

Outlet Rough (11/1/11)

## Poetry

### Moments (Cassandra)

Red balloons pour into the living room, pecking the carpet,  
Yellow streamers hang from the ceiling like seaweed,  
Blue icing cakes your lips, like a clown's face.

| Crimson metal ~~handle bars~~handlebars glint in the warm sun,  
A shiny gold bell rings over the boys' laughter,  
Electric blue racing stripes peek behind the pedals.

The brick wall shades the splintered picnic benches,  
Bumblebees poke along the blossoming flowerbeds,  
The sky reflects in the water jugs lounging by the lunch baskets.

Captured in a wrinkled, torn album,  
Tucked away on a cracked shelf,  
Pictures:

| Faded by time,  
But cherished forever.

### Books (Edo)

Off-color, drying, torn and frayed,  
a faded rainbow of old, worn books  
sits ~~in on~~its shelf—motionless.  
The gritty spines, which seem to crumble  
under the stroke of my delicate fingers,  
whisper softly to me  
that they have lasted through the ages.  
| ~~Enobled~~Ennobled, distinguished, applauded,  
they innocently sit,  
confidently postured.

### A Date with My Life (Kathryn)

All I ever do is wait  
| for Life to walk through the door;  
and introduce himself to me,

| grinning like an idiot,  
saying: “Let’s grab some dinner.”

I would go, of course—  
to dinner, that is.  
| Yes, like a lost child,  
I would go.

I would hold Life’s hand  
and look through wide eyes  
| at strange dreams—  
composed of my possibilities.

We would discuss our hopes and aspirations,  
and he would assure me that  
we could be great together—  
if I was willing to give him a chance.

And knowing myself, I would be unsettled  
by the uncertainty of it all.  
I would probably choke on my chicken milano  
while he gazed at me across the table.

| Then I’d say: “I don’t think I’m ready,”  
~~and his~~ smile would begin to fade, and  
he would say: “I’ve heard that before.  
But, how will you know if you never try?”

But by the time I’d finished my cheesecake,  
I’d know.  
We’d leave together,  
and Life, he’d be mine from then on.

### (The Title of This Poem) (Paul C.)

|(Words were supposed to be written  
here on this page, but nothing came to mind.)

(Each stanza was to be concrete  
while the words, ebbing and F

lo  
o  
o  
w  
i  
n

**Comment [J1]:** I don’t like that everything’s in parenthesis, but this is an aesthetic choice, so I don’t think we should change it.

g i n  
g,  
bounced  
from one

rock

to the

next,

cascading down

in

pure

melodious

song.)

| (Yet, the unspoken this; and that; filled the space. -Rolling and engulfing.)

### **The Kettle (Anna)**

| He sits asleep in his worn recliner; facing the television,  
the volume loud from drowning out my mother, toiling in the kitchen.  
| He wakes at the sound of the volume leaving the screen.

and I quickly turn it back on, guilty, returning to the floor.

| The cat jumps onto his lap and nestles there,  
purring herself to sleep under his protection.  
| He strokes her back as he stares ahead like a broken traffic light,  
his finger absently returning to the volume button.  
I look up from the floor and watch them.

| In the kitchen, the little kettle shakes on the stove,  
sobbing hot tears of steam.  
| It emits a low wail that cuts the air,  
and I press my hands over my ears  
to suffocate the suffering.

| The television becomes deafening with each press of the arrow,  
competing to drown the fragile kettle as it endlessly laments.  
Yet no one removes it from the stove.

| And as the miserable television continues to shriek,  
I force my eyes shut and whisper,  
“Please.”  
But no one relieves the kettle from the stove.

