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Guarantee

Kneeling on a tired church
I pay for single consumers.

Cashiers wink at expiration dates.
Express lanes offer love gods.

You pull me past fourteen lines.
By you, love, or by existence.

You secretly shampoo my hair.
You're an impulse buy.

I try Cupid. He abandons
a box on a perfectly made bed.

His arrows are blunted.
He uses less sadness and thought.

I mistake you for damaged goods.
I'd rather play with the box.

Half-open, partially eaten.
Desire will not catch me out.

My church promises remorse.
I'm uninformed. I forget to look.

Heaven gives clear instructions,
though God hides his fine print.

Should I arrange our marriage?
An altar guarantees us.

At the Bus Stop

Sparrows jump under a bench.
Haydees Restaurant, unlit sign.
Clumps of strangers drift,
molecules that break up
for the bus. My watch eats
time till blue doors open.

Twenty years ago in Dayton,
I waited on Gleneagle Drive.
A pimply teenager, bad breath,
no book bag, it wasn't cool.

Pacing a hill's dewy grass
I always looked up the street,
kept safe with simple breaths.
I'm not going to die yet.
No test, homework, social life,
if I stay quiet on my slope.

After the driver picks us up,
we pass the Air Force Museum,
curve around the base where
jets ferry generals and airmen
to their jobs, inspecting wings,
so Thunderbirds don't fall apart,
convincing political appointees
to increase funding of bombers.

They are afraid. We all are.
Of exams strafing nervous
systems, schools kissing fright,
policy meetings' scarecrows
shambling toward staff members,
twisting on futons with dreams
of steel planes draped with fire.

My own voice repeats back to me:
You must wear their robe of red stars.
I try to remain a small bird
that's too harmless to harm
in a green seat near my window,
nesting in the seconds that race by.

Concrete and Loss

Shovels scratch the parking lot.
Headlights stick to branches,
cobalt teeth, cobweb fingers.

It's winter. You're barely clothed,
like your work, expect big things,
but there's nothing to listen to.

Congrats on making it this far.
You left this world for pick
pockets, salesman, supervisors.

You push against your schedule.
Knock, knock, come in, they say,
wear this concrete. It mixes

ground, air, hours into loss.
Skeleton limbs cover the fields,
white stars smocked by halos.

Praise in Every City Branch

Our city's branches
celebrate my girlfriend.
They praise her teeth.

What does she say
about her best friends?
I imagine their showers.

She asks for washcloths.
Clings to slick surfaces.
I will join her book club.

Ears glow on cell phones.
Pals tease her with dirt.
Sexual confidences.

My size, make, and model.
A steam shovel cleans up.
My motor revs up words.

New details of my life
revolutionize the way
farming is done. Tractors

harvest grain for her party.
She discusses Jane Austen.
I'm her friends' screensaver.

Overhearing them talking
I'm unseen but muscular.
I soap myself in an animal bed.

Fragility

Millions of movie stills.
The sun barely moves.
It's mischievous. Swats us.
Walks down country lanes,
sees closed-mouthed kisses.

Let's hold hands. Don't
break headboards, dent walls.
Lanes will close their blinds.
We'll climb a gritty sky.
Taste our cloudy sweat.

The Pumpkins take a child.
They know fragility.
They fall off trucks,
crack on highways,
splatter like ice cream.

The world needs props.
Bad breath, morning eyes.
Chunks, white brain seeds,
fly past black moons.
Midnight juices our skin.

The earth is decorative.
It extinguishes flies.
Our uneasiness, pain.
Numb tongues rot their love.
Everyone knows this.