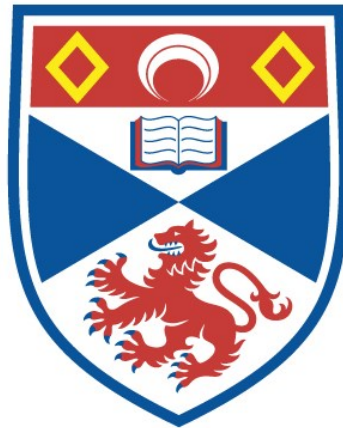


steps

Shloka Ramachandran

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of MFA
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Abstract

The poetry collection *steps* is a 40-page creative exploration of grief. Drawing on A.R. Ammons' essay 'A Poem is a Walk' and influenced by the work of Frank O'Hara, Alec Finlay, and Billy Collins, *steps* navigates ideas of loss, the body, and home as explored around the central framework of a long walk.

steps

a poetry collection

*I love you. I love you,
but I'm turning to my verses
and my heart is closing
like a fist.*
'Mayakovsky', Frank O'Hara

How does a poem resemble a walk?
'A Poem is a Walk', A.R. Ammons

Over the course of a year, the poet went on many walks along the same route and thought about many of the same things many, many times; 'steps' chronicles those walks and those thoughts.

Scottish Bluebells

A friend joins me for a walk by the river. It's the beginning of
Something idyllic, I think, with the river and the birds
The endlessness of the early summer.

Scottish bluebells bloom next to my feet. Daffodils flutter
In the breeze; it's all very Romantic. I don't always know
The names of flowers. My tongue is used to different syllables.

My tongue is used to different words, harsher around the edges,
Sanded down, like wood. Building blocks. Bifurcated: what I say and
Everything else that flows, like the river, into the harbour. But my friend,

She says, are those bluebells? You should write a poem about that.
Right now, on my desk, is a flower she picked for me. A wilted bluebell.
Everywhere there are reminders of life drawing to a weary close.

And isn't it strange? Flower poems become death poems, too.
I'm coming to terms with it. It's time to turn back around; it's been
Only ten minutes, but my knee's been giving me trouble of late

So she says, are you okay? And I say someday the endlessness of the river,
The flowers, the leaves, will consume me, someday I won't remember
The colour of the flower you picked for me on the way home,

I will go home and forget to press it between my heftiest books
Or forget that the river runs right along my backyard. Someday I will
Think of this moment and sigh. I don't say that, I say, I'm good, let's go

And she comes to my flat and I make us two cups of tea,
Just the way we both take it. Today I wake up, only to roll over
To see the bluebell on my desk, to struggle for an ending.

On the pearl (as a metaphor)

For Ari

My best friend says she kept her sadness inside her,
Like a pearl, hidden in the depths of the ocean.
Some of us talk in metaphors. It's easier that way.

I can't stop thinking about sadness pearls,
How I might wear them on a string around my neck,
How I might adorn myself with them on a walk,

Or for dinner, and then when it came time to present myself,
To the world, to you, to anybody, you would say,
Darling, don't forget your pearls.

What a sight for sore eyes!

Certainty

It all tracks back to this
This single moment in time
A blinking numerical display
On a handheld machine
By your bedside table

It all leads back to this, the path you take on your way home,
The way the leaves are changing, the way your footsteps
change, too

Have you ever thought about
Everything you have lost

I like to think about storing it all carefully underneath my bed
Along with a pen and my lost earphones, lurking in the void

I was so sure
That I would find the way home
That I would breathe a new life into myself
That I would find a way to conclude
I was so sure

But today is a new day and this road is a new road
And maybe the numbers will be different

And maybe
maybe
maybe

We find a way
To burn it all down

elephants

This, a haunted spectre of beauty roaming the paths of a tiny coastal town // this, an indented line leaving room for // the things we cannot say // the things that make your mouth curl // the things that make you think of Shakespeare's porpentines // this, an old legacy of an east Indian company // an old tea enterprise // a kettle about to switch itself off // this, the big brown elephant in the room // this, the smell that lingers

lingers

lingers

this, a contemporary tale of loss and woe // a historical account // you don't give a shit about // formulations // pining // angst // this, an unread WhatsApp message waiting to turn blue // this, what you wait for in the dead of the night // this, a 2 am cliché // different colours on our passports // ships that pass in the // whatever comes close to an absence of light // this, the act of existing

between margins

a clearly defined act of rebellion // something that doesn't piss anyone off // the devil // in the details // in Ohio // in phone conversations with my best friend // did I tell you // I've decided to moult // too much goes into this // a slow walk // what do you think Kafka would have to say about all of it // feathers and whatnot // I'm starting to agree with the concept of armchair politics // this, our legacy // sitting and talking about elephants // while time goes by // while I grow old // while my colour fades

