shivering.

I'm sorry she bore you to witness the unraveling of years spent packing
and unpacking, the dutiful movers always breaking something precious or stealing the record player.

How you hated watching your baby's plastic eyes go down into that box.

Cruelty

is unforgiving hardness against
the body, a voice grown ruined like the tree
rotting after lightning,
the slow giving way.

Cruelty is death meaning
victory, the old wife wanting
her husband dead first,
his always saying no—you can't paint the living room pale blue;
no, we can't put the top down; no, you're not good enough.

Cruelty is a family imploding, becoming a teratoid
unit, eating each other alive with bitterness and envy; the taste
of righteousness so much like chocolate,
so much like blood.

Cruelty is need,
is the need to be
apart, to look upon, to spoil the difference
with better or worse than.

Renovation

The rain rattles through the moon's fullness
and the days to count my forgetting
of all that is not death fit together
like the jigsaw of wood on my living room floor.
Pounding one piece into the other,
fighting against each imperfection,
a splintered tongue; a crushed groove.

As I drive to class, scrape wallpaper, listen
to my husband curse and bless the house
he is bleeding and bruising to repair
I think of you grandfather, and how I will lose
bigger and harder and faster one day.
How you are primer and prelude
to death coming closer, inching its way
into family photographs and dinner conversation.

And here goes the forgetting of things in boxes
that in view once seemed important,
but nestled in the old crumpled Sunday paper
appear like any dot on the map.
All the paint in Strawberry Whip and Stillness
has helped the house forget the walls,
the bamboo wallpaper from 1976,
and the unknown dead who once lived here,
but whose space I now fill
with all things undone.

Gathering

You took me to a giant uprooted tree
its roots jutting like frozen tentacles
and we were to cut them for the fire,
but they tumbled out
at our slightest pressure.
Not roots at all, mother,
simple dead branches...

then a vision of grandfather's wilted body in a lawn chair.

You left me with instructions: gather and haul.
I did, conscientiously as a child
I picked up the root-branches
and brought them to the fire.
I tripped, nearly falling into the burning pit,
but steadied myself in the morphing faces
of uncles and aunts—at once themselves
and then strangers.

Beneath Loose Soil

You stand under the camphor tree, a rake in one hand,
the neck of our marriage in the other.

You rake what is dead from the ground,
displace it, lose a part of us in the detritus.

We plant your wedding ring beneath loose soil,
await its gestation, then unearth it one Saturday afternoon.

We wash the dirt from its face and once again let it bind us
to our separate pasts, which trail behind us like smoke from an engine,

the shuttle's burning tail. We are launched now,
the ring on your finger having gone to the grave and been resurrected

it's a token for moving on through piercing faithlessness.
A weight we bore together and now shed like fall leaves.

The Roses Drop Their Heads One By One

and you pack pressed powder,
ripe blush, deep reaching lotions,
and lilac mist snuggled in your curls and waves,
closing in over your browned skin, wrapped
up in the snap of your pants—
the button of your blouse.

The roses drop their heads one by one and I pick up the towels,
wet and smudged with your skin. I inventory
the cupboards and fridge. Stacks of leftover dinners
push against the door. Herb cheese and green
queen olives sit unloved, undesired.

The roses drop their heads one by one and I pull back the sheets,
find your hair comb and crumpled tissue, clouds of your soapy scent
converge for the final storm.

The Cup

All that's left is my body and its blood and birthmarks.

Each scar a token for every fall or burn or slap,
the broken bones of leaving
packed in ice and then the melting away.

The sludge and drudgery of rivers converging and rushing up
against the dam and how we came together with the wily brother
guiding us through rapids and the eager father pushing people
over and the mother and daughter slamming into each other
as the raft bucked and rode the tumult, the chaos of rocks worn smooth
but still deadly, still hard as the one who wasn't there.

In my skin, feeling it all go static then the smooth leveling out
as if coming from a dream late and still seeing that image,
the one with Picasso proportions and the depth of flesh.

Vagabond Girl

There are few places where I feel utterly lost,
and here, on Earth, is one of them.
And so I search for my life
in the white of this page, the black of this ink,
in books on cosmic humanism and world unity.

I am trapped looking at my surface self,
looking into the dusty corners of terrazzo floors
and faded chalk blue tiled walls.
My silent gaze broken by emergency sirens,
voices of my loved ones whispering
“Where is she?”

Where I am the door barely clicks shut.
It is not strong enough to hold in the safety
of the worn speckled floor,
and soft blue amoebas that flower
the chipped and stained fiberglass counter
where *Chicken Soup for the Soul*
and dried flowers hold up three years' worth of dust.

Name Calling, a Sestina

My name is not your name.
It is not the name of my husband.
It is the name of my father
and this was not my choice.
My name is my own. It cannot change.
And the not changing doesn't say anything about man and wife, or love.

Naming is only real when the name is love.
It is love that assigns. Devotion does not require a name.
A name is a weak vessel that cannot be strengthened by change.
It makes me no more my father's or any less my husband's,
I do not belong to anyone. This is a choice,
unlike having or not having a father.

And I do not speak in the name of the father
because I do not believe that he invented love
or that he regulates my power of choice
to break a tradition of ownership and reclaim my name,
to preserve an identity separate from wife and husband,
to resist the pressure to change.

