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Ghost City

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FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

GHOST CITY

By

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ABSTRACT

Ghost City is a collection of poetry about Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. It travels through the history, landscape, and family of the writer's hometown. The poems take up themes of love, loss, food, hope, and family. The author seeks to emulate many characteristics of other poems such as the rich images and details of Elizabeth Bishop and the storytelling genius of Philip Levine as well as to present a tale emphasizing the importance of place and time. Some are found poems recovered from the letters and writing of the author's family.

I have never been more in love

with smoke and dirt...

- Anthony Trollope on visiting Pittsburgh

Invitation to the Pittsburgh Reader Only

Would you read my poems
if I told you they were about hockey

or the legend that saved hockey
for us three times? Would you read my poems

if you could almost taste
the coleslaw on a Primanti Brothers sandwich

or remember your first ride to Mt. Washington, sandwiched
between your parents, after eating chipped ham, the taste

only from Isaly's? Would you look for your face
in the poem on 5th Avenue at Christmastime

heading toward the windows at Kaufmann's where the faces
of children follow the holiday story, not giving time

a second thought? And would you hope for a poem
about "one for the *other* thumb" and maybe recall your first

Great Race on a cold September morning, your first
5k in under 25 minutes? And then I think, you

could tell me a few things about our city:
your first time riding the Whip at Kennywood, or how you

find a place to park when the Wharf floods, about your
great grandmother's Italian neighborhood, and how the city

rallied around "Pops" for MVP in '79. You could show me
Turner's Dairy and where 5th Ave. becomes one way.

You might tell me why the tunnels slow us down each way,
into the city and out. And like me,

you'll have Warhol and the Children's Museum, the Heinz plant
and the Monongahela. We all have our sad city stories,

like how when E.L. Wiegand closed down
and my father, my uncle, and my grandfather lost

their jobs. It's so easy to get lost
wandering over the bridges or up the steps and down.

I.

City

In the morning the city
Spreads its wings
Making a song
In stone that sings.

In the evening the city
Goes to bed
Hanging lights
About its head.

- Langston Hughes

Ghost City

Someone in my family died in a Chinese restaurant,
“drunk” and from “falling down the stairs.”
That’s what the death certificate reads.
We also find in the same old box a copy of King James
pressing a piece of silk from Roosevelt’s coffin.
There are funeral cards, a woman’s lace,
and lifeless four leaf clovers. I wonder why
in this city a man would have chosen Chinese
amongst the deli sandwiches from Donahoe’s
and the cherry pastries from Jenny Lee’s.
But *anything can happen*, says “Dr. General” Jackson,
the self-proclaimed haunt and old city barber
who each year rides in the parades on a white charger.
I was in Mexico, he claims. *I fought in the Civil War!*
There are others in my family who I never met.
They must rest uneasy, like Uncle Chuck
who ran over Aunt Lucy and broke her leg.
I’ve even heard that there are those who die
in this city right there in the bar when there is another
touchdown. And sometimes when there isn’t.
Let’s meet under the Kaufmann’s clock one last time
if you go before I do. We’ll share a last meal
at the Tic Toc Shop, walk the old streets, and take peanut brittle
for the ride. I’ll tell you the story of how working downtown
as a cocktail waitress on the Gateway Clipper fleet,
we called the city’s riverboats the “Gateway to Hell,”
and when the wind was strong we couldn’t dock
at Three Rivers Stadium. The drunks leaned overboard,
and I waited for the splash. But what right have I
to judge misdeeds? My own family gave away Uncle Dink
to the neighbors because of too many mouths to feed.

The Shape of a City

Two funiculars
remain inclined
on Mt. Washington.
On the ride up,
“The Golden Triangle”
becomes a tiny
platter of glass and steel.
And riding down
is like a heavy coal
centering in my gut.
I know the gumwood
and locust rollers
are long gone,
and that cast-iron sheaves
pull us up and down—
arms and eyes—
legs and ears.
What is friction?
Or counterbalance?
What if this bluff
one day will crumble?
Kirk Lewis be damned.
The incline you designed
hoists my head in and out
of latitudinal grooves.
Alarm: 1 Bell. Ready:
2 Bells. Start: 3 Bells.
No foul language.
No credits for freight.
Do not open the
rectangular panic button
(aka the window).
The Tin Angel watches
down from the heights.
And at another restaurant
nearby, over dinner,
Dad proposed marriage,
and ever since I’ve been
crashing down the cables,
further from this city.

Wishing You Were Here

Go ahead and laugh, but I can take one look at ketchup on your plate and tell you whether or not it's Heinz. When my mother gave birth to me her focal point was outside the window, a giant Isaly's vitrolite sign, and the Eat 'n Park commercials are my favorite thing about Christmas. I'm more a part of Pittsburgh than I ever thought. I was too young to really know it, but the PETA protestors were naked behind the signs they carried down 5th Avenue, and I was lucky that I'd left the fur coat grandma bought me at home.

I missed a few other things too: In the cultural district sits Wiener World right next door to a porn shop, and there was Kennedy in his maroon auto passing Gus and YaYa's Icey Balls and double-coated butter popcorn on the North Side, which is one word or two, whichever you'd like. I might have enjoyed the field trips to a baseball game had I known that in the parking lot I could stand where Louis Bierbaur guarded second base after being pirated from the Philadelphia Athletics.

Didn't everyone hate Three Rivers? How damn mod were those weekend warriors who didn't realize what they saw on stage in Brian Jones, soon-to-be member of the 27 club? Even though Westview burned, there's still Kennywood where every day two tons of corndogs are swirled around stomachs on the Jackrabbit, and the grease from the potato patch fries makes it hard to hold onto the Thunderbolt's safety bar across your lap. If someone tells you the park's open, check your zipper. After dark the coasters are faster, the Wurlitzer louder.

But please don't tell. I was the first generation without a Pittsburgh zip code. Dear Saltsburg, an hour east of all I wish I'd seen and done, I hated you every day.

The Banana Explosion of 1936

No one believed it at first,
that bananas could bend the domes
of St. Stanislaus, God's work.
Yet for a block in every direction, the glass
from the windows crashed into the streets,
and there was nothing left to do but drink.
"The drinkingest town in the west"
had a pub on every street. Long days
spent at Agnew and Brown's pigeon ball
factory earned small pay for hard work.
At James Jelly's cotton factory
they'd file out at the end of the day
truly believing that a drink from
a Bakewell's glass was the way
to cut grime from the throat. Prohibition
barely dampened these streets
where booze barons worked
as celebrities and whiskey came at
sixteen dollars a quart. The first club,
The Devil's Cave, sold bourbon in a heavy
glass which they raised to FDR,
and there was celebration in the streets.
This was a Democrat, in fact the first,
a city like ours could support.
Work in the mills went on as long as
there was beer to drink. Lights, coal fires,
and pitch pots burned as strong at noon
as in the night. But for every drink
a knee was also bent under the stained glass
of St. Stanislaus. There was a moment
to drink consecrated wine and walk quietly in the street.
A day when perhaps there was no work.
These sacred laws were brought to the city first.
But the gas explosion in the ripening room
had twisted the towers beyond what work
could repair. And so, with glass and steel they
rebuilt the street with pious hearts and drink.

What We Were Eating

When you and I leave Florida to visit
my family for Christmas, it's all about Iron City Beer
and Primanti Brothers—grilled meat, chilled coleslaw,
hot fried egg, tomato, french fries, and lettuce
all between slices of thick chewy Italian bread.
The same cook flipped the pastrami last year,
and you tell me there isn't enough salt.

