

Scenes of Everyday Life



Betrayal by Robin Good

Poems by Linda Lenzke

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Phases of Love

Unkissed

This is not a love poem
it is too soon for anything
more than infatuation,
yet words make knots
when they spill from my lips.
I introduce you to my best friends
I only remember your name.
My synapse misfire
hands grasp a millisecond late;
I wear evidence of my dinner
but I don't know what I ate.
All my senses drink you in
I'm giddy in your presence.
But like the hero in a Capra film
I try to be suave under the porch light
of your parent's house,
we say goodbye
unkissed.

Crush

Sweet daydreams visit uninvited,
pleasant interruptions in my workaday life
like snacks between meals they satisfy momentarily,
but soon I crave more; I'm insatiable.

My appetite is piqued. I want to nibble
on the fleshy lobes of your ears, run my tongue
in the valley where your lips divide,
burrowing inside to seek the silky wetness of your kiss.

I think about you stretched out in my bed;
sheets gathered at your feet as the dusk light
casts shadows from the curves of your body
inviting me to explore your terrain.

Suddenly I'm shy realizing it has been a long time.
Desire trumps my fear; I find the courage
to wrap my hand firmly behind your neck
and draw you close, my flesh shivering as we kiss.

My phone rings; a colleague stands in the threshold
of my office impatiently; a sound cue reminds me I have new mail.
I'm jettisoned into the present moment
and discover a smile on my face.

Thinking

We listen to Lynette
string melodies
some bright, some jazzy.
I think about how I want to kiss you,
first running my hand up your neck
holding your chin in that crook
between thumb and forefinger.
You startle me in my reverie
grabbing my hand
you pull it close to your nose,
cold like a puppy.
I feel you breathe warm
beneath the cool.
I think about how I want to kiss you
deep to your core.
I smile, thinking, how I love loving women
how lovely the women are I love
I love thinking about how I want to kiss you.

Ellen's Face

Second grade sandlot softball
shaped your nose, soft curve to the left;
rosy birthmark down its shaft
signals for attention.

We eat Chinese food, red peppers spike
like a thermometer.

Your green eyes, almond-shaped
scrunch together, then like emerald fireworks
they sparkle brilliant as they open.

Faint tawny freckles sprinkle your face.

Your mouth moves, animated.

I listen, I nod, watch the room empty
behind you. I realize
that we linger again
in each other's company
spending time, carefree
like pennies in a fountain.

Inside Out

Inside out we meet each other,
beginning with our innermost
thoughts, wishes, fears,
broken places in states of repair,
stories from the road.

Ignoring all dating advice,
we discuss dysfunctions, drunks,
fractured bones, driving while intoxicated,
more than one family intervention,
sexual addiction (you remind me you're not an addict),
death, therapeutic history,
cheating spouses, liars, liars, pants on fire, unpaid debts,
anger as a motivator, use and abuse of cursing,
compulsive overeating, and sabotaged relationships.

Our foreplay is suspect.

Are we posting danger signs or invitations?

Proceed with caution; take me as I am.

We offer our vulnerabilities, tender underbellies,
unfulfilled dreams, our hunger for touch,
desire to laugh; there are no pauses in our conversations,
because there is so much to say.

We talk about how we love our families, our work,
the care and keeping of our bodies and souls,
the importance of home, oceans and memories,
passions and poetry, perfecting forehands,
hopes for our futures, and yes, we whisper,
is there a future for us?

This week:

Inside out we meet each other.

Next week:

We'll take outsides in.

Earth Day, 1992

Another rainy day afternoon
when rain dances in potholes
like fish biting on a foggy dawn.
My mind wanders like a dragonfly in flight
with thoughts of you and the itchy restlessness
of spring fever.
I walk in my favorite arbor,
the piney woods spiking the air like a hot house.
Green buds reach out like little handshakes
from fragile brown branches
welcoming me home.
I walk the paths where autumn's leaves
mix with mud like molasses.
I listen to the whir, the chirp, the whistle
of resident wildlife.
I hear their song;
I dream of you and want to wander in your wild places,
nuzzle my nose in your musky dew.
I want to taste the salty softness of your skin,
lick your tears, stroke your hair.
I want to know that you want me too.
I haven't seen the sun for days
yet I feel full of brightness and light.
Such a gift to fall in love this spring,
in your arms, in this way, this Earth Day.

