

## Shoulder Ghost Dispatches

*Before I thought I was gonna cry*

I used to know who was behind  
the noises this train station makes  
but now I bike everywhere and forget  
how the benign ghost whistles up the tunnel  
before dodging an incoming G train  
and coming to sit on my shoulder as I wait  
on the wrong side of the yellow line  
complimenting the density of my quads  
sizing up my mildly impressive calves  
chastising me for not visiting  
more often, for my naiveté  
my lips pressed around the rim  
of a keychain flashlight  
taking drags of LED light  
my cheeks are peeled grapes  
emanating a drunken glow

There is no time  
to analyze my capillary situation  
because we must leave  
our yellow line like little kids  
hurling themselves off starter balance beams  
into the foam pit, smushy martyrs  
about to toddle towards the sticky table  
coated in foods that all taste alike, like play-doh,  
bequeathing the children with their first hypothesis:  
everything is the same, pretty much

The first train offered to me  
is saturated with stuffy cups  
a skin of coffeeish fluid wobbles underfoot  
“natural” doesn’t count for much  
in poems  
in hazelnut flavoring  
my face certainly

thick and foamy  
like the tempur-pedic  
pillow I sleep on, like  
lite asceticism  
a judgement on  
the way I crane my neck  
and why, and for whose benefit?

Shoulder Ghost rolls her eyes at me  
she likes the extra room to lounge,  
and she never tells anyone else  
if she surreptitiously spots a hickey  
It's time to change  
I allow my ankles but nothing else  
to drag me across the concrete  
when I remember forgetting to eat  
feeling ashamed  
not of how my body looks,  
of what it represents.  
I hope someone will take full advantage of it  
of what I can give  
awful, pale power  
sloughing off my skin  
Quick, run away with life intact  
while they think they saw a ghost  
They did, mine reminds me with a jugular pinch  
the blank white canvas of my face  
is an artistic failure, but  
I have some ideas  
maybe  
redeem it as an empty space

The second train that comes  
turns out it's a vessel  
for a weathered brown bandana  
splayed on the seat like a guy  
slumping, staking a claim he'll soon regret  
pathetic and important  
cut from the same brown paisley

I feel guilty for picking it up  
and placing it in the front pocket of my backpack  
under the embroidered order to  
LOOK AT ME

That bitch ghost got bored somewhere around west 4th  
and started playing a first-person shooter on her gameboy  
in which the player becomes Cupid  
chubby fingers opening bodies  
in a violent show of pity  
but that gets boring, too  
so she dips somewhere in midtown  
which is fine with me, because I'm just trying to get some steam buns  
before I go to therapy, because I can't wait around  
for anybody anymore ever since  
I waited for you that one time at the pho place off 2nd ave  
every patron was impressed  
it isn't every day you can feel someone's rage from across the room  
weaponizing their chopsticks  
against soupy wedges of lime

I haven't waited a second since then, even in bathroom lines  
urgency is the best policy  
it puddles at my feet  
but I only ever wear my stumpy old Docs, so  
in K-town I can't tell whether or not I feel sorry for shellfish  
caring for animals too much feels just as sinister somehow  
as not caring at all  
there is a point  
at which love detonates  
It's hard to believe that foods I once enjoyed don't taste good anymore,  
the passage of time that represents, incomprehensible  
as a loaf of thousand-year-old bread,  
anachronisms feeling indulgent now  
with snow on the ground  
embarrassing me somehow  
involuntary as dandruff  
and awkward as the teenager to whom it belongs  
wearing a black turtleneck, writing poetry

scraping at the fattest flakes  
with the butt of her pencil

*It's dead*

Look at me.

So fucking untexted  
angry at the phone itself  
as if it contains all the love withheld

No, I know it is

where Love itself is born

Why can't you look at me?

okay okay

Jeez it's hard being so smart

that you have to go to office depot once a year

to dissociate in the craft supplies

So here we are, I guess.

Hi.

I cut eye holes in this piece of graph paper

so I can wear it like a mask but

you've got to learn some time

True love is repulsive

and highly scientific

in its repetition.