Imagine my Nanna
running the numbers and peddling penny stocks
to the neighbor women when things were slow
and someone mentioning something great
and depressing all at once. She'd leave Forbes Field
with her second husband (or was it the third?)
when the Pirates beat the Dodgers
and everyone feasted on warm baked beans,
Klondikes, and skyscraper cones, a nickel each.
But George Krohe was still scooping frozen gallons,
and it would be years before he was the president
of chipped chopped ham. You've never heard
of chipped ham, like I don't know about jimmies
or pork rolls. But I promise if I'd have known,
I'd never have eaten any of it. It's all tofu and granola
for me

now that I know there's pork lard
in the Gobble's chips and that for 59 cents a pound
my ancestors bought hog legs shaped like footballs,
passed through a slow system of mechanized
preparation:

*Collect the fat and muscle trimmings.
Place in a special machine and tumble to separate
the protein. When the meat is reshaped
it will act as a binding agent. Add seasonings.
The result should be a flesh-colored pudding.
Place in a paper-lined metal can which will mold
the meat into a loaf. Cook for 5 ½ hours.
The result is 17 percent fat.*

That's just how things turn out.
My grandmother learned from Isaly's
that cooking an egg in the center of a meatloaf
results in a gourmet dish. I think it resulted
in something that looked more like dog food.
And you should have been there the day
she tried a pickle instead,
and juice soaked into the cheddar

and meat, and it was all covered in thick baked Heinz.
But tonight it's all about Primanti's on the Strip
and a hockey game. We'll have nachos later
because the cameraman likes blondes,
hat tricks, and nachos. I think there's something
I've forgotten about this place.

Maybe someone.

Something about the last goalie to face a puck
here without a mask. Something about
the silverware the Primanti uncles didn't order
for the dockworkers in the middle of the night
when they opened the doors to their small restaurant
and how no one wanted to wait, so they piled
it all onto the bread in layers hot and cold.
Something about my grandma's pierogi recipe.
But you've got my knee under your warm palm,
there's a white frost outside, and Crosby's got the puck.

What a Choice Means

She must have had suitors spread out
over the entire city—My great grandmother
would have turned Andrew Carnegie's
billion dollar head. A young widow with
snowy hair, she'd have lit Hazelwood afire
like St. Philomena's with its cast iron spire
and the tower, 225 feet, flames and sparks
from the steel mills enlightening a thin
silhouette from behind. Everything was better
in Pittsburgh, even the fog.

How much Christmas dinner must have cost
for the wooing steelworker who sought your hand
and took you for a night on the town:
He selected Boiled Kennebec Salmon à la Trianon
but first the Olives, Lettuce, and Young Onions
with Salted Almonds and reminded you to savor
the Sweetbreads Glacé à la Financière,
while you drank Imperial Punch before
the English Plum Pudding, Mint Wafers,
Mixed Nuts, Raisins, and Figs, Roquefort,
Swiss, and Neufchatel then Tea, Coffee, or Buttermilk.

How many games, hands clasped close
with a young entrepreneur who played the stocks,
you must have watched while "The Flying Dutchman"
stole base after base, made hit after hit.

And Schenley Park in the spring!

On St. Patrick's Day the artist who could have
drawn your portrait in chalk, might have taken you
up Coal Hill to watch the Golden Triangle,
its buildings sinking into the rivers, the streetcars
barely breathing above the rising floodwaters.

And yet this is who you chose, loyal to the city,
this man born of Pennsylvania Dutch,
this man who you cooked and cleaned for,
this man who didn't trust the banks
and kept his money in Braun's bread bags all over town.
You refused this man with enough money
to own your entire street, who our family

remembers as “Pap,” and who proposed to you
time and again. But another marriage
was just not something you wanted.
You did want games of Whist, nights on the couch
watching Bruno Sanmartino wrestling the world
on the behalf of your neighborhood, lunches
at 8 p.m. after Pap finished his work,
three course hot meals of pork and sauerkraut,
potatoes, and coconut cream pies.
This man who found his way into your heart.

The Molly Maguires

*There's one thing I'll tell you and don't you forget
That your back with the droppers is all wringing wet,
Your clothes they are soaking, your shoes are wet through,
Oh! Never be a miner whatever you do. (Miner's Song)*

The Molly Maguires didn't really exist,
but they killed my great aunt's husband.
At least that's the family folklore.
Accidents will happen, says the mine owner,
in all great works. No miner can be certain
when he leaves home for the pit mouth
that he will return alive. The real Molly
stayed in Ireland, and some say she organized
against the Englishmen, while others claim the men
of the group dressed as women
when they were attacking the landowners.
But no such group lived in America.
The big bosses just branded the labor leaders:
assassins, incendiaries, thieves and gamblers.
Wasn't life itself a gamble working in mines
in the 19th century? The young boys
worked from dawn until dusk, sucking
cold air through an open window, picking and picking
their lives away. Their little spines curved
under old shawls, and they wore handmade mittens.
A little miner's graveyard beside the tiny church
bears names of many under ten.
They knew what matters: the difference between
the slate and the coal. If they survived
without being blasted to death or mutilated,
they might have watched the leaders hanged
at Pottsville and Mauch Chunk in June
or seen fifteen hundred miners lay down their tools
in July. And through it all the watchman called
each and every hour to keep the men awake.

Dear Grandma

I guess you endured.
Waited calm like Chief Shannopin
for the white men to come.
Waited for your movie star
husband's postcards. He wrote to you:
*This is a good picture of the plane
I tried to fly. Remember, dear, I told you
about how I pre-flighted that P-40
down in the woods. I got this for the scrapbook
so we could recall that. Boy was it a close one.*
You persisted like General Braddock
at Fort Duquesne who understood:
*We shall know better how to deal with them
another time.* Did you learn to sew,
cook, clean, and play the piano
that you left to a neighbor when you died?
Your husband showed you an exciting world:
*These men look just like we looked
yesterday. They are firing from a kneeling position.
The targets are right along the seashore
and we fire out toward the sea.
You should see the splash when the bullets hit the water.
The fellows standing just behind
the men firing are on the "ready line"
and will fire next. As high as 4000 men have fired
on our range in one day.*
You waited like John Boyd hanging on the hill
to punish an unfaithful wife.
Like Henry Heinz on his tiny horseradish plant
for the big day to come.
Like the Hunkies on the boat.
Like the Homestead Grays waiting to bat.
So young the bride, how poor you must have been
at waiting for anything.

Baseball in the City

No Pittsburgh Pirate
ever hit a ball
out of Yankee Stadium,
but our Josh Gibson did.
That home run king
hit a ball so hard
in '32 it left Pittsburgh
and landed in that
outfielder's glove
the next day
in Philly. "You're out,"
yelled the ump.
"You're out,
yesterday, in Pittsburgh,"
I heard him shout.

And whether I played
for the Homestead Grays
or Greenlee's Crawford
Colored Giants, it was sweet
under the portable lights
on Forbes Field
in the spring.
Nine pennants. What team
will ever top it? Nine!

Every rich kid had a jersey,
and every poor woman
on the Hill wore a smart hat
for our weekend games.
They came to watch
Vicious Vic throw those
fists and Chet Brewer
toe the rubber.

When it was all over,
sure, I was happy to see
Jackie take the mound,
but I'd play it all away to
see Cool Papa Bell
again, see him running,
running like he stole something.

War Scenes

for Edward Jackson

I.