Sunset in August

I don't have a painter's steady hand. All I have are my weak words
And my knee, weaker still, twingeing as I go
Just a little further. Here— past the hill—

The sunset breaks over the sky, turning everything bright, bright orange
We're on fire, we're all on fire,
And everything's gone purple and grey again as I walk home.

Sunset orange. Sunset purple. Sunset pink. Candy floss clouds.
Sunset blues: everything is coming to an end.

The sky says I miss you, I miss you, I miss you
The sky says come back home, impetuous child
The sky says make your weary way back to your room

Where the sheets are blue and pink like the skies of a Scottish dusk
And nothing ever comes to an end.

Time does not exist here

And if it does, the concept of it faded some time ago:
The universe is expanding and I am terrified of every second.
Take a left, here. Aage se U-turn maaro, and then you'll be

Right back where you began. It's fairly simple, don't worry.
Somewhere in the walk back home, we froze time.
And now we walk in tandem, you and I, waiting for the other

To speak, to think, to breathe life into the misty winter air.
I'll think about this moment later on. Or so I think now,
In so much as a now can exist when the rest of it doesn't.

It's a stretched out concept. Speaking of which, my doctor
Recommended a daily walk, and breathing exercises. Stretch out
Your mind, and your body, and all of that. Grief,

That same old never-forgotten story, plays in my head like an album
On repeat. My grandfather will never know that I'm here, but he walked daily,
Through Adyar and up to Besant Nagar sometimes,

And brought back treats for us, and made friends with the vendors
On the road. They remembered him after he left, because no one
Walked along his route anymore. No one asked after their children.

Time does not exist because I will live in this moment forever.
You are walking me home but I cannot stop shuddering— maybe
I can pass it off as a shiver from the cold, because it is cold,

Colder than it ever gets in Adyar or Besant Nagar,
But when you touch me home feels further than ever before,
And I want it back, I want it back, I want it back.

Tuesday afternoon

i.

Take this literally: I am one second away from falling apart.

What do you say when I'm not looking? Do you tell people I was strong? I don't know if I like that. Do you tell people that it was just one of those things, and you're sorry, you wish you could stay, but –

Do you believe yourself? Take this literally: there's a pep in my step because I imagine crushing you under my boot as I walk to Tesco to buy some strawberries.

Stand your ground. Someday this will pass, I'm sure, just like it always does, and until then we'll be here, leaky faucets in a defunct house, a fucked up neighbourhood with fucked up promises, and we'll just keep going, and going, and going, but you should like that, because going is what you like best.

ii.

Did you think any of this would be easy? It rains at home every summer.

This is not a metaphor; there's never been anything more metaphorically resonant. I don't long for the heat, but you get used to not having it, and then suddenly your skin feels browner in a sudden burst of sun and then Chennai feels closer than it ever did.

Every summer I think of you, and every summer I remember that I will never see you again.
Every summer, the sky cries and cries and
I will never see you again.

iii.

Maybe it exists, outside the realm of my vision. Some sort of meaning, shrivelled up in my fists, and my hands cramp because they've never been the same since that day ten years ago, I've never been the same since that day ten years ago.

Take this literally: I have no goddamned idea what I mean.

Lines from a train

Something about the beach. Each wave desperately trying
To reach the same point on the shore as before,
Or maybe even surpass it. Chasing the same glory

Till the tide recedes. It hits me, sometimes: some things
I can never capture in a poem. My train's on a bridge;
I look down, and see a parking lot and the beach and houses,

And the ocean, inexorable and fathomless. Everyone lives their lives,
Just the same as always, except there is something sparkling
At the edge of our vision. Something we all don't talk about,

Because we don't know how. Promise me that you'll wait for me, I think.
My train turns a corner, and I think who? Because I don't always know
Who I mean. But promise me that you'll wait.