### Abuelita (Matt)

| We were gathered in the church,  
*la familia*, dressed in Sunday best and somber.  
| I saw her cold-looking, sallow face  
with its typical scowl  
and her hands folded across her breast.  
| The priest was chanting in Latin,  
and everyone repeated the incantations,  
the eerie drone echoing off the ceiling.  
| Usually, Carlos and Lita were rowdy,  
laughing raucously as they clutched their *ceresas*,  
but today there were no *ceresas*, at least not now,  
and nobody told any jokes.  
| I thought of her life, a complex tapestry of  
homemade tortillas, staunchly ironed clothes,  
and grandchildren on her lap, whom she cared for  
while their parents were out "living their lives";  
| how her daughters married alcoholics,  
and her husband occupied Hiroshima;  
how all she really wanted  
was to leave this arid Utah valley  
and go back home to México.  
And I thought,

**Comment [J2]:** This feels a bit off to me. The second two parts of this long list (both starting with "how") feel balanced, but the first part of the list doesn't start in the same way, and so it doesn't sound right. I can't figure out how to fix this, though, without rewriting part of the poem. Any suggestions?

after all these years,  
surrounded by us, her people,  
in the church she went to twice a year,  
it must be nice to finally get some sleep.

### Mid-afternoon Moon (William)

As I glimpse the moon floating in an azure sea,  
I feel I like an intruder on some sacred moment—  
a child entering to find his father knelt in prayer.

Normally invisible or unnoticed, this hour in the various stages  
of its habitual blinking, this clear afternoon, it hangs peacefully,  
free of the coyote's howls and the longing eyes of lonely sailors.

Following twilight, the stars will begin to flicker and will honor  
the glowing sphere after all else has faded.  
But as I walk beneath it now, our steadfast moon needs time alone.

In a few hours, it will appear as we know it.  
Youth will use it as a metaphor for love,  
which comes out at night and fades in the morning.

It will draw in dreams with the tides  
and light our trips to the bathroom  
as we avoid waking our spouses.

But now it sits stoic in the western sky—collecting it's thoughts.  
So I drop my head and start a meaningless  
conversation, hoping to redirect the attention to myself.

### Seeds of Reconciliation (Ray)

Fallen angels in scaly shells of self  
hoard all words.  
Each festers into an acidic pearl  
on which they burn their own hands trying to heft  
Answers at their foes.  
But rotten fruit tastes ripe to rotten tongues.

Fresh bruises sprout on both our minds  
when we let petty fists of words rail  
unhampered by higher thoughts.  
I have shouted and singed my arms

Comment [J3]: Chicago 6.114

(arched upward in exasperation,) while you festered on unvented jabs of thought.

This is the black, thick pulp of the Eden tree, serpent wrapped, fatal knowledge, dropping sweet- tree seeds.  
A seed speaks:  
Feed your brother, you will feast yourself.  
Our desert distance blots out tree tears, seed cries, sound falls like poorly tossed stones, far from its target.

But words on leaves have somehow been carried into our dimly lit linoleum wreckage, as if on messenger wings.  
I drop my fighting, burning arm, and you and I are healed.

## Fiction

### Little or Big (Heather)

“Jenna? Jenna? Can you hear me?” There was panic in Travis’s voice.

All I could manage was a grunt.

“I’ve just called your mom. She’s going to watch Addy while I take you to the hospital.”

I moaned. “Don’t want to go.”

“We have to go. Honey, you just had a seizure.”

I shut my eyes. No—no. A bitter taste. I’d bitten my tongue. It hurt to swallow.

The next twenty minutes were exhausting. I heard my mom’s voice as she pulled Addy from the car and whispered, “Call me” to Travis. After that, every bump in the road felt pronounced, and I stumbled twice as Travis led me into the hospital. It wasn’t until the emergency room nurse called out, “Pamela, I need a gurney out here immediately!” that I sensed fully the seriousness of the situation. I looked down at my clothes. My gray stretch pants were stained red with blood.

Time sped up then. I found myself being wheeled through the arterial hallways of Jefferson Regional Hospital with Dr. Waddell walking beside me as I stared up at the lights above my head.

“We’ll have to do a ~~e~~C-section right away,” he said. “Travis, there won’t be time to change. Stay here. I’ll send the nurse out as soon as I can.”

I shut my eyes. The doors banged a couple of times. The nurses strapped me to humming monitors, and then murmured to each other through pursed lips as they scurried back and forth between the closets and tables. There was only one thing I heard clearly before the IV went in and darkness resumed. It was from Dr. Waddell. “Let’s not lose them both.”