Migration

As the Canadian Geese
return to the marsh
finding respite as they journey south
so do you and I stand
in a familiar place
of ritual and body memory
seeking sanctuary and answers
in a fallow field with duck blind sentry.

We stand like tall grass
holding each other
silent except for tears
and the rustling of cattails.
We are buffeted by wind and desire
pulled together by nature's magneto
of flesh and spirit
love on the wing.

We hear the plaintive cry
a lone goose seeking her flock
and the popping recoil of a shotgun,
then silence.

I too am lost.
It seems like I'm always leaving you and returning,
yet in this moment we stand together
like an oak in an open prairie
swaying gently in the wind.
We are safe,
rocking cradled in each others' arms.

We are creatures of habit
and we've come here like the geese
this season of the wing
another migration of the heart.

Breaking Camp

Into the woods
where aspens quake, and birches and maples
crackle and creak in the wind,
we enter the wilderness.
Loons wail, calling their mates home
as the sun peeks, reveals itself, then hides
behind a gray cloud
like a mischievous child.
Pileated woodpeckers, katydids and frogs
create a cacophony of percussion, strings and bellows.
Smoke curls from the fire pit
and your mouth as you exhale.
I turn the pages of the local paper
reading the police call report
and church supper menus to divine
a sense of place before breaking camp
as you and I drift apart as if afloat
on the clear, still lake
untethered without an anchor.

When the Sumac Is Red

When the sumac is red
I remember you and the time we shared,
the season, the reasons you fled.
Grief and healing happen in small steps, sometimes a minute,
a day at a time, in the end it felt like I survived an amputation,
my love for you a phantom limb, like you,
still alive, yet no longer visible, still here, but not.

Time heals all wounds, some scar,
some disappear, leaving only sense memory.
I've let you go, but not forgotten
my debt unpaid, the amends not made.
I can't know how you've resolved the past
or filed me away,
a brief chapter of your life.

All I can wish for you
is love and dreams fulfilled.
Like a leaf transported by the wind
and a migrating bird in flight,
life is a marriage of randomness and destiny.
I'll always remember you
when the sumac is red.

Weekend Melodrama

Movie matinee love story imprints upon my heart;
a template is stamped awaiting its matching part,
loneliness expressed in sighs this Saturday afternoon,
as I give myself permission, open-heartedly to cry
in the darkened movie theatre
in softly wept whimpers,
like a small abandoned animal
separated from its litter. Pitiful am I.

Full of Myself

Indian summer, presidential election day, November.
A joyful, hopeful day to vote,
be a citizen, stand in line, greet neighbors,
watch others curiously sample the school bake sale.
Outside, sky blue, translucent.
Air fresh, breeze gentle.
Fallen leaves in orange, tan and scarlet,
blanket my feet, making crisp noises, shuffling,
almost skipping as I walk.

After voting, I drive to work
all the windows open,
music playing at maximum volume.
A smile breaks full and widens across my face;
emotions rise, tears fill my eyes.
I realize, I have let you go,
at least the binding attachment
of who and what we were to each other.
Like spinning in circles together,
our weight, a counter balance,
as our hands hold on to each other,
whirling, then letting go,
you are launched away from me
and I am lighter and free of you.

I'm momentarily dizzy,
then grounded and content.
I'm present in this moment.
I soak in all that I can,
my senses fully engaged,
my spirit fills with each breath I take in,
I am full, full of myself.

Anthem

Springtime, I plant stakes,
mark boundaries,
delineate the path to my heart,
post "keep out" signs where appropriate,
no trespassing on the tender places,
mulched and fertilized for growth.
I sing my new anthem while I toil,
reminding myself how the earth is turned first
to make a soft place for the seed to grow.
I pray for the sun and long days
to work their magic
on the tendrils of hope
as they take root, bloom and reach for the sky.
I sing my new anthem,
repeating choruses like a mantra
to center myself, anchor, establish gravity;
I breathe through my feet.
and sing my new anthem
in hopes that the heavens will hear.

The Valentine Poems

Dedicated to Cindy and the sum of us

The Valentine Poems are a chronicle of the author's personal, committed relationship spanning 15 years. Each year on Valentine's Day I wrote a poem to my partner Cindy. Our 15 year journey together included two sabbaticals and almost three years of living in two households as a commuter relationship. The poems capture both the passion and the mundane nature of everyday life.