I'm glad there are no bluebirds at the cliffs of Dover.
The mere idea of music as you were lured into the chalk
and flint of the coccoliths is almost too much to bear.

The bomber skimmed the earth's vertical crust
at the last second, and you knew that London was close
and safe for the moment. France waited behind.

As a nose gunner you spent hours in the turret
and once watched a cardboard box of Christmas tinsel
shred from a Heinkel 45 toward your wings.

Glitter caught the sun, leaving rainbows around the clouds.
The metal threw your radar into a tailspin
while the cardboard crashed straight through the turret.

I can't match now the black and white pictures of you,
with a movie star chin, riding the Allegheny in the *Rambler*
with the stinging frostbite from the hours you were trapped.

II.

In London I was lost in Kensington within an hour.
You spent days shrugged down in your leather bomber
looking for relatives. Was London ever small?

III.

After you returned to J&L to direct the barges
down the rivers, a B-25 ditched into the Monongahela.
Were you outside when the six men flew into the river?

Did you see only four men come back up from the icy
waters? I've heard people say that in the bottom of the lochs
there are giant catfish as large as a man.

Some say the plane carried an atomic bomb, while others
say it was nuclear weapons, Mafia money, Howard Hughes.
Soldiers closed off the banks and stole it away.

Do you know that to this day it has never been found?
I think you must have walked to the river that day
and squinted through the sun toward Bird's Landing.

IV.

You might have imagined again the white cliffs,
the calm sea, the full tide, England glimmering and vast.
Listen! I too have heard music from these waters.

What the Women in My Family Have Said

Dear Friend, I have not heard from you in so long
I wondered if you were sick. I presume you are doing
the “Good Samaritan” for the children as usual.
If it would be convenient for you to have me come,
I would be very glad to see you. I am of course busy,
but I expect to always be so—I might as well take the time—
there is no prospect of a dull season as I can see.
I do wish everyone was busy—the World would be running
smooth. I am sorry to see so many unemployed—hope
the President will arrange for all to be employed again.
I am only sending a line to ask if you are well. Please
let me know before Saturday if I should come as I leave
here for Pittsburg that day. Yours with best wishes,
Pauline Albright, Greensburg, Oct. 11th 1921.

Dear Edward, the evening of your
birthday I stopped to remember.
The church misses you most of all.
The boarding house on Tullymet Street,
near the Hill, reminds me of Sunday school.
How shy you were at our first picnic.
When father built our house in Hazelwood
and Edward, William, and Grace came along,
how did I know that these mills and mines
could ever take you away. Hay fever!
In these thirty years, I have missed
mountains of your red hot coal.
Sarah Ethel Hill, Allegheny, 1942.

Dear Karen, You should know about
my great grandmother, Jean Douglas,
who married Grandfather Love.
Her funeral procession drove in carriages
and wagons to the cemetery way up on Detmold Mtn.
Here, we picked wild pansies and dug a bit
of sassafras. Patton Mine nearby
was small. The families were large
in those days. We emigrated from Scotland
and found Lonaconing—
Uncle Douglas Love was shot to death in his home.

They say the Molly Maguires did it,
but I have never seen proof.
From Lonaconing we would ride the old C&P RR
near Mount Savage where the hills were so high
the train climbed up so far, then backed up so far,
then climbed again, as it chewed up the mountain.
You never went to Cumberland and back in one day,
because what you found there was
Grandma Harper's porch, which was too high
and oh so close to heaven—
There was no future in Lonaconing for a girl.
Marion J. Muirhead, age 92, 1986.

What the Men in My Family Have Said

Dear Mother, I earned my Quarterly Conference license for the United Brethren today, May 22. I wish father could see the church, strong pews, strong souls. The men all shook my hand, and the women made pies with peaches they carried from Coal Bank Hollow Road. They were too sweet, but with strong coffee I suppose I will manage. Next month we leave on the circuit. I have chosen a strong bay mare to carry my saddlebags. My passport through the Southern lines should arrive any day. Be strong—war is inevitable after all. Give my best to the folks, Rev. William A. Jackson, Ohio, 1862.

For my sons, True, our clan now has no chief, but once, once, we ruled Scotland. Carnegie is a poor Scotch immigrant like us. What can you not find in Pittsburgh? There is Orkney cheese at the deli and Arbroath smokies at Macbain's. But beware the "water of life." Black Douglas drank too deep of life and too often. It was the English who called him "Black." For us, he can always be the Good Sir James—*Douglas! Douglas!* he cried that Palm Sunday when he captured the English prisoners, beheaded them, and left them to burn. God forgive weakness in men. When I am long gone, you boys will battle on. Young crusaders, build our family's castles strong. R. Stewart, Pittsburgh, 1910.

I'm going hon. It looks like I will be even farther now. But it also looks good. Love, Ted, 1941.

Dear Peg, Here is some Mexican jewelry. I was always sorry I did not get some when I was there, but at last here is a pin I thought you would like. I got it in a shop in Hollywood, hon. It is from Mexico, though. All my love dear, Ted, 1944.

Good news. Last week there was a near miss.
I hope you have been receiving my telegrams.
We were sent over the Rhine on an important
mission. It was a crack outfit, great for its accuracy.
That day the fog was thick, and we were forced
to admit we had missed the target. I wondered
how long we could feel so badly. But today!
The Yanks have crossed the Remagen Bridge.
It was that same bridge we missed. My love, Ted, 1945.

Dear Folks, I have heard that Sgt. Edward W. Jackson
from our very own Jones & Laughlin Steel, now serving
the Air Forces in England, has been awarded the Air Medal
and four Oak Leaf Clusters. It is also rumored that he has
received the Distinguished Flying Cross and that he has
completed the required 35 missions, and may possibly
be home soon. Nice going Ed, how about dropping in
at the meeting when you get home— Anonymous, 1945.

Forgotten Poems

*for Sgt. Edward Jackson, 539 Bomb Squadron,
382 Bomb Group, Muroc A.A.F*

Hello folks: I went through
classification this morning, and I'm in.
They say stenographer and seem to be saving
me for something. Most of the gang
is gone or going this morning.
I think we'll move to the day house
to make room for foreign service men
who've made it back.

This morning there was singing:

*What will we do with the Führer, when we get over there.
What will we do with the Führer, right in the public square.
We'll hang him under the linden by the lock of his hair.
That's what we'll do with the Führer, when we get over there.*

There's always something to read,
and I found an interview this morning:

*No, sir, nobody ain't mad at nobody
out here. Our boys don't hate the Germans.
The fact is, they don't think much about them—
except how to kill them and how
to keep from getting killed.*

We're here. Hut No. 86—
Drift Inn, the boys have named it.
From here, we go "over the top"
to kill Germans,
and return to the clammy smell
of mud on our pillows.