**Comment [J4]:** Chicago 6.114

**Comment [J5]:** Replaced en dash with em dash.

**Comment [J6]:** This is what I found on the Chicago site about putting a comma before “then”: “the true conjunction (*and* or *but*) is omitted but implied: I plan to work from home [and] then I will come to the office. The comma is necessary because it indicates the implied conjunction and prevents a run-on sentence; a semicolon would be even better.” In this case, though, there are not two independent clauses in the sentence, so it makes sense that we’d have to remove the comma and insert an “and.”

\* \* \*

I could see the leaves being tossed in the October gusts like lettuce in a giant salad. We were at Porter Park, ~~two-year-old~~two-year-old Addison and I, and she was on the swings. Though it had taken place on a day five months earlier, the scene came back to me so clearly, so easily, as the voices in the hospital room became more distant.

“Push me again, Mama.”

I smiled, then backed up and pushed my hands against the stiffness of her back until she and the swing beneath her gained enough momentum to lift her little ~~two-year-old~~two-year-old body parallel to the ground. The highest reach of her toes heavenward lasted for only one exhilarating moment before gravity pulled her back to me.

“What a big girl you are, Addy! You were in the clouds!”

She giggled and cried, “Again! Again!”

I drew the sleeves of my striped sweater down over my fingers as a chill ran down both of my arms. My daughter would have liked to spend the winter slipping down icy slides and pushing around a snow-covered merry-go-round until she became frozen solidly to the metal bars. No matter what protests and pleas she mustered later, this would probably be our last autumn visit to the park. I rubbed my hand over the gentle roundness of my abdomen. *Maybe we will come back in April—after the baby is born.*

Our second baby. An unexpected and frightening gift. My epilepsy medication made it dangerous to carry children at all, but during the long hours of Addy’s birth, I had had a grand mal seizure. It had been a miracle either of us survived. For four months afterwards, the seizures continued. We were compelled to hire a neighbor to sit with me at home until Travis came home from work. I had to crawl around the floor, fearful of falling on the new baby at any moment. Travis and I had been in the process of resigning ourselves to only one child when a missed period had turned things upside-down again.

A kid with tousled brown hair and freckles came running up to a smaller blond boy sitting on one of the swings beside us. “Hey, Mike! Wanna ride over to the store and get some pop?”

“Yeah!” The two boys ran off to where they’d left their bikes leaning against the trunks of a couple of shedding maples.

Addy began kicking her feet wildly. “I go too, Mama! I ride bike!”

“No, Sweetie. You’re too little to ride a bike. Don’t you want to keep swinging?”

She remained silent for the next two pushes, then she suddenly began to cry. Her sobs grew in intensity each moment.

“What’s wrong, Sweetheart? Are you hurt? Do you want to get down?” I reached protectively for her and brought the swing to a sudden stop.

As her little chest convulsed, the only words she could get out were, “I big.”

“Yes, you are a big girl.”

She twisted her head from side to side and frowned. “No, I little.”

“You’re little?”

“No! I big! I little! I—”

More tears piled up and overflowed the lower rims of her eyes. I slipped her tiny frame from the swing and held it to me, then let out a slow breath of understanding. *How confusing life can be.*

Once she calmed down, I covered Addy’s precious hand with mine. We crunched leaves as we walked the three blocks home. She stomped on each leaf with a firm step while I replayed in my mind conversations she and I had shared the week before. Too big to use a pacifier, too little to pour her own cereal. Big girl using the toilet, little girl drinking out of a sippie-sippy cup. I made

**Comment [37]:** Chicago 5.220 under “toward, towards”

myself a mental promise to speak more carefully in the future. But how could I explain it? Was she little or big?

\* \* \*

A baby's high-pitched cry sounded in another room. My fingers inadvertently crimped the edges of the hospital blankets. As the noise faded, my mind began to grope its way through the haziness until another image gradually sharpened. A tall man dressed in a gray suit was speaking—it sounded like Darren Gage. The details soon revealed the Sunday School room at the church on a day four months earlier. As the chairs and chalkboard became clearer, his voice grew louder.

