

THE SCIENCE OF _____

“The French, I believe, have agreed on the term ‘aviation’ in case they ever succeed in flying.”

—*The Century Magazine*, October 1891

Let’s agree on a word for _____ in case
we ever succeed in _____ing. To the girls
who lie down in fields, their bicycles
on their sides, too, like horses
asleep in the sun, know this: even though
_____ is not a science yet, it will be.

When you button your shirt in the morning,
fingers fumbling to fasten the circles,
to thread them through, know that we invented
the word for this science from *bud*, as if
a row of tender orchids will soon bloom
down your chest, a new branch of botany.

Science of radio, science of sleep,
science of kindness, science of the wheel.
One day we will study _____ like we study
flight or photography. Let’s agree
on this: everything exists on a spectrum,
word derived from *specter*, science of startle,
science of the remarkable. Two girls
in a field test the science of buttons.
Their shirts soon to break into yellow blooms.

EROS AS OXYGEN MASK

: after the EROS (Emergency Respiratory Oxygen System) Crew Oxygen Mask

In a brown paper bag, I test my lungs' capacity
for fear. No, I test my lungs' capacity for recognizing
it as such. I'm not dying, I tell myself.

Beside you in bed—my dress on the floor,
your bra next to it—I watch the paper fill
& diminish, fill & diminish.

Fear of certain kinds of desire
can manifest in the body like hypoxia.
A tendency to ignore our feelings
or act on them only in secret—both a kind
of flight—can result in what a pilot feels
under rapid decompression. Arterial
constriction, neurologic shock.

The first time I kissed a girl the pressure
dropped for what felt like hours, my breath short,
my body shaking beside her in bed.

It's not that I don't want to kiss you. I do.
It's not that I regret kissing you. I don't.

The altitude in your room reaches 12,000
30,000 50,000 feet,
as if we're under water or miles above it.

Could we pass this paper bag—a kind of kiss—
back & forth between us?

BOYS

There were boys whose time I wasted. I didn't know it
at the time. Boy who drove a black car fast, boy who

wore a rubber band around one wrist, across-a-river
boy, boy I kissed underwater. I kept some boys too long,

like sand dollars, starfish. Boy who painted his bedroom floor,
boy who fixed motorcycles, boy who loved the girl I loved,

chrysanthemum-tattoo-on-his-back boy, boy like a shell
I took home to put to my ear to hear *home*, put to my mouth

to call myself there. Boy who wore a watch to bed,
boy who cooked spaghetti, sauce spilled down his shirt,

cheese-toast-in-the-oven boy, yard-strewn-with-yellow-leaves
boy, beach-so-dark-we-couldn't-find-the-path-back boy.

FIELD NOTES ON LOVING A GIRL IN SECRET

There's a danger in comparing her to things.

Her prayer, a stall of horses. Her anger,
the beak of a bird. Her sleep, a sun-bleached fence.

Her sadness, a yard pile of firewood.

A patch of pines is all I remember of a field.

Quiet, she says. Her stick-shift sedan,
her trouble with mathematics, her car radio
turned up all the way. I write her questions

on a sheet of paper so no one can hear.

Late at night in my blue car, we drive
back roads, the only place we speak openly.

The field's full enough tonight, I think,
to break into a thousand wings.

APPLE SEASON

There's something primordial about knees,
she tells me. Not nervous system or heart
but joint, hinge, seam. We leave our small city,

drive several hours north to Upcountry.

The trees are beginning to end, to start
the falling season. Last week my knees

turned red, skin raw on the rough upholstery
of her couch. She kissed me smart,
put her hand under my skirt. In a city

so small and southern, I worried our bodies
might set off an alarm, a flare in the dark
open field behind her place. Was it Nie-

tzsche who said, at least once it's necessary
to doubt all things? Or was it Descartes?
These nights, we doubt our parents, the cities

of Sodom and Gomorrah, Adam and Eve,
the churches we grew up inside. We harvest
bushels of apples, get down on our knees,
pick up ones that fell like burning cities.

EROS AS BUS

: after *Eros Bus Travel*, Reus, Spain

Our particular story involves a bus

the shade of liquid amoxicillin.

The hostel walls, too, like a mouth

with bright light inside. She has a boyfriend,

so I reason when she goes to kiss me:

I loved her first, *before.*

She says, *Let's put the mattress on the floor,*

afraid the hostel walls are pink azalea

petal thin. She doesn't want anyone hearing

she's anything but straight.

Tomorrow night

an overnight bus so pink it will be impossible

to sleep

will take us from Corfu to a ferry to Athens.

I'll wonder as the pink strobes

light up the aisle:

how far in advance

could I see it coming:

falling for her again

like a fact

up ahead in the road

an animal

crossing in the dark.

MOON PRAYER

Tonight the moon lies on its back:
a thin, white spine. I count each vertebra
of the woman next to me in bed,
map her lumbar curvature:

each bone : a moon : a linear diagram
down her back. In this parable
in which I am an astronomer
the night sky is a body capable of holding
what may not survive our atmosphere.

Oh god of well-made darkness,
let us not forget how prayers have been cruel,
how the moon has been misconstrued
for a knife glinting in the dark.

VERNAL EQUINOX

Talk's small and laundry hangs on string
 across the kitchen. Morning light, like wold,
dyes your hair and our walls with its rising.

You hum threads of songs while ironing
 a shirt. Forgiveness has been thin, a camisole.
The back door's held open with string

so our orange cat can spend the morning
 on the stoop. I crack four eggs on a bowl's
thin rim; the yolks intact, each rising
like a brass button in the glair.

 Then you're mending
a tear in my jeans and one in the shoulder
of your favorite shirt.

 Imagine heat as string:
with steam, you fix my chiffon dress, threading
water through each wrinkle.

 Like a thousand pressed stoles,
the sky's clean: new cloth, taut and rising.

Breakfast almost ready, the eggs sizzling
in the pan.

 The sun's just a pinhole,
the wind, a needle closing up a seam. Clouds rising
and so threadbare I can hear the snapping strings.