Valentine I

I drink my first cup of coffee
hoping my brain will engage;
I think about how this is
the last drug I allow myself
(we won't count chocolate).
I already have an association with coffee and you
and I muse about that
as my hands are warmed
wrapped around ceramic curves
and my tongue swims in liquid.

I think the first cup of coffee
you poured me was drugged.
I'm sure of it being so close
to Valentine's Day;
some invisible, gossamer, giggling nymph
poured in some potion
that possesses me.
My symptoms are clear:
escalating excitement, complete disclosure
of thoughts and feelings,
a compelling desire to repeat the experience.

I drink my second cup of coffee
and have scheming thoughts of you
and the day ahead
seduction by voicemail;
I am possessed.

2/14/94

Valentine Sabbatical

This is the poem never written
dedicated to the gap year never shared,
for the love that was lost, in suspension,
between the first and second Valentine year.

This is the poem never written,
constructed with words never heard,
conversations in abstention,
arguments not presented, pleas unaccepted.

This is the shortest poem never written,
marking the longest year;
letting go of each other revealed
the path which brought us back together.

Written 12/24/08 to commemorate 2/14/95

Valentine II

You are sleeping on your side this frigid Sunday afternoon.
I wrap my body around you as if I were a blanket.
Pretending to sleep, I match my breathing to yours,
as I did as a child when I napped and spooned with my mother.
With you my thoughts are far from innocent, as heat and desire
generate in that space in between the moon like crescents of your cheeks
and the moist triangle of my body that presses and rocks against you.
I make futile bargains and unspoken pleas that you will turn,
open your eyes, halfway, as you spread your lips to kiss me.
I imagine my arms reaching for you to love as we had the afternoon before.
In this sweet moment that bridges dreaming and wakefulness,
I am filled with the blissful thought that passion and serenity
have conjoined in this bed in our lovers embrace.
The visceral knowing that you are my mate
soothes me as I realize the safe harbor and sheltering protection
of your love, sparked by the hunger and ache for your touch.

2/14/96

Valentine III

Writing you on Valentine's Day
has become a ritual like waking together,
you with your head buried beneath a blanket,
me with two cups of coffee and a catalog of questions.
We are different. It works.

Typical day,
I ask the litany of questions:
How late will you work?
Do you want to have dinner together?
Do you want me to cook, if yes, what?
Who will buy the groceries?

I suggest we need new recipes.
We haven't been together that long, you reply.

I count. Three Valentine's Days,
two winters, one challenging, consecutive calendar year
(I don't remember how many Budgets)
but none of this really matters or measures anything of importance.

What matters is this,
when we cook; taste and savor anew,
then each Valentine's confection will be sweeter than the one before.

2/14/97

Valentine IV

I wonder why we've been fighting all week.
Is it the lack of nicotine in your veins
and the missing comfort of your smokeless friends?
Or is it my impatience with conflict and bulldog desire
to avoid or challenge the anger of those I love?

The answer that comes is this:
You are so important to me, that when I look into your eyes,
I see my future and my love for you reflected.
When there is anger or ambivalence, I panic.
My greatest fear is indifference or a broken gaze.

This fifth Valentine's Day that I've known you,
marks four years celebrated, one sabbatical taken.
Each day, each year I spend with you, I learn three things:
how to love you, how to love me and how to be, we.
This keeps it simple, heartfelt, and spirit-filled.

2/14/98

Valentine V

Wandering the Hallmark shop,
I seek the Holy Grail of Valentine cards.
Speed reading down the aisles,
I pass by others, who like me
gather to find the perfect few lines
of sweet confection captured in a card
adorned in images in rouge of roses.

The signs direct me to sweetheart or wife,
to my husband or special someone,
for my sister and family, best friend,
and secret admirer. You are all of these and more.
Yes, this is precisely the challenge.
All the cards are simply snapshots
of who we are and what we mean to each other.

I settle upon a line drawing,
two toothbrushes in a cup on a bathroom sink.
Somehow this mundane depiction of home and habitation
(habituation?) is a haiku of my love.
We inhabit each other's days;
we share in the simple and sacred rituals of love.
We dwell in the soul and spirit of life.

2/14/99

Valentine VI

Seven years have passed
since I wrote your first Valentine.
We have entered new decades
in our birthday years,
a new millennium
in the calendar.
We measure time
in memories and holidays
from photos of last year's vacation.

