

*Safira*  
*before the beginning*

Infinity stands in 8 familiar positions  
facing the sun and one prayer:  
please find all my oranges.

I last saw them asleep on a sailboat  
peeling their skins in the sun.  
When I turned to leave they said,  
*Watch for monsters. You're safe*  
*in our laps, in the sun.* But I couldn't stay.

I followed the milkweed to shore  
to the Islands. I didn't want winter  
to find me. *The milkweed,*  
they whispered, *are dead spider souls*  
*making their way to the sun.*

A procession. Lila. Monks

in midday  
    arcadic nodal  
postures. Transgressions  
    Placemats  
Sins: just missing  
the marks. How did we get (anything &)  
to this point We rode here.

Past that field past the field  
of right and wrong doing to this  
field. The one with the de-  
robbed monks. The field  
with Lila and Jennifer

a blonde and curly summer winding down  
*It's almost there* she said and softly stayed  
a word that spilled and sounded as it should  
We pushed a wooden wheel through fields of hay  
and halos silos balancing  
a mood and unused toboggan in my arms  
*I like your shoes* she said.

But the day did not stop. The sun had  
just paused reminding us to re-assess our accumulation  
of life particularly in the form of  
footwear, hoses (coiled on the porch  
serpentine, re-generative Norse  
slithering, demon) undergarments. Locks  
of hair, un-hemmed threads wrapped around our fingers  
(so we didn't forget) "The hose is expanding!" Jenny cried  
"There are tufts of milkweed in my eyes! I can't find my life line!  
Did I already die?" No water. We lay in the field and tried to imagine  
dead. "There couldn't be darkness," Lila said. "There would be no  
space for it to exist in. Imagine  
*nothing.*"

Mine is a plastic spool  
without the thread.  
Someone unwound the thread  
and used it to make a trail while  
wandering to the ends of the universe.  
But since the universe has no ends,  
the thread ran out and whoever it was  
who'd been looking for the edges  
became horribly lost.

A lighthouse  
in the desert.

Mom naked  
in a bucket.

A tiny spider  
tossed in the ocean.

The artifact that isn't there:  
Mom sold her rocking chair and left for the Cayman  
Islands two days before Easter Sunday.

Tumbling! in the Easter grass  
                                tumbling!  
                    Tupperware

She melted our crayons in the sun. A chocolate bunny. "Ice the lamb cake," she said.

Grab the devil by the horns and ride  
            The elusive flutter  
of Gabriel's wings  
            (graspable, too) and imagine!  
what makes the more accomplished  
life: to have never ridden never fell, or to re-  
rise triumphantly from below (thighs squeezing  
            the juice) on the devil's back,  
bloody red horns grasped. A conquistador!  
Michael's dirty feathers stuck between  
your teeth. (He's in a heap!) To wrest with one  
is to wrest with the whole familiar  
congregation. You know the posse rides  
like that, together like that. Protecting and sinking  
each other.

Who else did Daddy kill  
on the hills in Fu Bai How many  
women did he rape along the path  
to My Lai Sick with Malaria.  
Malaria. Malaria. Aiming his gun  
at the sun. "I really stepped on my dick  
this time Sarge," G said. Daddy carried him back

They left his legs behind. "I fear we'll never find my oranges now," G gargled the rain.

"I'm sorry," I told Jenny when I left that day.  
"I have to find the man who stole my thread. *You* have to stay with Daddy."  
"I don't think it was a man," Jenny said. "I think Mom took it with her."  
She runs to Grandma and asks to trace the scar.  
Grandma lifts her blouse, allows Jen to poke the place where her breast once rested above the navel.  
"Don't forget the songs your Mother played on the high keys of the piano."

The moon fell behind the mountains  
and G hugged a stick of butter. "It feels like being hugged by Jesus," he said.  
"If I make it back to Jackson County, I'm becoming a crossing guard. Melt the butter around me before I die, Sarge."

Lila finds her father in the park teeing off inside a sandbox.  
She drags him back. "This is home," she says.  
He follows her to the kitchen and waits as she stains the bread yellow with mustard. "You're old," she says. "Disguised by the sun."  
Daddy falls, embraces her legs, embraces her knees.

