How to Tell a Story

I am given a choice: to look at the world
or to become it. Paula draws two lines
growing ever outward. I flip the notebook over,
needle further and further toward a center.
I open my mouth and my life rushes in.
I close my eyes and am fraught with scenery.
Write about the boy without the weather
on the mountain. Write about the boy and give
each blade of grass its own name. So what
happens next? Hold a bunch of gravel in your hands.
Hold a bunch of history in your hands. Draw a family
tree with no branches and so many leaves.
Technically, we're in a Kung Fu Tea. I'll show you
what I am if you'll show me what it means.

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Poet Laureate of This Costco

I receive a poet's welcome.
Everything is the same.

Off the Q104, I step through the gap
in the hedges past the auto shop.

So many poems about light glinting on the water.

Here is my poem about light
falling between painted white lines
in the parking lot
of the Astoria Costco.

Around the corner
the stone diligence
of Isamu Noguchi draped in autumn leaves

the rambling color in the grasses
in Socrates Sculpture Park
and yes, the waterfront
catching the light.

It is both on-brand and honest
for me to call this gray warehouse
the most beautiful thing for miles.

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I mean aisles.

Rows of bulk to clean and feed your family.

I go looking for something
and I find it

but it's way too heavy
to try to carry home.

An Almond Roca melts forever in my Gong Gong's jacket pocket.
All summer since Popo died.

In moments of personal and national catastrophe, it is my job to tweet:
"Catch me crunching croissants at a crossroads."

I am not on Twitter.
I am stacking glossy boxes in a cart with one bum wheel.

I am examining assorted shrink-wrapped muffins.
These muffins are Asian American cuisine.
Especially the double chocolate.

I am testing Kirkland socks for hand-feel.
These are Asian American socks.

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In 1942, Isamu Noguchi drives himself into the desert of his own volition.
He is not allowed to leave.

This is an Asian American story.

Costco Iwilei is the busiest Costco in the nation, an Asian American fact.
Its pizza is the best pizza in Hawai'i, but the bar is low.

Yes, I will sample anything in a small enough cup.

Where there is need
there is devotion.
I was raised a short walk away. I've taken dates to this food court.

In Queens, I am never far.

On bad days, the gas lines stretched further away than my mother's apartment.
No ocean in sight.

I have history.

It was my job to push the cart.

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On Day One, I Quit

On day one, I quit the Cub Scouts.
It was tradition to howl at the end
of each meeting. I refused to howl.

Mom held me in the parking lot.
Inside, the pack whooped and cried,
animal brothers under the moon.

I don't remember if Mom ever got
her deposit back. Across the street,
Sacred Hearts Academy rang its bells

on the hour. The last scene of *Lost*
filmed in their chapel. Light shone
through its arch and a man walked

into heaven. In Illinois, my father
and I spent our only winter together.
I slept on the living room floor

and woke to passing freight trains.
That week refused to carry snow.
Sixty on Christmas, we drove back

and forth through melting suburbs.
He told me about a distant aunty
who'd died suddenly when bitten

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by a dog. This was back in China.
I've let this country sit between us.
Its melodramas and indoor malls.

Fields of wheat beset by family cars.
We passed house after bright house
flushed with lights but no sound.

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Kapūkaki Red Hill

I can't remember the time I was born.
Is that a stupid thing to say? I can't say
I ever knew it, not to the moment, wristwatch
pressed to my newborn eye, my mother
cut open beside me. This frustrates my friends
who want to know my rising sign, who want
to understand why I am who I am.
I tell them *maybe afternoon, definitely not morning,*
and this seems to make them more upset.
I know I was six weeks early, barely made
my way into a life, that I almost took
my mother along with me. This was on Red Hill,
in the hospital built like a row of teeth.
Red Hill, known to the Navy as the military's
largest gas station: 250 million gallons of fuel
placed directly above O'ahu's main aquifer.
I am an ocean and continent from home
when 20,000 gallons leak into the wells—
jet fuel in the water, forever chemicals
striating in the blood of my neighbors:
Kānaka stewarding the waters for millennia,
Swap Meet uncles who barter on Sundays,
passengers resting on city buses day and night,
the daily betrayed, tens of thousands now
living with chronic illness, relocated, displaced.
I live amid waste, in the heart of America,
brewing coffee then forgetting it, showering

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twice because I'm sad. Where I am, the winter
makes the lake into a temporary land. My friends
coax me to the middle of it and I follow, unsteady.
I hear them marvel at the magic of it, the sky
bright and full of balloons. But my eyes are on
the shore, my mind fixed on the work of return.

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