"How is it that the Nephites could become so rebellious after having literally decades of peace and happiness following the visit of the Savior?" Brother Gage peered over the top rims of his glasses. "Yes, Tim?"

I looked over to see Brother Rogers scoot his generous behind to the edge of his seat, causing it to creak loudly. "Well, I think back to Helaman twelve when it says men are considered less than the dust of the earth because even the dirt obeys its Maker. The Nephites had let go of their hold on the Savior and fallen back into what they really were—sinful human beings who didn't amount to much without their faith."

Brother Gage nodded, his silver sideburns bobbing. "Right. Remember King Benjamin's counsel for us to always keep in mind our own nothingness. How's that for a self-esteem talk?"

A low chuckle went in waves across the room, but I didn't join in. As Brother Gage continued to explore 4<sup>th</sup>-Fourth Nephi, I flipped the pages of my scriptures until I reached a familiar verse in Romans: "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ—"

I tapped the worn eraser of my marking pencil against my bottom lip as my mind seesawed back and forth between the concept of nothingness and the idea of divinity. There were certainly days when I felt like dirt, days when I blew up at Addy or got into a screaming match with my husband or felt guilty for staying home from church just to enjoy some alone time.

But there were also days when I remembered a neighbor's birthday with a homemade cake or received an important insight from my scripture study, days when my toddler acted so polite at the dentist's office that the receptionist smiled her flawless smile and said, "What a good daughter you're raising."

I sighed and rubbed my palm against the tautness of my silk maternity blouse.

*So who am I? Dust of the earth—or joint-heir? One of the parable's five unprepared virgins or candidate for the Celestial Kingdom?*

Little—or big?

Brother Gage turned toward the chalkboard and began to write. "Next week, we'll get some insight into Mormon's views as he says—"

\* \* \*

"It's okay, Kiddo," a smooth voice said. "I'm just going to check your blood pressure again."

I turned my head toward the voice.

"That's it. Just relax."

My arm went limp as she wrapped the stiff cloth around it. The band began to squeeze. I slowly opened my eyes to see a plump, gray-haired woman bending over me. Her eyes met mine, and she smiled.

**Comment [J8]:** Chicago 13.42

**Comment [J9]:** Should this be capitalized?

**Comment [J10]:** The Church usually writes the numeral out, so it makes sense to do so here, too.

**Comment [J11]:** The Church lowercases this term.

**Comment [J12]:** Chicago 8.33



"Your husband will be happy to hear that you're waking up. You've been pretty out of it for the last few days, ~~my~~ Missy."

As the pressure grew, my eyes fluttered closed again. I could see myself standing at my kitchen sink. My husband was sitting at the dining room table on my right, and I was filling a pitcher with water.

"Do you think God is okay with me getting my tubes tied?" I heard myself asking.

Travis set Addy's plate of mashed potatoes and chicken down in front of her. She reached for her fork. "Prayer, Daddy?" He didn't seem to hear her.

"We've thought about it, Jenna, prayed about it. I think it would be crazy to ignore the doctors on this one."

"I know. There's no commandment saying how many kids a good Mormon family has to have. But I can't help thinking there's some divine number out there. Like, ~~the~~ true? Latter-day Saints have seven or more children, and mediocre ones have six or less. Kind of a Celestial minimum that only the really in-tune people know about."

Travis chuckled. "I guess the bishop's not gonna make it."

"Okay, so maybe the limit is five. It's just—why do we have to stop? Most people now just have one or two, and that's all that they want. We want more kids. Do we just need to have more faith?" My voice broke. "We promised the Lord we'd keep having kids until He said to stop."

"Maybe that's exactly what He's telling us."

I sighed as I reached for the brown potholders on the kitchen counter. As I put out one hand to open the oven door, everything in my range of vision—the stove top, the sugar and flour cans, the Anne Geddes calendar hanging on the wall—all blurred and darkened.

A thick, dark line. Pain. Head throbbing. Jaw. Oh, oh, sore. What—was it? Tired. A line. Carpet. Line of carpet. I was—the dining room carpet. I was lying on the carpet.