The songs are mostly the same:

*What will we do with Herr Goering, when we get over there.
We'll take the medals he's wearing, and pin them you know where.
We'll hang him up with the Feuhrer...all in favor say "Yeah."
That what we'll do with Herr Goering, when we get over there.*

*The Clinton Hotel, Miami Beach, Florida:
New, Ultra Modern, centered in the heart
of all activities. Elevator service.
Roof solarium overlooking the ocean.
Free Parking Facilities. Open All Year.
This is where I'm staying,
and my room is right across the hall from
the room marked X in the photo.
We have a wonderful view
of 14 roofs and some sky.*

Most of the boys write.
This letter won't make it home:

*The cat that sleeps on the stove
has no printable name,
but a canny little scat,
she is friendlier than the rats
who used to eat the boys'
candy bars out of the gloves
and cigar boxes where they hid them.*

*When the lights go out, Drift Inn
is very quiet. The cold creeps in stealthily
through all the chinks and cracks
like a sea of ants. It nibbles down
through your skin to the bone.
Soon you are cold down past your guts,
frost forming on your tonsils, ice cubes
like slow twirls through your blood stream
clinging as they round the bends.*

I found these in a local paper:

*Will swap several pairs
of nylon hose for one baby buggy.*

Local butcher: *Unless it's bologna,
we ain't got it.*

We all know the words to this one:

*What will we do with Benito, when we get over there.
We'll slap him like a mosquito. He'll say his final pray'r.
We'll cut him up like spaghetti...all in favor say "Yeah."
That's what we'll do with Benito, when we get over there.*

This is the only picture I could find
of the band shell. That's where I sang, dear.
This looks a lot more like an artistic
picture than a photo, because it doesn't show
it exactly as it is. There are permanent
seats now. There isn't canopy stitching
in front of the stage. Maybe they decided
to fix it up a bit for the occasion.

This was rapid fire honey,
and I had the feel of the gun a little better.
The score on this target is seventy-two
out of 100, which would qualify.

This is the main drag, hon, looking over
toward Laredo. You can even see
the Hamilton hotel where I had to cash
the money order you wired. You can also see
the Mexican end of the outer-national bridge.
I'll send more pictures soon dear.

I'm running out of stuff to write
on these damn things.

Others can always say it better:

*The best and busiest men work in metal boxes,
mechanical brains, with prosaic counterparts
of comic strip robots that go around with
stovepipe joints on their legs and electric coils
sticking out like hair on their steel heads.
The ball turret underneath the big bomber
provides accuracy nowhere near 100 percent,
but it is far better than ever before
in our short-lived history of combat aviation.*

Everything and Nothing

And so, when I call my friend
to complain about all my
misfortunes, she offers
a simple solution: you must have
been a dreadful person in another life.
There's not much to be said
after such a matter of fact conviction,
but later, I'm thinking I should have told her:

It's just possible that I was Queen Aliquippa
sipping Chinese ginseng
and flirting with the young general,
George Washington.
The attention of such a powerful man
was too much for my conscience,
so today I'm doomed
to pay for my feathered eyebrows
with eons of men who turn into
flesh-eating forest beasts
at the sound of the word
"stay" (they're a little soft
around the middle, but have
horns and claws beneath the fur).

I was the scab, the strikebreaker,
the first shot at the riot.
When Dickens called my city
*an ugly confusion of backs
of buildings and crazy galleries and stairs,*
I spit in his eye and loved Pittsburgh
for all the dark places to hide.
Perhaps it was because of all this that
I can never be the skinny red-headed
Italian you wished for on Valentine's Day.

I was John Boyd's unfaithful
wife who expected my husband
to kill my lover and save my honor.
That could be why still today I can't forget
my first love who calls once a year to remind me
of our long-gone anniversary. I was never enough,
you will always love me,

and all that star-crossed lovers propaganda.

I was the one who lit the match.
I was the slumlord of the shantytown,
the snake in Benjamin Franklin's cartoon,
the English driving
Chief Pontiac into the ground,
the fog and smoke that made the city
look like night at noon.
I was the wealthy, eating off the glass plates
that someone chopped his fingers off to make.
I was cholera and pitch pots in the street.
Everything and nothing, I am the whiskey
that burns your throat.

Kurt Vonnegut Flunked Thermodynamics

at Carnegie Tech. Did he not study? Didn't he care?
Did he wonder if he'd ever find a new forte?
A few decades later some shrewd scholar
realizing that some majors are just too demanding,
ironically accepted a degree in bagpipes.
He took his diploma and ran, full of knowledge
of swan-necked bags and feather bonnets.

It wasn't the first paradox of the city.
Some time earlier and across town,
Henry Frick ordered an elaborate shower
built to his precise corporal specifications,
thousands of dollars of copper pipes,
and dozens of nozzles, each labeled
by body part to massage from his spine
to his liver to his toes. All this transpired
while outside his mansion more people
were dying from influenza than the war.

Today still people don't seem to realize
when they're missing the obvious.
Nine buffalo roam the trails of South Park,
where there is enough grass for a lifetime,
but enough homeless in the streets of Pittsburgh
that nine buffalo would only be a snack.

Can't you understand the movement of energy?
Some of us have got it, and some just don't.
With so many people in a city, there are bound
to be a few who don't get it right the first time,
or sometimes never. I'm with Kurt on this one.
Who cares about a final exam in transport

phenomena in a slaughterhouse? Or thermodynamic
potential when your daily life supplies enough horror
for the next chapter? Who cares of black holes
when all you really want is to wash away the irony
and a few sins? What's a humanist to do in such a city?

For the Female Falcon Atop the Gulf Building

Since last night I've watched online the live camera feed of your nest. It was ninety degrees here yesterday, and I followed seagull tracks on the beach, exotic delicacies for a peregrine.

The Pittsburgh pigeons you feast on must be chewy or thick like molten steel, but I guess you like hard work.

I miss your city and the weather guide, which sits on top of forty-four stories, with its lantern that blinks blue for rain or snow.

You have come and gone some fifty-two times, which is miraculously strange considering the speckled garnet egg that has appeared today, direct center in the gravel under a cold shadow. Still you haven't rested, traveling out the limestone branches of the skyscraper and back, out and back, out and back.

Where is your mate? You two who watch over this city. How long will you wait for him? It is your resolution, your love of Penn Plaza, and the way you enjoy a slanderous perch on the great statues, which we build to cover up the damages we've done to these hills and valleys, that keeps you always returning to these stones.

It's not easy to stay so still. Trust me on this. But how could you understand? The air pressure from your two-hundred mile per hour hunting dive would burst any ordinary bird's lungs. The baffles in your nostrils slow the wind velocity, and you are free to breathe. What then for me? What love could bring me back to a familiar place?

II.

Dreams

Hold fast to dreams
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly.

Hold fast to dreams
For when dreams go
Life is a barren field
Frozen with snow.

- Langston Hughes

Moving to Pittsburgh Alone

The woman at the salon
was your dream girl,
thin and oily like the angel hair
pasta, your one and only specialty.
As she leaned over the sink
and scraped shampoo hard
into my scalp, my eyes
slid back and forth
inches from her hip bones,
your favorite body part on a girl,
the closest thing to licking a corpse
that you could get.
Anyone would have noticed
the black lace inching just over
the designer denim, icing on the cake.
I think you could have overlooked
her tattoos, the way you nibbled
around mine. Looking up,
I wondered about silicone
as an artificial
flavor. As she sheared
off the dead ends I still
hate so much to lose, I watched
her back in the mirror, shoulder
bones like chicken wings,
and I thought of your record,
gaining 11 pounds in one evening,
carcass by carcass, a piece of celery
here and there for the sake of blue cheese.
My new fridge will be full of tofu
and skim milk, strawberries,
spinach, and organic wines.
When she dried my hair,
she pulled me toward her
firm and strong—nothing at all like you.

The City of Pittsburgh Writes to Venice, the Self-Proclaimed “Most Beautiful City in the World”

We’ve got more bridges you know. Four hundred and forty-six on a good day, but who’s counting? And we can taste Italian with the best; ask Jimmy and Nino Sunseri down at the Strip. The Stamoolis Brothers, Deluca’s, and Penn Mac have enough parmesan and sfogliatelle for everyone.