If Romeo and Juliet
had lived that day
and their love matured
would they resemble us?
Is there high drama in the aging of wine
or the growing of a ring in a tree trunk?
Would Shakespeare craft a story,
detailing their daily routines? Probably not!

If I lost any part
of what I have today with you
it would be tragedy
and the heart of opera.
Though it may seem
that I take your love for granted, I don't.
Though it may appear
that my passion is hibernating, it's not.
Beneath the veneer of our ritual kisses
brews desire and longing.
In the mirrors of your eyes, I exist
and you in mine, Valentine.

2/14/00

Valentine VII

Saturday morning, Wisconsin winter
I'm dreaming of our green arbor up north,
safe harbor and wellspring,
whose territory we have surveyed with promise
and will tend with sweat and joy,
a place for our spirit's restoration and weekend retreats.
The land is hibernating now, protecting its rich reserves for spring.
Beneath the frost line dreams of new growth are conjured;
pine and aspen, birch and maple
blackberry bushes and wildflowers
ready themselves to send taproots deep and branches high.

Our love is like that too.
It has seasons and times of suspension,
cycles of change and anticipation.
Spring fever, cabin fever builds in me.
I'm impatient with time, restless in my routines.
I want to rescue you from your obsession with work
and instead sleep naked under the stars
to the sounds of loons and the lake,
snoring dogs at our feet,
feeling kisses that linger
and our bodies trembling with pleasure.

02/14/01

Valentine VIII

Don't be afraid.

I don't need all of you,
or all of your thoughts, wishes, gifts, dreams and desires,
all of your trust and kisses, or all your bliss and soul's rapture,
your time, tenderness and energy.

I don't need to share all of your successes and victories,
or all of your laughter and affection, prayers and passion.

Don't be afraid. I don't need all of you,
or all of your doubts and demons, dark nights of the soul,
resentments and fears, anger, discontent and disasters,
or all of your failures and foibles, shame, grief and sorrows.
I don't need all of your apprehensions and anxiety,
all of your sarcasm, teases and excuses,
or all of your lies, sins, betrayals and transgressions.

Don't be afraid. I don't need all of you.
I do love all of you, accept you and desire you,
trust and respect you, cherish you
want to be with you, always, you
bright light and shadow, authentic you, chameleon you,
precious gift of you,
emerging you and the presence and essence of you.

Don't be afraid. You don't need all of me.
I'll give you the best and worst of me.
Just promise me you'll want me, seek me, cherish me, respect me,
accept me, desire me, and call me your partner, your friend and your lover,
your soul mate and family,
your one and only Valentine,
as you are mine.

2/14/02

Valentine IX

I have never loved you more than I have this year
watching you slip away in a rebel's fray
of rapid-fire words and silent truces.

I have never fought for love as I have fought for you
surrendering control and outcomes
retreating to mend a wounded heart and eviscerated ego.

I have never loved you more than I have this year
knowing that my pursuing may be pushing you away.
I have never sought love as I have sought you
searching for signs of love and commitment
in your eyes, your touch, unspoken words and attention.

I have never loved you more than I have this year
releasing you so I could stay, resisting flight
to ease my pain and quell the fear.
I have never let go of love as I have let go of you
wanting to hold you, I embraced hope
trusting that healing would come in patient steps.

I have never loved you more than I have this year
learning that love grows like bones,
filaments that weave and become strong.
I have never connected in love as I have connected with you
realizing that our struggles and growing pains
measure progress not distance.

I have never loved you more than I have this year
grieving the journey with gratitude for the experience.
I have never cherished love as I have cherished you
accepting that I love you soulfully
and the work is worth the reward.

Valentine X

A decade after that first cup of coffee,
followed by a refill and a story,
more anecdotes, warmed up coffee in hand,
aromatic like some exotic incense, years pass.

5:30 a.m. awakenings repeat
in mornings awash in honey light,
rising with the steam of fresh brew,
from a faraway place.

We sit across from each other
drinking coffee and sharing tales of our journeys —
our lives separate from each other.
This is the secret of our success.

Our ten minutes of intimacy,
and three cups of coffee each day for ten years
equals 25, 24-hour days of marathon talk
and consumption of 10,950 cups of coffee each.
This is the way we have sex.

(I'm not talking body-slamming, moaning,
slurping on each others' nipples,
visiting dark wet places
with fingers, tongues and other apparatus,
teasing touch and hot friction,
I'm so out of breath I think I'm going to die
kind of sex that ends in orgasm and cigarettes
[which is always fun and we don't seem to do often enough]).