Listen to my hypothesis:

tiny spermy mites

pulsing through the inscrutable carcass

of this buzzing plastic cockroach

laying parasite eggs that when burst

generate indulgent scenarios

behind the LED display

of my cell phone, they murmur

What if this time

we do not hold back

this time,

we have learned

to use emojis

It takes some coordination

and some strategic leverage

but we have become adept

at the winky face

albeit without nose  
We took your SIM card out  
and dropped it down the drain  
when you were drunk  
I guess we took advantage of you  
it's too easy  
Love is just a series of words  
strategically ordered  
deployed in swelling cheeks and  
blow-darts.  
Which brings us back  
to the woman who reads our work  
alone, asks someone who is not us

Don't you ever get bored of not loving me?  
Why do you do such subtle things  
in my dreams, when you could really be going  
all out?

Disappointed in your damp thumb  
when I was ready to be crushed  
under the foot of an elephant  
in full parade regalia.  
Christ I just had to confirm  
my Con-ed account via text message  
to pay my electric bill  
and I still felt your love streaming around me  
when my phone buzzed  
Even Con-ed is a conduit  
for you, for me!

I had a fucked up feeling about you  
like I did about the Rat King  
from the nutcracker when I was 6  
kind of dirty but now I understand  
the biology of it  
the sheer horror of tails matted  
into one lattice of backbone  
My phone martyred itself so I could forget  
you fucked my nose ring 360 degrees  
and filled me with tiny spermy mites

and left me amiably, ignoring me  
playing dead and leaking

*Life before art*

Old Frank advises me to make room for jealousy  
to keep my art in my pencil case  
as stationary as my ice cream cone shaped eraser  
and with less utility.

The sexiest proposition is  
elope with me to New London  
I will steal a lawn mower from the hardware store  
in the city no one needs less grass  
hop on and practice your lawn gnome faces  
as we push northeast

tracking allergens in two neat lines

How exhausting to be yourself  
and your older self simultaneously

The suburbs are a great place  
to be your own grandfather

I'm bequeathing the city my never-used slow cooker  
all my paints lotions bottles of gin and  
a farewell loaf of banana bread

I'm disassembling my ego  
into its most streamlined components  
so I can rebuild it on  
my new front lawn.

*Return to the lonesome ocean*

I'm sure the people I've swiped left on  
live perfectly full lives, that they  
genuinely thought the pictures they posted  
of asscracks and broken animal bodies  
added allure to their profiles.  
If your ego is the size of your cock tell me  
is it big or is it small  
I'm just out here  
hunched over my inflating body  
feeling like a single-use airplane life jacket  
whose red tab once pulled failed  
to initiate bloating,  
I am that shitty life vest and  
I am the person with a shitty life  
blowing into the red tube on their shoulder  
I am also the flight attendant on mood stabilizers  
sighing at the sheer humanity  
of how slow life gets  
just before death.  
I'm just gonna take my clothes off  
fuck it I'll do the whole choreographed strip tease  
It was worth taking this shitty job  
for the uniform  
And then I'm gonna swan dive out the emergency exit  
the indicator lights at the base of the aisle chairs  
illuminating my ankles  
Just kidding if the plane goes down  
I'll be swiping on Tinder I won't even look up

*Dispatches from the shelf*

I guess I've just been feeling tangential  
lately, feeling like I've been minding my own business  
but always wake up feeling like I didn't get a break  
in sleep, I had to watch the delayed broadcast  
of at least three other days in the business of others

I'm becoming a Miranda at her most paranoid and least laid  
She so had Jewish blood in her

Anyway it's been hard to sort out  
what's happened in each life

I dreamed a day of this barista with a beard  
who fucked me in my waking life  
It was funny to look down at me  
translucent stoned and sweaty and  
taking frequent bathroom breaks

When I woke up I felt distinctly abandoned  
but the only face I could envision  
was my own.

I made a friend in front of the corner fried chicken store  
and we sat on a duffel bag containing everything he owned  
and looked at the toxic blue clouds circling us  
and breathed in calmly

When I woke up my lungs were expelling  
calcified beads of gasoline  
I just let them lie on my pillowcase  
and they melted, staining the white with iridescent pitch

My therapist explained to me  
that she is also the therapist of  
all mens' exes  
and that I should know by now  
every guy kills at least one woman in his lifetime

She grimaced at my scab and was like  
you might have sepsis  
but hey now that you know the secret of all men  
you can let your skin fester and eyelashes whiten  
Go, grow long  
your nails and whittle them into butter knives

Exalted hours will be spent  
performing chemistry experiments inside of your body  
feeling gassy, listening to Rosemary Clooney  
and creating a mini allegory of the cave  
in the space between eyeball and lid

Bing Crosby beat his kids  
so blue eyes should remain shut.  
Men do not exist now.