

Interrogation

*What plants do you harvest in the dark of the moon?
What bodies form halos?*

Cinnamon, menth, and lavender.
the moon—
cup overflowing
Dandelions and dark matter,
broken harp
punctured amulet shedding talc.

*In this world, what did you see?
What shapes did light take?*

Amber, and sheen of pearl.
the moon—
old woman's satchel
Boneflower and weeping girl,
saltlick
shadowface in the well.

Can you say what you want?

To lay it down lay my story down
over the harm like a blanket of moth wings,

Death's Head, Luna, White Witch, I want
to lay my story down.

Poem of the first kiss

The water in the spillway was only that, water, I understood the weight of water with its load of silt, I understood silt, the burden of carrying and letting go, the idea of a trench, the idea of encasing a watercourse in concrete, they released me in late afternoon in the season of early dark, a strained light still shone, three little words, oh please, please, I'm not a girl like others now, ordinary in ordinary light, the djinn ended that, the djinn lit down and smacked me good, crossing the bridge, water in the spillway only water, late afternoon moon, leaves green and breathing, I hear their little sighs, enough rain fallen the week before to wake the dead, that lily that knew to renounce every green thing and wait, clenched and knotted, that lily understood stay dead, play dead, but couldn't resist in the end; much later I'll live in another country, and there will be book clubs, and one woman will tell the story of how it happened in the fifth grade at the first Star Wars movie, her fingers brushing the silk of his cheek and she still knows his name, and my turn is coming, I'm waiting, getting ready to look nobody in the face, and say, *I don't remember.*

Keats at Fourteen

She dozes, her nails fretted against the linen's border,
a hectic rose flaming each cheek. Her lips move, no words.
The boy is guardian spirit, no one but he enters this sickroom
where his mother fades, home finally after six years—failures,
disgrace. *Scarlet daughter*, neighbors hiss, *slave to appetite*,
but John is single-minded—she *will* live. No one but he gives her
the tincture of mercury—one tenth of a grain daily, dabs the sweat
of her fevers away, a basket of withered poppies at his feet. He pierces
each capsule with a needle, drops it in a small glazed crock to warm
near the stove, sweat out the opium. Then he'll add wine, saffron,
nutmeg. It takes time, the hour darkens. He cups his hand
to light the votive. She moans a furred voice from webbed lungs,
a cup of black blood brimming, *the pilgrim is fleeing the City*,
he leans in closer, *the City of Destruction*, takes her clammy hand,
that place also where he was born, so close now he's breathing her,
"Johnny," she cries, "lift me up, Johnny, your father is here in the room."

Darkfall

Because black blood beat against his temples
like muffled wings and
there was never a moment when he
didn't feel that trembling, and because
that same blood flowed slowly
over the stone of his skull as he paced, stopped,
and looked around; *I served my country*, he'd say in a hurt,
bewildered voice, like he still couldn't believe it.

Because Vietnam followed him home
in a beat of black blood, always
a bank of heavy light.

Because every darkfall ripened into nightmare
& overwhelmed—he could not
change it into anything else, and could not
stop it, and neither one of us thought
to wonder if we believed in love—we did not—
and because he could not
believe in sleep, the dream came to dwell in daylight.

He was infantry and I was high school, I lay around
smoking his dope, nervous
because he never made a move on me,
but grateful too, that it wasn't compulsory,
he wanted nothing so much
as to smoke and talk in a flat voice
while I sat,
head propped against the wall, body
shanked on a stained mattress.

Because he spelled his name *Ric* without the *k*,
and once we might've been friends.

Because he sometimes disappeared
and the dream did all the talking,
coming into being
and he suffered alone in that empty room
where I was nothing.

Only a body of silence
the dream moved through.
Only a hand
holding a joint, letting smoke rise.

Because they were coming, they were always coming
through trees
into a shoal of light, and he could see the way
light pounded heat into thick air,
and there was never any wind.

The Viet Cong ride on grasshoppers
through the dark trees,
perched up high on huge grasshoppers
with bodies like moving scaffolds,

and here's the thing he couldn't get past:
their eyes, enormous and deep,
like the eyes of horses
whose muzzles he'd stroked,
that pure,

and tears brim up in their eyes
and fill to overflowing
and trace a wet shining.

Against those tears, all weapons are useless.