No, what I'm saying is this — there is no other person in the world
who both knows me and loves me more than you,
who shares my mornings and my dreams,
my evenings and my grief, who accepts and tolerates my faults
and is in awe of my evolving spirit,
who breathes the same air as I do as you, Valentine.
I love you a decade's worth of Valentine's —
may your heart always be filled with my love
your cup filled with coffee
and our mornings with each other.

Valentine XI

I've never been with someone for so long a time
as I have with you, a decade and a year.
Measured by rings of a tree trunk,
dog years, cycles of the moon,
the number of finch nests in a season,
days lived between brackets of dawn and dusk, dusk and dawn,
and all the countless, silent moments of a breath, a thought,
the spasm of a muscle, or a tear caught in space.
I've never been with someone for so long a time.

I've never known someone as well as I know you.
Sometimes I think your thoughts for you,
answer your questions before asked,
anticipate your regrets. Some days I know you better than myself.
I know things about you, you can't know,
what you look like when you sleep,
how your eyes brighten when you tell me you have a good idea,
how sadness presses into your shoulders
and etches frown lines in your brow.
I've never known someone as well as you.

I've never loved someone as much as I love you.
Not in the manner of infatuation or lust,
but in the profound experience
of shared bliss and
the mundane familiarity of everyday life.
I've loved you in ways I've feared,
past limits of comfort and control,
loved you in spite and because of my better judgment.
I've never loved someone as much as you.

2/14/05

Valentine XII

Distance divides us in the days of the week
between Monday and Friday.

Our work lives and material needs
separate us in miles.

We have two homes; we are commuters in transit
between the home we shared
and the home we created for alternate weekends,
base camp for your exile from here.

All that truly matters is the abode of our hearts
you reside in mine every day,
you inhabit my thoughts and converse with me
in dreams and email, morning phone calls over coffee
and evening check-ins, as needed.

Our routines are altered, rhythms out of sync
yet our story unfolds in parallel realms in
this chapter of our lives.

You are always with me
even when away;
you are loved every day.

This is the promise we make as partners;
our lives are married,
though not governed by laws and money
judges and legislators but
by spirits, hearts and kisses.

2/14/06

Valentine XIII

Call me lucky, lucky thirteen
born on Friday the thirteenth,
celebrations not superstitions marked the day,
as today, I celebrate, fearlessly.

These past years meander like country roads,
when you look back, the dangerous curves and detours disappear,
we marvel at the distance traveled,
revel in the journey shared.

We spend a lot of time in cars, shuttling between
homes that support our work lives,
we map our love in mile markers and memories,
making the most of the moments we share.

It has taken us time and practice,
hours logged on highways,
repeated rituals of packing, and unpacking baggage,
to become seasoned travel companions.

I've always loved road trips,
some days too, it feels like I've always loved you —
don't frown — not in a weary way, but with curious wonderment,
anticipation of the trip ahead.

We enter territory where we've never been,
navigating the wilderness of the unknown,
what lies ahead of us will certainly look different
than destinations passed.

When I think of our future
you're behind the wheel of your brand new ragtop,
my hand rubs your leg while Sweet Penny Rocket,
points into the passing wind, ears flapping like wings.

Call me lucky, lucky thirteen,
thirteen years of a journey shared
celebration not superstitions, mark this day
as you and I celebrate, fearlessly

Valentine XIV

Bitter winds and record snowfall
push us back into our homes.
Mounds of ice chunks,
like cold bones stacked high,
shake and shiver
in the swirling, darting wind,
trembling like eerie chimes.

Cabin fever is epidemic,
yet dreams are on the move
teasing imaginations,
speculating tomorrows.
I am more alone than ever
yet hopeful for my future,
embraced by my own love.

My writing is interrupted;
our house finches
return to visit last year's nest.
Dancing, side-stepping on their perch
outside the window, under the awning
they sing in full song, knowing
Spring is coming, new nests to be built
cycles of life to repeat, futures to be born.

2/14/08

Valentine to My Unknown Lover

Whoever you are, whatever you do, wherever you live,
whenever you're ready, however scared you may be,
I am waiting for you, my new love. I try to recognize you
in the faces of the unfamiliar, or in the eyes of friendly others.
Perhaps I've already met you at the bookstore, or the
Farmer's Market on the Square, our hands reaching for the same red pepper.
Were you the woman two rows in front of me
in the movie theater? I watched you, then the film.
Maybe we're friends; belong to the same group,
pass each other on the road during our daily commute.