I have other ways of change.
Like how I forgave and then un-forgave my father
and how I have grown to see the bud of youth and the root of wisdom in my husband,
or how I use to not believe in marriage or trust anything called love.
I morph and ebb and flow, simultaneous in my one name.
With each movement, each crack in what I think is me, I learn what it is to make a choice.

And the further along I go, the more artful I am with my choices,
the more colorful and alive, the more vibrant the change.
The change in the cells of me, the change in the cell of my soul, luminous and without a name
it cannot be passed down or traced back to a mother or father.
The savory juice of love...
the breath that passes between wife and husband.

And even this name *husband*
is no good; it is too small for him, the one who makes a choice
everyday to hold my small body next to his and spell his love
with the patience to watch me change or not change.
It took this man to shake loose the embers of my father
and he loves my name,

even though it does not signify a husband. I did not change
my identity for him, a choice born out of love for myself, not my father,
a choice my husband a choice my love and I refuse to name.

Working as a Sales Assistant

The Internet is my psychic friend.
It is the oracle.
Down the hall co-workers take phone calls,
enter orders, and answer questions.
I check my horoscope over and over again.

The Southeastern sales rep enters my office,
pelvis first, clicking his ballpoint in and out.
I pinch myself to keep from screaming.
I hand him the file.
His forefinger grazes the back of my hand.
I never look away from my computer monitor.
He's singing "Stairway to Heaven."
I have three more hours left of looking busy,
sweating into my shoes, feeling my control top
take control, answering calls from Suzy,
the boss. Her broken, crackle-crumble voice
requests reports as long and anticipated
as my loneliness.
Only child.
Long-distance runner.
One set of keys.
Only a half-gallon of milk in the fridge.

The phone rings.
I have more email.
I need to go to the water cooler
and strut (look busy) around the office.
I click my two-inch heels against the tile.
This is the loud feminine stomp.
These are shoes that say, I'm pointy and mean
and I mean to care less.
These are the shoes of authority,
the kind that demand attention.
Now, back to my ergonomically correct chair
and the clear plastic mat for my shoes
and the little man I keep under my desk
half panting and drowsy with love.

Meditation

She sits in the lotus,
her hands small soft cups,
empty at the moment,
waiting to be filled with something other
and that is the mistake,
the suffering.

There is a flame that flays her will,
lashing with varied tongues,
cutting it open to reveal more
eternal unknowing.

The New girl

Here comes the new girl again.
Here she comes walking down the hall.
Here she comes opening the door.
Here she comes folding her hands to pray.
Here she comes holding her stomach in pain.
Here she comes to sit on the couch.

Here comes the new girl again laying herself open to her newness,
to her rejuvenation, her already fading mystique that we love so much we hate it.
She is all wrapped in her skin firm as a peach not yet ripe
still sucking from the branch and cursing the graveyard ground.

Here she is, the new girl at work, at school, ten years ago or today
always the new girl. Never entering the circles of the known
as they almost intersect and she carefully navigates between their shoulders,
between the edge of their circumferences, stepping to the side she narrowly avoids belonging.

When you meet her you have no reference for why you may or may not like her.
You don't know why she clicks her teeth or smiles so big you can see them all lined up
straight and vulnerable. She'll seem nervous or shy and you'll like that,
think she must be a really nice person, that she'll do alright in life—
find a nice man who'll treat her good and who is just as nice as she seems to be.

You have a short conversation about Phoenix because you've both been there.
She's been many places, so many that you decide you probably don't have much in common
because you've never left your part of the country.

You'll never know that the last time she was the new girl it was very different.
She was talkative and instantly popular. People thought she was nice,
although she was known to smoke and curse.
Some thought she might go on to find trouble.

But even those people didn't know who she was the time she was the new girl before that.
How each time she was a little different, sometimes not saying a word,
others times saying a lot, seeming so secure and smart and funny.

All these times she's been the new girl she's always had the same name,
the same face, the same history, and the same reason for moving,
always of course really her parent's reason
until she became an adult and then it was her own reasons and she learned.

She didn't need to leave a town to be the new girl.
She could always stand just on the periphery where she was safe from belonging
and then every time she joined in she would be new.
Even people who had met her before would feel that she was new
because she had been away for so long and she looked a little different,
fatter, or thinner, or prettier, or not pretty at all.

And if there were a wall that surrounded all people
she might like to be a part of it and not really be a person at all
so she could just watch and not be seen,
not have to find a way to answer other peoples' questions about where she's been
or where she's from or her family or her love life because the answers are never simple like:
I've been on a nice vacation to the Smokey's.
I grew up in Jackson, Mississippi.
I've lived here for five years and I'm happily married.

This is not her story.
Her story involves the tearing apart and putting together and tearing apart
and putting together and tearing apart and putting together of a family
and ending up with extra pieces and ones in the wrong places
but going on anyway just as proud and purposeful as anyone.

It involves different continents and oceans and battleships and war missiles and cargo airplanes.
There were campfires and house fires and a constant flow of cardboard boxes and packing tape.
There was a great big rat that had to be killed and there were pets that died or were lost and along
the way, there were friends that she never knew would be so temporary.