Sure, you can brag all you want about canals, but just try and show me a hundred-pound catfish sliced open with a man’s boot inside. We’ve got those swimming in our rivers too. From what I hear, only the flies love your little streams that smell worse than Philly cheesesteaks.

I admit, *Venezia* sounds beautiful in Italian, but I’ll cook your risotto for a year if you can pronounce: Monongahela, Murdocksville, Wierton, Yoghiogheny, Duquesne, Versailles, Esplen, Sheraden, Beltzhoover, and Fairywood without cracking up. Go ahead and try it.

Yeah, we’ve got a regatta. And with our boats you don’t even have to row. You might be older, but is that really something to brag about? Napoleon, Attila, and the Crusades did little for your reputation wouldn’t you say? You can even feed our pigeons without a license.

Stephen Foster could play Vivaldi under the *piazza*, and we’ve still got plenty of room to die while you’re cramming bodies into San Michele and every twelve years digging them up to dump them in a bone yard. City of Light did you say? Queen of the Adriatic? *Serenissima*?

You’re so proud of that printing press, but what else have you got? Try our banana split. And the first game of Bingo was played here, the first emoticon typed, radio broadcasted, ferris wheel conquered, and gas station built. For god sakes, we made the first Big Mac!

Sure, once or twice we've had floods,
like back in '36 when the water rose
46 feet and even drowned the street cars,
but in case you haven't heard—you're sinking.
Send us a postcard, will you? We'd love to hear
from the most beautiful city under the sea.

First Night in a New City

To reach anywhere in this city
there are stairs, bridges,
problems to
navigate. When they
built the bridges, many men died

falling into the deep pits of concrete
and stone pillars. They
were mourned, and
the workers surged on, truss
by truss. The rivers wash away nothing.

In fact, they bring in the gray.
Tonight, all I can think of
is your last words.
With our reckless
engagement cut short, I wonder

what keeps us all moving, not exactly
flying, but soaring, coasting,
sometimes out
of control. I place my useless
ring inside a bottle, drop it carefully

into the Ohio River. I want to wash
everything away. But eventually
there'll be ashes, bits of me
scattered, floating around the
world if I'm lucky. We just hold on till then.

Mt. Oliver

Years ago, John Cameron grew pumpkins big enough
for the ball, peas for the princess,
donkey cabbages and sweet squash
like diamonds in the rough. But for every
fairy tale a villain. When General Jackson
came to call, he refused his vegetable plea.
No work on the Sabbath was a Pittsburgh creed.

My new home's a bit like this, with registers
that clank and toll the midnight hour
and the grinning yellow cat who purrs
upon the porch and just as quickly disappears.

Oliver Ormsby's old land here has its gremlins.
Just imagine the hogs, dogs, and rats
all big enough to chase little boys and they in turn
swinging a hickory branches like baseball bats.
Not much is new. Ask the ogre, the tire-slasher,
the ski-masked pizza hold-up man.
Ask the raven, the cabbie-shooter, the ones with sins.

As long as I'm safe inside from my window I watch
the houses along the hill I face like square confections,
sugary, pastel blue, lemon chiffon, sweet reflections,
cherry red. They line up for my choosing, each wearing
a perfect suit, brick-laced, porch-frosted,
sweet and tall. Tonight, beaten and whipped by the rain
each winks back at me with lights that shine like
the glint from swords of many valiant knights.

The Bridge of Sighs

I'm standing halfway between
the Allegheny Courthouse and the County Jail,
and it's the kind of cold Pittsburgh night
that we endure when everything is melting
and the ugly shows up from underneath.

Your message said something about marriage,
so I'm assuming she's finally worn you down.
If this were Venice's Ponte dei Sospiri
I'd look down into the Rio di Palazzo for your face.
How much eternal love was eluded with kisses
in a gondola at sunset beneath the bridge?

But this is a city where you can take your prom date
to the morgue, into the chapel to see bodies
in the display case, look in the coolers for familiar
faces. When I stare down onto Grant Street,
I remember you running faster than me
in the marathon, even with pneumonia. At mile ten
just past the street with a lively polka and beer,
I saw a man lie down in the street
like a sunning cat and later heard the sirens.

Like Desdemona, I cannot turn back to the palace
shamed, and a granite cell awaits my last long breath.

The Great Pittsburgh Fire, 1845

The Irish washerwoman stepped away from the kettle's flame for the clothes, and after several weeks without rain it didn't take long for the embers to waft and settle on the roof of her hut. The reservoir was empty from the strain

of sun and drought, no water coming from the hand-pumped engine. The flare that began at Second and Ferry soon became the burn that took Colonel Diehl's house and jumped right through the cotton factory's doors to take aim

at the Third Presbyterian Church. When the cornice caught fire, the men chopped off the steeple to save the building, while "all the salt of Sodom" in wagons and carts was brought to keep the warehouses of coffee and sugar from flaming.

It's said that Mrs. Maglone was one of only two who died along with Samuel who went back for the piano he left inside.

Tearing Down the “Igloo”

It's named Mellon Arena now,
but only broadcasters have to call it that.
Resting on an icy hill, the inverted silver bowl
with its retractable dome has been home
to the city's hockey team since 1967.

It's summer forty-one years later now,
and at the groundbreaking for a new arena
I'm breathing 2 feet away from Mario Lemieux.
As godlike as ever he adjusts his shades
and signs a few photos as he glides through.

I've skipped out on work, like so many others,
to listen to Jeff Jimmerson sing the anthem
and see the mayor toss up a shovel of dirt
while *Let's go Pens! Let's go Pens!* echoes
off bulldozers and nearby buildings at midday.

At my first game, Dad's friend, Howie, made me
listen to the radio broadcast on my Walkman.
He said I wouldn't understand, but from the puck
drop I did. When Jagr tucked in his shirt and skated
off, mullet flying in the wind, I was addicted.

I waited for hours for Marty Straka who signed
my jersey upside down, chatted up Wregget
in his alligator loafers, and booed the Flyers loud.
I saved Mario trading cards in Bun candy bars
and tried to skip school for the victory parade.

Mom remembers when games were cheap,
and the team rarely won, but they sure could fight.
And back then the arena had a real penguin, Pete,
who appeared before games. He died after only
months, but his replacement, Re-Pete, skated on.

In the Igloo we all know Lange and the old 2-9er
get drunk together when there's no game,
Errey's funnier when he's between the benches,
and Malkin has to hit the trainer with the puck
on his way off the ice. Jeff Reed sits in section C.

Big Ben hangs out in Lemieux's box,
and every day's a great day for hockey here.
You should duck when the cotton candy man goes by,
and boo louder when Hossa comes to town.
A Kasparaitis jersey is still a safe bet for now.

Save me a seat in that new arena please,
though I can't promise I'll love it quite as much.
At least Briere and number 66 will still have banners
in the eves, and the organ will still echo from above.
Half the reason I came back is hockey, maybe more.

Looking Down on the South Side from My New Home

Here, the steel mills
are replaced
by dull monstrosities,
restaurants and bars
that are all Art Deco,
pastel, manufacturing
“forbidden fruit”
drinks. Progress
in this city
takes the scraps
and makes sweet
grimy ingots,
slabs, and sheet—
everything the same,
shiny aluminum
with tedious iron links.

The diners are restless.
They smoke, smoke,
and generate
industry with
forged grins.
When my grandfather
retired, Jones
and Laughlin Steel
lined the rivers
with barges
and banners,
great hope
for years to come.
From deadly
factory to the next
big fashion trend,
there’s always
new work
to do here;
but oh, molten world,
we’re all being
rolled into one.