You may not yet have arrived in town; the new kid at work;
The neighbor moving into my building,
whose ripped cardboard box I rescue before hitting the ground,
our eyes meeting for a second
in recognition of something important, strangely familiar.
We ready ourselves for each other each day in our meditations and reverie,
conversations with friends, when they ask, what will your next girlfriend be like?
I ponder you. I wonder. My curiosity distracts me in my work, sometimes
becoming the purpose of my play, inspiration for poetry.
I write about you in my journal, I conjure you up in my dreams.

Know this sweet woman. I have loved, I love, I will love again.
I will love you as well as I have learned to love myself,
sometimes with abundance and generosity of spirit, often imperfectly.
I can't promise I won't hurt you, I will. It is the nature of life and love,
yet I will give you my best and hope you can accept the rest.
My passion and desire will wax and wane, yet my love will always be true
and yours. You will have my hand, my heart, my attention.
We will laugh at our similarities, and practice patience with our differences.
We will hold each other during the dark nights
and giggle under the covers as the sun peeks in the window in the morning.

Unknown Valentine, come out, come out, whoever you are, whatever you do,
wherever you live, whenever you're ready, however scared you may be,
I am waiting for you, my new love.

Valentine to My Ex

Old habits are hard to break,
like writing you poems on Valentine's Day.
Uninvited thoughts rock me
like a phone call at 3 a.m.
or a knock at the door
I don't want to answer.
Unexpectedly, memories rush in
interrupt my day,
disturb my night,
some pleasant, others still ache,
yet the sting is gone, the worst is over,
the letting go behind me,
the forgiving yet ahead.
You are often in my thoughts,
a character in my dreams,
a messenger, I try to decode
the cipher, learn the lesson.
Our relationship, what remains,
is like your old red flannel shirt.
Once, you wore it so comfortably,
it fit you well, you felt good in it,
it warmed during cold times,
you could count on the simple pleasure,
of being in it, rely on the softness of its touch
and the familiar smell when you drew it close,
but like that shirt, it's either folded away
in a box, in a basement or an attic,
or it's lost and remembered
on a day when you need it or miss it.

2/14/10

Scenes of **Everyday Life**

Synchronicity

Is it random or synchronicity?

We write about each other independently
describe character attributes with acuity:
kind-hearted, tender-loving, gentle spirit,
yet delineate no recognizable physical features
other than woman, caring eyes,
warm knowing smile.

I find you finding me strangely familiar,
like friends encountering each other
in an unexpected place, it just might be
right place, right time.

In a prelude to this moment
you walked the labyrinth meditating,
beginning with a question, ending with an answer,
finding direction and yourself, full circle.
I entered the wilderness of intimacy, lost my way
found my path back to me, now you.
We stand at the gateway,
parallel lives becoming tandem,
we pose unasked questions
with our eyes and body language,
mull imagined answers,
then say good night with an awkward hug
and words left unsaid.

Jetlag and Jetsam

Tired, lonely, missing you, though I just returned
home to you being happy without me.
Your depression lays heavy on me like a winter quilt.
Like that quilt, when removed, I feel the missing weight,
and for a moment want it back.
It is familiar and for that reason comforting.

I'm glad you are happy and lighter.
I want the sun to shine bright for you.
Yet my fatigue and weariness concerns me
and colors my day gray and bluesy
I wonder if my happiness depends upon your sadness,
if my helping is hurting, and my good loving is bad for you.

Quickly I dismiss this thinking as jetlag and jetsam
for I know I want to roll in the flowers and laugh with you.
I want you to grab my hand and pull me down
till the scent of grass and the wetness of your kiss intoxicates me.
I want your body to be my blanket and your loving my dreams.

This Night in the Guestroom

Each time we fight
I take inventory of my furniture
and prepare budgets in my head.
I decorate the walls of my newly imagined apartment
with the photographs of all my ex-girlfriends
leading up the staircase to my bedroom.

When I've climbed those stairs
and slipped between the fresh sheets of my brand new bed
(because I gave away my old one,
believing I'd be with you forever),
I miss you and decide not to leave.
Instead, I stay and fight, make up, strike bargains
and repeat this relationship cleansing cycle,
that is as predictable as the china white moon,
my silent companion as I sleep alone
this night in the guestroom.