"Jenna? Jenna? Can you hear me?"

\* \* \*

My eyelids stuck, draped over my eyes like two thick plastic tarps. I struggled to peel them back again. The first sight that met my gaze was a huge vase of purple irises on a tray table near the foot of the hospital bed. In the middle of the bright petals stood a stark white card bearing the words "With Sympathy" scrawled across the top in dark lettering.

My heart contracted at the sight of those words, and I turned away. The dimly-lit room was crowded with furniture; a second table stood on my left, several machines with wires stood on my right, an oak wardrobe dominated one corner, a large television took up the other corner, and a large blue recliner lay behind the machines with a rumpled blanket draped over it. I was alone in the room.

I reached automatically for my belly, dragging a tube along with my hand. Underneath the thin white sheet, I could feel it—the large bump had been replaced by a flabby, empty, shrunken mound. I thought of the blood, of the words "You just had a seizure," and "Let's not lose them both." I felt small. I felt like something insignificant, one small woman with a large emptiness inside. A forgotten body swallowed up by the huge stomach of Jefferson Regional.

Beyond the door, I could envision nurses rushing around, busy, needed. Beyond the walls were mothers, driving kids to music lessons, taking them to McDonald's, shopping at ~~Wal-~~ ~~Mart~~ Walmart with babies in car seats being driven in carts. The world kept turning, and time kept ticking, insensitive to the fact that my world had stopped cold.

And where was Heavenly Father? In the worlds without end that He monitored, with all of his spirit children and every creation named and known, had He forgotten my name? My eyes

**Comment [J13]:** This is Walmart's official spelling now.

clouded. I couldn't feel Him. I couldn't feel anything. Something squeezed inside my chest. Even He seemed to be busy elsewhere. "Couldn't you watch with me one hour?" The words ran through my mind again and again.

Slowly, a low murmuring interrupted my thoughts. A voice. I looked up and realized for the first time that the television was on, with the volume turned down to a soft hum. A man in a dark suit was speaking. He was surrounded by greenery interspersed with pink and yellow flowers. It was General Conference. Travis had told everyone in the ward, "We're going to have an Easter baby, right after Conference."

The speaker, unfamiliar to me, said, "Amen" and disappeared. Then the darkness withdrew. The camera pulled back to a full view of the choir, in red dresses and navy suits. With one movement, they stood and began to sing.

"Jesus, once of humble birth, now in glory comes to earth—"

As I listened, my heart yearning for something to replace the emptiness, the words seemed to unfold two contradictory images—one of a helpless little naked baby, the other of a strong figure who could move mountains with a single word.

"Once a meek and lowly lamb, now the Lord, the great I Am."

I pictured Addy on the day she was born. She wore a little white bow and curled her fingers into fists. Even before she could hold her head up, she ruled our universe. I imagined the Savior, a baby, held in a mother's arms. He had saved her with His innocence, saved her by needing her, saved her long before He ever entered Gethsemane.

"Once He groaned in blood and tears, now in glory He appears."

I saw in my mind the blood running down my legs and heard the fear in Travis's voice. Then, with a gentle flow, the Spirit began to fill the raw places in my heart.

"Once forsaken, left alone—" He knew what it was to be little.

"Now exalted to a throne." Because He had become little, He was lifted up to become bigger—bigger than He had been before. Bigger than His pain. Bigger than my pain.

I ~~sunk~~ sank back into the pillows behind me and let the stream of peace flow over me. In my mind, I heard words spoken, low and soothing. *Jenna, you're only little when you try to do it alone.*

A soft click sounded at the door. My eyes flicked open as my husband entered the room. His chin was covered in stubble, and wrinkles ~~criss-crossed~~ crisscrossed his plaid, button-down shirt.

"How are you feeling?" he asked, sitting next to me and taking my hand in his.

"Okay." My tongue moved slowly, as if my mouth ~~were was~~ stuffed full of quilt batting. "I'm glad to see you."

"The doctor thought you'd wake up a whole lot sooner." Travis's eyes fell down to our hands. "Jenna, the baby—"

"I know."