A Woman Is Worth Twice that of a Man

in the case of murder. After all, she makes
the bread, tans the hides, shapes clay pots,
dresses the game, gathers, fetches, plows,
plants, grinds, and keeps the fire burning.

There's little left of the *Lenni Lenape* here
between the rivers: a plaque, ancestor,
or trail that's lasted hundreds of years.
That branch of my family tree is bare.

This poem is worth twice that of a man.
I can say that because he'll never read it.
He's busy hunting, playing, or ignoring
whatever I'm doing. Maybe getting shot.

I would sew a story in a belt with beads,
but I'm sure that's out of style.
I've tattooed what gossip I can on my body,
and that didn't go over well either.

This view is worth twice that of your word.
The steel scraped into a gray sky,
never moves or leaves, and I search for how
to touch it all. You slip through my fingers.

The Indians' wolf-like dog is now extinct,
but on some nights I hear the howling.
Wind? My own voice? A woman hearing
the turtle rattle far away and knowing?

This night is worth twice that of a lifetime.
The French brought beauty but the English
metal. You bring all but what matters,
and I pound the floor like corn with a mortar.

I'm not giving up, but you're so cold.
The city's shouldering up to the moon
and I'm still hoping to trade for goods better
than what I've got. A pearl. A shiny stone.

Stories are worth more than any truth.
This I can handle. This I can pass on.
Do you know that the women conceived

of agriculture first? The Corn Mother tells it.
What I wouldn't give for a medicine bundle:
roots, feathers, a stone, an animal tooth.
My guardian spirit lives in the city
but is never home when I come calling.

One woman is worth more than any horse.
One man traded his mount for "as much corn
as filled the crown of his hat" and returned
on foot, carrying his saddle by the horn.

Would you exchange anything for me?
Would I barter one night of flawless stars
for days of blood on my feathers?
Watch me. I'll stoke these flames till the end.

The Olde Salt Restaurant

-for Rege and Nancy

I'd come in, prop my head up on the cold counter,
and shape sausages into the usual trees or stars.
I'd carefully butter the toast to the edges as ordered.
The mornings were expected and fine. A tap on the shoulder
from behind or a white face in a high window near the ceiling
only appeared after closing time. The three dining rooms
had too many antiques with too much dust, and on one wall
a red line marked the flood waters that reached from the river
gone off course. Amongst the pictures, the railroad signals
and switches, the antique coffee cans and maps, a flash of light
sometimes appeared or a noise in an empty corner. At least
it wasn't such a bad choice for them. The innocent ghosts
watched me trip and spill drinks, giggled when the Wilsons
left me only pennies, and turned the vacuum on and off
late at night when we closed. The women's restroom
had a trickster who liked to lock the door, and a little boy
cried behind the wooden rocking horse. Two gunslingers
tossed fists behind a wooden bar. But the ones who scared me
most, were those I never saw and the story I already knew.
They tap-tapped on the kitchen floor from the basement, the slave
and her children, and wherever safety was, they never found it.

What the Train Says

From my house
on the
hill
I hear honey,
chai, cinnamon, like swirls
through
the valley.

Near the
river
it yowls
hollow.

And from far
or not so far
a cruel
silver city
never
fails to
whisper back.

Love Poem on a Snowy Day

*I wanted you from the moment I saw you,
glowing Aztec gold like the bridges in the morning sun.*

*I don't want it to end. The rivers are frozen hard
but flow all the way to the Gulf if you have patience.*

*I could kiss your cheeks all night long. Soft and smooth
as the houses look in fog, clinging and crawling up the hills.*

*How do you want me? The way the old air beacon blinks
without pause. Dot dash dash dot, spelling the city's name.*

*I live for this like that underground fire that's burned thirty
years and sends smoke and flames licking at the headstones.*

*Let's do this all day. The city will be there tomorrow.
Even Sandburg waited it out ten days in a Pittsburgh jail.*

*I want you. The way the snow enfolds the sharp edges
of the skyline, bonds to steel, softens and covers all.*

Vegetable Wars

I awoke this morning to zucchini carnage
flung about the backyard. The dog pranced
and swaggered, squash guts oozing from her teeth.

Biodegradable ravages. Spoils of salad.
Wasted young and delicate, no fritters,
no sautéing, no baking, no soup.

The neighbor, herbaceous conqueror,
had earlier traversed the risky alley
to place the vegetables atop my rusty garbage can.

And so I had to offer a similar gesture of peace.
What type of gift for this 50-year resident
of a shabby fortress? Wine? Chocolate?

My gallant canine? No. There must be bread.
Pumpkin, walnut, sweet, sweet bread.
Kill them with kindness I must! Put this to an end.

But tomatoes kept coming, one after the other.
And peppers, and onions, and bags of ripe squash.
I became a right hermit avoiding the loot.

A few days later, armed with hot pepper mix,
I was ready to cross the line again. But in return
was fresh salsa, cookies, and homemade pizzelles.

So, with heavy heart and full kitchen shelf,
I admit defeat. I can't win the vegetable war,
so thank god for a Pittsburgh winter.

Iroquois Tradition

On a long ride
and at the forks
of the Susquehanna,
Shickellamy revealed
to his companion
that he dreamed
last night
of the excellent
rifle Weiser
would provide him with,
and so as etiquette
demanded,
it was so.

Weiser dreamed
that night too
of the island
in the river
that Shickellamy
would give him,
and by sunset
he was fishing there.

For the future,
Weiser and Shickellamy
agreed to never
dream together again.

Red Belt

In the 1940s an engineer, Joseph White, designed a system of roads to circumvent traffic around the congested downtown area in Pittsburgh. The roads form concentric rings around the city with the outermost being red, followed by orange, yellow, green, and blue.

After you I dated a boy who flipped
a quarter to decide it all:
fish or chicken, red or blue,
to cheat or not to cheat.
But that's all too nonchalant
for me, so I choose the red belt,
the largest and grandest first.
There's no Virgil to guide me,
but I rock the classics on DVE loud.

And so I start out thinking how I'd like
to marry someone like Pittsburgh's native
son, Mike Fink: "half horse
and half alligator," joked Davy Crockett.
But I'm only thinking this way
because you were in my dreams
last night again. Damn first loves. Damn you.
You, riding your bike eight miles
to my house when we were fifteen.
You, jumping from the roof of my dorm
with a friend in college. You and I
dancing the night before I left for Florida.
Your living room spinning and us
still, in limbo. But I'm driving to forget
you've found someone new. I'm driving
and thinking of Mike Fink shooting whiskey
glasses from his woman's head
and dragging keelboats up the river.
Oh to be drunk and happy all day long.

Pretty quickly, I realize it's a big joke.
These roads are too far from the city I love.
I need a map. The wind chill is fourteen
below, and the crossing guard

only comes out to help the cute kids across.
There's a dead deer outside the gunsmith
shop, frozen creeks, corn fields,
and abandoned barns. It's too much like
where we grew up. Like when Barry
jumped through the fire and we ended
up at the hospital. When Tim took
you, Laura, and me four-wheeling up the coal piles,
and we smacked into that tree. Hard.
When you and Autumn got caught
in the field, parked in your Jeep,
and I heard about it in school the next day.
No punishment for you in that level of hell.

I imagined how I'd stop for lunch
at a cute café, take pictures of old mills
and meet the "locals," but it's too damn cold
to get out of the car except for gas.
I spend thirteen dollars and eighty three cents
on a map I don't use. A black truck
follows me for miles, and all I can think
is how we drove for hours through back roads,
how I could drive to your house eyes closed.
I keep thinking how I shouldn't tell this story.