The Foreign Language of Love

Standing in my black linen work clothes
I meet you in the hallway, the intersection of bathroom and bedrooms.
You too are dressed for Monday,
in navy blue suit and pink oxford shirt.
I ask you what's wrong. You answer me directly, I'm startled.
You have been talking in circles and sending up smoke screens all week;
now you are ready to talk as we pass in the hallway on our way to work.

As you answer me, I realize that I'm standing shoeless, without socks.
Somehow this makes me more vulnerable.
You say. "I'm not happy. I don't feel connected to you."
I react and begin to talk. You quickly interrupt and say,
"You asked me what I was feeling and I told you."

You're not aware that I feel vulnerable when barefoot,
but I do as if you hold all the power in your shoes.
You do hold all the power. I've asked you the question all week,
but I get the answer as we leave for work.
You're not aware that when you say,
"I'm not happy. I don't feel connected to you."
I hear, "It's over. I want you to leave."

I know it's crazy, simply projection, my fear externalized,
but love is like a foreign language.
I hear the words, I think I understand, but I'm afraid.
I'm missing the subtle shading and nuance of a phrase.
I wish I had an interpreter who would whisper in my ear and tell me,
"When she says this, she means that."
Yes, then I would know how to feel and act
beyond vulnerable, afraid and barefoot.

Moved

Overcome, under touched, overwhelmed
by the undertow of letting go
of you or we, what we could be
if still in love,
whatever.

Words seem trite, wounds are ripe
for infection.
Promises can't be trusted.
Question asked, "Can we be friends?"
Answer — only laughter.

I'm so angry, I make tears not fists.
So hurt I sigh not holler
for this dream to end
for your carmine lips
to stop moving.

Half Life

Midday sun permeates through an umbrella of clouds midweek.
Partly cloudy or partly sunny goes the perennial weather debate.
I'm half awake, wishing I could nap, rest, fully rest,
no toss and return to obsessive thoughts
of half truths and whole lies of inerasable images of you and her,
half turned as you sit driver and passenger en route
for lunch, or coffee, drinks past half light enraptured
with each anecdote of tired mid-life partners, overweight and sober
twice the size and half the fun they used to be.
I'm sure I'm at least half right
in my reading in between the lines of fidelity and cheating,
of friendship and love, of simple arithmetic.
When I add and subtract, it certainly feels like I'm getting
half the love and less the time than before her.
Yes, my glass is half empty, not full.

I'm living a half life with you.
You're half here and you're not.
Your thoughts are with her, mine are too half the time,
as I see you gaze past my shoulder,
half guessing at what you are thinking.
This triangle bisects our love; you're half mine, half hers.
I consider leaving you and choosing a half life,
a relationship with me without you.
Is a single person half of a relationship
or a whole life, singly whole?
Yes, will there be more of me to keep
if I don't give half of me to you?
I think so; I have half a life to live
and will live it as a whole life, well-lived.

Wistful

A nesting pair of house finches
perch on the balcony railing,
lift their heads skyward,
sing their song, claim territory.
I wonder if they know I'm here,
a few blocks from their nest under the awning
where I lived so many seasons,
watched generations of finch pairs
survey the sheltered corner, build a nest,
lay a clutch of eggs, protect and incubate,
feed a brood of hungry blind mouths,
teach to sing then fly.

The parents withhold food to coax the fledglings
out the nest, first to the perch, next the garage roof
and finally to the cables that connect the house to the grid
and the trees to the earth.

I'm convinced they've followed me here,
know my watchful eye, recognize the smile
that answers their song as they greet me.
I too feel connected to the earth,
grounded by nature yet wistful,
as the breeze that lifts them aloft
returns them to their brood,
the nest under the awning a few blocks from here,
my home, seasons ago.

Mixed Metaphors, Oh My! III

Canaries in the coal mine
died off years ago;
safety yellow, feathered friends,
early warning signs,
sacrificed their fragile lives saving ours.
Who will sing their songs?
Now bee colonies collapse
from immune-deficiency disorder and from pesticides
designed to kill the mites that kill the bees
now destroy the colonies.
Who will pollinate the crops and flowers?
The southern right whales beach themselves
on Argentina's Patagonia coast,
80% of the dead are calves,
the future of the species.
Who will birth their babies?
Oil erupts into the Gulf,
an accident caused by greed and exploitation,
spewing, puking, spitting upon, floating, coating,
killing our ancestors,
born from the oceans, shores, and sky,
the birds, fish, crustaceans, and reptiles.
Who will wash their shells, their fins and feathers,
clean their eyes so they may see, clear their mouths so they may breathe?
Mother Nature is in trouble
she cries out for our attention
in tears of acid rain;
the balance of life endangered
as she lays martyrs at the threshold
of our homes, our planet.