Travis squeezed my hand. We sat in silence for a long moment. Then he cleared his throat and pointed back toward the door. "Addy will be coming over with Grandma in about an hour.

She's been asking for you ~~non-stop~~ nonstop."

"I want to see her."

"Grandma's been spoiling her. Would you believe it, she climbed on top of your dad's recliner, took the car keys off the hook, and told Grandma she was just gonna drive on over here?"

I managed a soft smile.

He shook his head. "I thought she'd be excited to have her grandparents to herself. But she's been asking when can she go back to her own bed, and when can her mom take her to the park again, and why are all the shadows different at Grandma's house." He placed his other hand over mine and locked his eyes on mine. "Addy needs you, Jenna. She always will."

At his words, images began to merge before me. Pictures of park benches and autumn leaves meshed with those of car keys and recliners, grandparents and hospital monitors. In the middle of it all was a precious two-year-old girl in ~~blond~~blonde pigtails. And then I imagined the Savior with her, His wounded hands reaching out to push her on the swings.

As the images dissolved, I looked back into Travis's face. All I could manage was a whisper. "That's my big girl."

**Comment [J14]:** The Merriam-Webster dictionary says that this should be spelled "blond" with a boy or man, but "blonde" with a girl or woman.

## Everyone Will Love You (Amelia)

I really ~~do not~~don't want to do this. ~~It is~~It's right between ripping my toenails off and pulling teeth on the list of things ~~I would~~I'd like to do. If I had it my way, ~~I would~~I'd be at home finishing the laundry or at the store buying onions for tomorrow's dinner. Instead, ~~I am~~I'm surrounded by the clowns bumbling about as they ~~prepare~~prep to enter the ring for their mid-show performance. I linger at the back of the ensemble, away from the tent entrance flap, ~~towards~~ the rear wooden beams holding the seats of the audience sitting above me.

**Comment [J15]:** Use contractions throughout for consistency.

Why did I agree to do this? I've refused Jim's pleas before, ~~what~~What made this time different? This wasn't a new request; it hadn't caught me off guard. I ~~prepared~~prepped myself, defending against almost weekly attacks, always ready with some reason: *I haven't done that since college, and that was years ago. I've developed a new phobia of heights. After a fall down a flight of stairs, my balance hasn't been quite the same. Sorry, I have to wash my hair tonight. I have to rearrange my sock drawer.* Maybe this time I simply ran out of excuses. Maybe I was tired. Maybe I wanted that old feeling of glory. Whatever the reason, in the end, I agreed to my first performance since college. I agreed to do something ~~I had~~I'd vowed I'd never do again.

**Comment [J16]:** Chicago 5.220 under "toward, towards"

The final cheer from the audience signals the end of the clown's routine, ~~the~~an applause vibrating down the wooden supports to where my sequined body stands paralyzed with anticipation. Move to the entrance. It's time to shine. Clear the mind. Focus. Remember the breathing method. No, forget that. Just remember to breathe. Support the diaphragm. Listen for the cue. Shoulders back. Head up. Big smile. Everyone will love you.

It's just how I remember it: the lights searing down on me, the scream of the crowd. I can't bring myself to look at them. I'll lose my cool. They always threw me off guard, their eyes staring, wondering if I'll mess up and plummet to my death. I wonder that enough for ~~the both~~all of us, thank you. I smile and wave at the crowd I won't look at, focusing on the tent behind them, the ladder in front of me, the ladder beneath my feet. Each rung brings me ~~towards~~ almost certain death, and I'm fighting the urge not to turn and run. The last time I walked the wire, I fell thirty feet and broke both my femurs. And my confidence. I don't know if I'll get it back.

Climb the ladder. Hand, foot, hand, foot. Up and up. Keep that smile. Pull yourself onto the platform. Wave to the crowd. Don't look down. Walk to the end. Was the rope always this thin? ~~Always~~Always this long? Stop that. Focus. You will do this. Deep breath. Support the diaphragm. Listen for the cue. Shoulders back. Head up. Big smile. Everyone will love you.