I just want to get back home, so I take 28
past Pittsburgh Mills. When I see the Highland Park
Bridge it starts to feel better. When I take
the Veterans Bridge exit I'm really feeling good.
The city sits frozen and wedged in the rivers,
nothing like the Styx. I don't think I'll ever forget.
My new house you've never seen waits upon the hill.
It's five days until Christmas, and the sight of cold
tall buildings feels safe and good. Can you replace
the love of a man with the love of a place?

Orange Belt

I was driving and downing a B-vitamin
smoothie behind a dump truck spewing
exhaust fumes through my air vents
the third time I tried to find my way
around the 109-mile orange belt.
It's fitting. I'm a vegetarian in a city
filled with meat and potato lovers.
A country girl with a heroin-addict neighbor
in her new city home on the hill.
I hadn't yet abandoned all hope,
but I expected to be punished for my crimes:
maybe a lie here or a hamburger there.
And half way along this day's path
I was ready to throw it all to the wolves again.
There just *was* no sign. Right, left, five-way
intersection, roundabout, up the hill or down.
There was *no* sign saying where to go from here.

Maybe this is poetic justice.
Every time I get turned around and lost,
it all winds back to everything I'm looking for.
It's the holidays again, and I'm thinking how
when we were sixteen the diamond
you gave me was a quarter karat. At twenty
with a full karat in hand you promised to make
it four times bigger every four years.
This Christmas, without my 16-karat diamond,
I'm on my way to dinner at my aunt's
and find myself on the Orange Belt by accident.
I guess I'll follow this path as far as I can.
There's still hope, like that ring
in my armoire drawer I never open.

Yellow Belt

Call me a glutton.
I still want it all.
I've left the other poets
long ago in limbo,
and I'm pushing car
after car toward
the center of the city.
I never tried to resist
a single piece of you.
Here at the Hulton Bridge
I remember finding
you half way across a river,
running toward the hospital,
toward your brother
with his brain swollen
from the accident.
I followed you in.
You held me close
for just a moment
before the fallen angels
shut me out.

Green Belt

Like the lustful blown about
in a squall, I dodge
 traffic cones and ideas,
but they both keep coming.
Every time I think it's the last turn,
there's another bridge to cross,
another demon.

 It's February, but lukewarm,
which is an awful taunt
with so many more bitter weeks
to go. Once, someone asked
me to write a self-portrait;
I became a palm tree with icicles,
 glittering and fragile
like the rivers that thaw and waver
under the South Highland Bridge.

I want to stop for a picture,
but there's no room, no time,
 no guardrail.
The sidewalk just lets go into
traffic. The kids at the crosswalk
get loose for a moment to shrug
 or snuffle, knowing
a hand will still be there.
The lights change and set free
the traffic ahead of me.

When spring comes, Kennywood,
 bumper cars and all,
will reopen, and concerts will blare
at Hartwood Acres while the gardeners
will again have work in Fox Chapel.

You tricked me for just a moment,
 melted me enough
to blow free. I unraveled
what was left of hope and swung
out that limb when we stayed out late
one fall evening after I had come home,
and you held my face in your hands.

Here I am again though, driving
and free
to move on. Still I'm looping
my little world for a way out.

The sign where the green belt ends
has been stolen, so I stagger on
through stoplights for a while
before twisting back toward the start.
It's hard to give up the chase,
even though I know it's long gone.
But when I surrender, I'm rewarded
for just a moment with a glimpse
through all the traffic and glare.

I can see ahead
as far as this highway goes,
straight to the city's heart.

Blue Belt

Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch'intrate

My new distraction lives
right off the blue belt,
and on one of our first dates
we drove some of this circle
looking at the mansions
and manors from an earlier day—
when the music of Stephen Foster
filled the halls and Mary Croghan,
only 15, scandalized the city
by leaving her boarding school
in Long Island and eloping
to England with 43-year-old
Captain Edward Schenley.
Mary won her inheritance
eventually, and so the lovely park
that bears her name along this road
was all a product of love untamed.

There's no traffic this late
on the blue belt where I'm driving
again. And when my mind wanders
at the red light, it only wanders
a few weeks. This is progress.
Kiss me like you want me,
he said. *I want you to write a poem*
about this, he breathed in my ear.
I want to stop at his apartment
as I drive by so close, but that would
break my resolution. For me,
he is the wild horse that you
can't look in the eye. The one you
turn your back on and who must
come to you in his own time.
The wild creature that will run
at any sign of danger. I guess I'm danger.

As hard as I try to keep his voice
in my ear, the feel of his arms around
my shoulders—*I have to have you—*
I'm still thinking of all the crazy things
I've done for love, and so I miss the turn
near Boyd's Hill and have to circle back.

John Boyd hanged himself when he learned
of his wife's affair—just another sin
carried out in the name of devotion.

I wonder tonight how much time I wasted
with want and fraud. How much will
Minos judge? How harsh will he be?
Or could it be that this truly is the center
of the earth? The way out of it all.
Can new love absolve me of old sins?
As I turn the car away toward home
the last look I take is at the stars.

If this is the End

I used to dream of my parents in the front
 seat of the car, not listening when
I told them we were lost, lost beyond directions
 and lost beyond turning back.
Down the concrete boat ramp and into the water
 we'd splash at full speed before I awoke.
But this was only a dream after all.
 Even delusions that happen time after time
don't always amount to anything: Grandma digging
 dirt from Hazelwood and slogging it to
Lonaconing, Maryland year after year
 to fill in her mother's grave that kept sinking.
Once, in the '60s a young chemistry major
 from the university drove his '59 Chrysler
off the Bridge to Nowhere, onto the north shore
 of the Allegheny. Without a scratch he conquered
the unfinished double-deck steel bowstring arch
 and lived to deny all media requests.
The ironworkers, ropes optional, climb the rivets
 hand and foot attacking with hellhounds the heads
of the old salt-soaked metal. A KDKA cameraman climbs
 the fish belly trusses to keep another soul
from jumping. Glenn practices the divine trumpet
 beneath Fort Duquesne bridge where the acoustics
are the best in the city. In the dream, there were no signs
 pointing wrong way, stop, turn back.
If this is the end, give me a sweet ride, big city blues,
 and money to pay the one penny toll.

NOTES

INVITATION TO THE PITTSBURGH READER ONLY

“The legend that saved hockey” refers to Mario Lemieux, who “saved” the Pittsburgh Penguins by helping them win two Stanley Cups, buying the team when it went bankrupt, and keeping the team from leaving the city in 2007.

“One for the *other* thumb” refers to the Pittsburgh Steelers’ sixth Super Bowl win in 2009.

Kennywood is a Pittsburgh amusement park.

“Pops” is Willie Stargell, who won the MVP for the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1979.

The Monongahela is one of the three Pittsburgh rivers in addition to the Ohio and the Allegheny.

THE SHAPE OF A CITY

The financial district or downtown area of Pittsburgh is often referred to as “The Golden Triangle.”

GHOST CITY

Although the department store Kauffman’s no longer exists, the famous clock that adorns the corner is still a recognizable feature from the street and a favorite meeting place for Pittsburghers.

WISHING YOU WERE HERE

Isaly’s is a popular deli chain, famous for its “chipped ham,” that has been in Pittsburgh since the early 1900’s.