"She ruined my crayons!" Jenny cries.  
Daddy spits out wet bread.  
"I hope that cunt dies of cancer," he says.  
But Mom doesn't die. She continues to melt the primary colors. The chocolate bunnies. The paper airplanes. Miniature brass instruments. Felt clippings. We didn't know felt melted.

Keep it moving, the crossing guard says.  
He motions with the windmill  
in his hand (a whistle in his mouth so we do not pause to wave at the passengers in the cars.) Keep it moving.

Daddy pulls a toolbox from the garage and heaves it towards the Jeep in the driveway crushing ants into unrecognizable ink. At the tire's edge he selects a wrench, changes his mind, removes a hammer lifts his arms (the maker of a first great tool!)

He tries his courage  
against the rubber beast.

Lila pulls Jenny in a wagon through the field until they come to a plum tree at the edge of the highway.  
Dad has promised a dime for every orange truck they count while Mom is away. They keep a tally on a piece of cardboard, stuck to the wagon with gum.

8, says Jen, but she writes it on its side.  
Infinity, says Lila. That's at least a million dollars.  
This could go on forever if Mom never comes back.

*What happens if we're right about Mom's permanent flight, and she never comes home again? Then we're left with two possibilities: 1) We don't wait, and we get on with our lives—losing nothing more than the original loss (0). Or, 2) We wait, and we're left waiting under this tree forever, and we rot away into the dirt, waiting, and we become plum tree fertilizer, waiting, then plums, waiting, then maggots and who knows what else. It keeps going. Outcome: negative infinity.*

½ a chance of us not waiting and mom never comes back	$\frac{1}{2} \times 0 = 0$
½ a chance of us waiting forever and mom never comes back	$\frac{1}{2} \times -\infty = -\infty$

A negative infinity? Jenny tilts her head.  
I don't like it either, Lila says.

Don't leave my lap.  
    We watch the sky  
peeling the skins off our oranges  
    We set sail on paper boats.

Are we going to the ocean? Jenny asks.  
Yes, Lila says. Everything goes to the ocean.  
We're going to probably maybe pass Mom on the way?  
Don't talk about Mom anymore, okay?  
Jenny considers this. Sometimes I can't help it. My head says I hate God.  
Don't worry, Lila tells her. God doesn't get offended. I can't sail anymore. I have to do my homework now.  
Why do you have to do *that*?  
To stay in 99<sup>th</sup> percentile.  
What's that?  
I don't know, but I know that Dad likes it when I'm there.  
Jenny pulls a finger puppet over her index finger. Why aren't you in the 100<sup>th</sup> percentile? she asks.  
It's impossible, Lila tells her, for anyone to be there.  
Jenny scrunches her face and tilts her head *But it's better*, the finger puppet says.

The monks tell us this:  
It's hard to play with a zero denominator.  
Mathematicians don't like to do it. "The answer comes so close to zero... and never reaches it!"

one is infinitely receptive  
    to nothing

||| an absence

a hollow bamboo

(a hollow bunny breaks  
at its limits too. )

The crossing guard  
shuffles. Polypropylene limbs.  
    (He thought he was born  
    in Bethlehem. He was  
    born in Biloxi.) We scattered his ashes  
in Tulsa. A regenerative compromise.  
The segments *might* have grown back into  
windmills and stop signs if he'd only let us chop  
    him up, but  
    ashes-- no chance.  
He must have been at peace with death, yet still  
so unsure of his timely appearance and  
    (earthly placement)

Signification.  
"Oh come on," he'd said  
challenging the gun. "I already exist  
in all possible worlds. Shoot me you fucking  
gook." But the gook didn't shoot.

G tripped on a line  
  
and Daddy ciphered the pulp  
out of all natural causes.

We know even nectar  
    stagnant  
becomes poison  
    so we run through the plain  
    hugging ourselves  
in approximate ellipticals  
squishing the soggy grass over the same  
places over again until  
we drill a hole  
    through the center  
to the other side where we find

∅ a null set.  
    A field that  
was never there. The whole set: these phantom stop signs  
tufts of hair, chambered  
nautical shells, Salerno butter  
cookies, the center of the tire where

the oranges have become orange  
marmalade now  
orange Julius how terrible this  
collection of numbers, this cold-hearted cluster  
of real integers  
    all in a set that doesn't exist.

(our fingers bulge deep pink  
except where we poke them jaundice  
above the threads)

Jennifer,  
your hair is so soft  
The high keys  
are so countable.