

**Laura Straub**

24, and I, ill-fed,

wear red-wine lipstick, an ideal stain,  
sipping so it only coats the tongue.  
Teeth cannot taste, but, like fat, facilitate  
feeling. It's gotten hard to run from home,  
my skeleton pulling towards the open keyhole.

The fat has leaked out of my face and hands, settling into the back  
of my arms, between my legs, in rings around my hips,  
expanding my shy stomach and chest. Wine is for these swelling arcs.  
The backs of my arms have prickles, dull purple dots.  
24, and this is my ugliest, most beautiful body.

Won't you forget  
most of what I've said?  
Focused on the butter between the skin and muscle I am  
presently estranged from,

I want to say I feel less  
than I ever thought I would,  
but my body craves fat and fat  
feeds feeling.

## Color on Black and White In Grandmother's Formal Living Room

Red spray touched level lips and clouded hair, eyes cold-lit blue. Like that of home-style fabric, pink petals hover over cheeks. Missing the vein, the skin recedes. Why are pianos for pictures of dead mothers?

Her daughter told daughter tells daughter. Unhappy  
is not never happy. Mother. Mother.  
Lost husband to his shotgun. Won pie competitions.  
Clippings. Interviewed by the papers. Clipped. Recipes writ.  
Made homemade sandwich buns. Mother. Domestic wits.  
Sent an infant. My mother. Just for 3 months so daughter could trip.  
Europe. Daughter. Can't cook. Mother. Lost daughter to anywhere but.  
Makes homemade crackers. My mother. Mother.  
Asked to die and was hushed. Grandmother. Great-grandmother.  
Snapped and put to dust on the piano I wasn't to touch.

## Balancing Coasts

The night's guards are these Berkeley hills.  
The sky pulled down, condensed,  
a blacker shadow than what's back.  
Tight stars burn the dark, open on  
empty streets, nothing but the thickest lines.

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The sun crowds, perpetual exhaust  
buses idling, honking, waning corners;  
swaybacked lizards stay still never.  
The beach's aqua a million shades,  
full of oily 'tweens stuffed in suits, wrappers, plastic  
bags and not liking. A child throws a rock at my back.  
We pay too much for lunch, eat under a rock to stop burning.

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There's nothing to figure out,  
only so much to remember.  
In one more bar, loud music's bad and blunts,  
people toss back each other looking;  
I leave. \$20 cab, I ask  
the driver about his sons and daughters.

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It's lonely, knowing you're asleep when I'm awake.  
The weight a day, the red wine pinches, pulling up the center of your tongue.  
Boston Freedom Trail calls, 'More steps, more facts! Solidify your history!'  
My wine dulls.

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Don't worry, you can be alone. Usually you know  
when it's the last ring, when the phone or who's behind  
it's done. I was nauseous for two weeks. All sunshine.  
If you haven't understood, this isn't not for you.  
In this non-commitment, you are finally not so young.