Lessons Learned Today

Hard lessons (good lessons)
learned today.

The trouble is learning
requires fear and change
stretching and relaxing
stretching again further
resting,
more fear and doubt
stretching and faith
stretching again
prayer.

The trouble is learning
requires discipline and grief
stretching and moving again
moving.

We grieve (I grieve)
the path that lies behind
stretching further
behind.

I have grown,
I have learned,
I have changed,
I have grieved.

It is not over
learning is dynamic
it ebbs and flows

I will grow,
I will learn,
I will change,
I will grieve.

And, it is to come
in all of my today's
hard lessons (good lessons)
learned today.

Missing You

I've been hearing all the sounds
that were hiding
the whooshing of the water softener
floor creaking as the wood breathes
tenor humming of the fish tank pump
the rotating blades of a fan slicing air
electricity dancing between utility poles
hissing streetlamps
the bass vibration of car stereos passing the house
as tires thump jumping potholes
television voices chattering around my bed
like late night hospital visitors speaking in low tones and hushed whispers.
I hear everything but you at my side and our dog at our feet.
I'm missing you and the comfort of your presence
the familiarity of your body a touch away
the restlessness of our puppy seeking the bend of a knee
or the crook of an elbow to sleep sheltered and safe in our love.
I'm missing you
missing
you.

November Night

Driving in the car this November night,
windows open to capture the Indian Summer air,
spiked with hints of hickory and maple burning in fireplaces,
smoky tones of leaves smoldering in backyards,
pricking my nose like a cloud of pepper,
as the wind drafts with a finish of pine and evergreen,
I feel light-headed, tipsy, that moment of sweet surrender
when candlelight flickers and I am warm, relaxed inside
while my skin feels awakened by the brisk breeze of autumn.

The sky is indigo black, the moon porcelain white,
stars seem close and far, reachable yet elusive destinations.
These days and nights between Halloween and Thanksgiving
evoke memories of grief and transition. Summer holds on
in one last futile effort before opening its clenched palms
and releasing its grip, breathing in deeply
then signaling a truce in its slow whispering sigh and exhalation.
This November night may be the last before the wind chills
and embers transform into ice crystals and pillowy flakes of snow.

Northwood's Retreat

For Elth

Greeting my Northwood's retreat
I say hello to the lake as it laps at my ear.
In whispers it tells me of the season's changing song
as it bids farewell to the neighbors travelling south.

I watch the sun's reflection shiver in the rippled tide
that reaches the shore where dogs play with shadows
who beg me to throw a fetching stick
tails wagging like metronomes.

Autumn invites me with its splendor of color
to reflect on what is passed and what approaches.
A year is measured in seasons and so is a life.
I am living my fall time and in this moment serene.

As the sky changes from dusk to dark
the smoky amber ember of light on the horizon
winks at me
before its fire burns to ash.

Author's Biography

Linda Lenzke lives in Madison, Wisconsin and has been writing poetry, prose, comedy and spoken word monologues for the past 30 years. She co-edits a poetry and prose feature for *Our Lives* magazine and is a founding member of LGBTQ Narratives Activist-Writers. Linda is a writer and producer of *Conceal & Carry: Queers Exposed* monologue play and has also authored, *Jenifer Street*, a short play in three scenes. In addition to *Scenes of Everyday Life*, she has self-published poetry chapbooks, *The Valentine Poems* and *Crushed(ed)*. Linda is currently working on a memoir entitled, *Perfectly Flawed* and launching a new blog, *Mixed Metaphors, Oh My!* Earlier in her writing career, Linda wrote and performed stand-up comedy and was a member of improvisational comedy troupes. Her poetry and prose has been published in print and online in the *Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets 2011 Calendar*, *Our Lives*, *Queers Read This Too*, *Echoes, [un]*, *True Stories Well Told*, *Forward Thinking*, *Tales of the Pack*, and *A Voice of One's Own: Twenty-Five Years of Readings at A Room of One's Own Feminist Bookstore*.