A second baseman during the 1880’s and 1890’s, Louis Bierbauer actually played for the Philadelphia Athletics before becoming an outlaw in the Players’ League that formed in 1890. When that league folded after a year, the Athletics, for whatever reason, left Bierbauer off the roster of players to reincorporate into their team. Seizing the opportunity, the Pittsburgh team “pirated” him for their own, earning the name that has stuck since.

THE BANANA EXPLOSION OF 1936

In 1936, a gas explosion occurred in the ripening room of the Pittsburgh Banana Company's building. The explosion bent the domes and shattered the windows of a nearby church, St. Stanislaus.

WHAT WE WERE EATING

The last goalie to face a puck in Pittsburgh without a mask was Andy Brown on April 7, 1974.

Sidney Crosby is the young captain of the Pittsburgh Penguins.

WHAT A CHOICE MEANS

Thanks to Stephen Lorant, who wrote *Pittsburgh: The Story of an American City*, for his insightful description and memorable images of the city's fog.

"The Flying Dutchman" is Honus Wagner, a famous shortstop who played for the Pittsburgh Pirates. He was one of the first five players inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1936 with votes just behind Ty Cobb and tied with Babe Ruth.

Bruno Sanmartino is the longest-running champion of the World Wide Wrestling Foundation.

THE MOLLY MAGUIRES

True evidence of the Molly Maguires in America is questionable, although there is record of their existence as a secret Irish organization. The group was blamed for crimes during mid-19th century in the coalfields of the U.S., but most evidence was provided by industrialists and owners who it is suggested were hiding their own misdeeds.

DEAR GRANDMA

Chief Shannopin of the Delaware tribe had his village on the southern bank of the Allegheny River.

The italicized text is taken from postcards sent from Edward Jackson (my maternal grandfather) to his wife, Margaret Jackson during WWII.

General Edward Braddock led a British force in the French and Indian War. After his defeat on the banks of the Monongahela, his dying words are reported as: "*We shall know better how to deal with them another time.*"

"Hunkies" refers to the group of Pittsburghers of Polish, Hungarian, Russian, and Slovak nationalities.

The Homestead Grays were a Pittsburgh area baseball team formed in 1912 that enjoyed success in the Negro Leagues.

BASEBALL IN THE CITY

Josh Gibson was an American catcher who played for the Homestead Grays, the Pittsburgh Crawfords, Ciudad Trujillo, and the Mexican League from 1930-41. Although he was unable to play in Major League Baseball because of his race, he was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1972 and is considered one of the best power hitters to play the game.

The “Hill” refers to the “Hill District,” which was once considered the center of African-American culture in Pittsburgh.

Jackie Robinson’s break into Major League Baseball also marked the demise of African-American leagues.

“Cool Papa Bell,” or James Thomas Bell, was a center fielder for the Pittsburgh Crawfords and the Homestead Grays.

WAR SCENES

“No bluebirds at the cliffs of Dover” refers to a song “There’ll be Bluebirds Over the White Cliffs of Dover,” which was made popular by Vera Lynn during WWII. Ironically, there are no bluebirds found in Britain.

J&L is short for Jones and Laughlin, a steel company in Pittsburgh.

“Glimmering and vast” references Matthew Arnold’s poem “Dover Beach.”

WHAT THE WOMEN IN MY FAMILY HAVE SAID

These “found poems” are letters written by women in my family. They have been changed some, but many of the lines are their original words.

For a brief period of history, “Pittsburgh” was spelled without the “h” mainly due to a clerical error. After protests from the citizens, the “h” was returned to the name in 1911.

WHAT THE MEN IN MY FAMILY HAVE SAID

These “found poems” are letters written by men in my family. They have been changed some, but many of the lines are their original words.

FORGOTTEN POEMS

Many of the sections of this poem have been recovered from my grandmother's scrapbook, which she kept during WWII. They are parts of my grandfather's letters, newspaper clippings, and memorabilia from the time.

EVERYTHING AND NOTHING

Supposedly Queen Aliquippa of the Seneca tribe flirted with General George Washington when he arrived at Pittsburgh.

Charles Dickens visited Pittsburgh in 1842 with his wife. He was not impressed.

Benjamin Franklin's political cartoon in 1754 showed a snake in pieces, which represented the "disunited" colonies in America.

KURT VONNEGUT FLUNKED THERMODYNAMICS

Carnegie Tech, founded by Andrew Carnegie in 1900, was one of the precursors to Carnegie Mellon University.

Henry Frick was an industrialist who earned his fortune in Pittsburgh.

THE CITY OF PITTSBURGH WRITES TO VENICE, THE SELF-PROCLAIMED "MOST BEAUTIFUL CITY IN THE WORLD"

"Serennisima" means "the most serene" in Italian.

MT. OLIVER

Mt. Oliver is a Pittsburgh neighborhood on the south side of the city.

John Cameron, who was reported to grow the best vegetables in Pittsburgh, refused to sell his produce when Stonewall Jackson came to town because it was a Sunday.

TEARING DOWN THE "IGLOO"

Jeff Jimmerson is a beloved Pittsburgher who more often than not sings the national anthem at Penguins' games.

Jaromir Jagr played for the Penguins from 1990-1994 and 1995-2001 and helped the team to win two Stanley Cups.

"Lange" refers to the Penguins' announcer, Mike Lange.

“The old 2-9er” is Phil Borque, former NHL player and Pittsburgh Penguin who does radio commentary with Mike Lange.

“Errey” refers to Bob Errey, another former player and television announcer.

“Malkin” is Evgeni Malkin, a current Penguins player.

Jeff Reed is a kicker for the Pittsburgh Steelers and member of the 2009 Super Bowl team.

Big Ben refers to Ben Roethlisberger, the quarterback for the Pittsburgh Steelers 2004-present.

Marian Hossa was traded from the Penguins to the defending Stanley Cup champions, the Detroit Red Wings, in 2008.

Darius Kasparaitis is a tough defenseman who played for the Penguins 1996-2002.

Michel Briere is one of only two players to have his number retired by the Penguins. He was killed in an automobile accident in 1970.

“Number 66” is Mario Lemieux.

LOVE POEM ON A SNOWY DAY

This poem is for Matt.

IROQUOIS TRADITION

The Susquehanna is a river near Pittsburgh.

RED BELT

All of the “belt” poems are for Adam Puzak.

YELLOW BELT

The lower parts of hell in Dante Alighieri’s *Inferno* are guarded by fallen angels. Here those who have committed “active” rather than “passive” sins are kept.

BLUE BELT

“*Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch'intrate*” is the inscription on Dante’s gate of hell in the *Inferno*, which can be translated as “Abandon all hope, ye who enter here.”

Minos judges those who have committed “active” sins by wrapping his tail around himself a corresponding number of times.

In the *Inferno*, Virgil and Dante ultimately escape hell through the center of the earth and on the dawn of Easter Sunday are greeted by a sky full of stars.

The last word of Dante’s *Divine Comedy* in all three sections is “stelle” or stars.

IF THIS IS THE END

“The Bridge to Nowhere” refers to the Fort Duquesne Bridge that was constructed 1958-63. Because of a lack of funding, the bridge did not span the river and open to traffic until 1969.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Amanda Reynolds was born in Pennsylvania and grew up an hour east of the city of Pittsburgh. She received an undergraduate degree from Allegheny College, where she first discovered her love of poetry. She received an MFA from the University of Florida in 2002. After spending six years in Florida, she returned to Pittsburgh to continue her writing about her family's hometown and to uncover the history there while also creating an exciting future. Her poems have appeared in journals such as *Gargoyle*, *Mississippi Crow*, and *Gander Mountain Review*.