I'm nearing the end of the ride. I can feel it in the train tracks:
Something about the way they seem to be sloping home
Or maybe that's you. Maybe that's what I'm thinking about.

Reassurances

Tell me you'll remember this moment.

How the setting sun makes everything look golden and nostalgic,
How it does my job for me.

Tell me you won't forget the mist of the early morning
And the way we set out, breathing out smoke

Like dragons guarding our treasure.

Tell me your feet know the walk to my house
Without you needing to think about it.

Tell me you'll think of me
When the cold seeps into your bones
And you are kept awake
In the endless night.

Tell me you've set out already.
Tell me you're on the way.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Battling against each other
In the dying light
Of this November evening.

Time muddles my memories
But this might've happened
All of this might have.

It's alright, you know
These things take time
Why should this be an exception?

Why should any of it?
These questions define my walk
Home, or whatever's closest these days.

My mother likes to say
My steps get shorter
When I get tired.

My hands are weak
But I don't make a big deal of it
It's always been that way.

I don't like being observed.
Everything hangs in the balance,
And you don't always know me.

Press a warm cup into my hands.
Does it feel better now?
I hate how well you know that.

I don't like to repeat myself
But I don't think you'd understand
I'm running out of words.

My horoscope said
Watch out for rain
And my umbrella's broken.

My best friend said
She can tell I'm drooping
By the way I say *I'm fine*.

My horoscope said
Quick to fall in love
And I laughed.

The Last October Poem

All I have is this: an echo of a laugh, a soft towel.
Your hand in mine sixteen years ago as we climbed the stairs.

My shadows are lengthening. It's getting to that time.
I spend every November pining. It's my little ritual. I walk home,

The days grow shorter, and I pine.
It's getting old now. I long for that old
Familiar longing. I like the routine of it.
I am older now, stronger, but a breeze

Could still tear me apart, if I let it,
And I still think about you, and about him,
Your laughs, mixing together in my mind,
And everyone else I've lost along the way.

All I have is this long walk home, a cup of tea,
And the comfort in falling

Endlessly

Apart.

Once upon a time, I met the gods,
And I said I want to miss everyone I've ever known,
I want to spend every November falling apart,
And they said, let it be so.

The Road Oft-Taken

We are walking along the sea. It starts to rain.

These catastrophic occurrences make me dig my heels in deeper and I do still think about you, I promise, but Frank had a point when he talked about hearts closing (like a fist) and I never thought it would come to this. I never thought about it at all, but maybe that's the problem. Catastrophising the mundane has become part of the walk home.

But still the dread lingers.

The tides seem to be telling some sort of story, but maybe I'm reading into it too much. It's not my job to see stories in the waves. This means that because this has to mean that because if this doesn't mean that then that means this means nothing, nothing at all, and I will be left with that same days-old emptiness that lingers on and fills the corners, the spiderwebs' rightful domain. (The apophenia of it all.)

It's been going on for days like this.

How do you take your tea in the morning? I've started to take it stirred longer than it needs to be, and I admire how it drops onto my white cabinet doors. At least something isn't afraid to take up space, I think, and then I think, shut up, fuck off, don't make a metaphor out of everything. My tea, my room, my morning, and my own voice in my own head trying to cut the cliché out of a daydream.

A terrible thing is happening.

Don't let that deter you. What were you going to say? Something about how much you hate when I raise my voice when I stay quiet when I'm there when I'm not – something like that? Don't let me get in your way. Train me to keep my neck at a 45-degree angle so I can watch for your messages, so I can wait for the new way you will find to make me wish I hadn't ever said anything at all. Maybe a list. Or something in numbers. Italics, or something to make this all make sense. Something.

We're almost home. The rain persists.

Episodic Metaphors

My head hurts, which is the best time to write about these things.
The poets are writing away, trying to make a metaphor out of their lives,
And I am in bed, looking at my legs, picturing them in a park,

Picturing a walk, picturing my way home, picturing it all.
A world where the sun doesn't cast everything in pain.
A world where I don't scream out *agony!* at a crack of light.

Maybe someday I'll find the words to say.
Maybe someday I'll find the way home. It ties together.
With a thread, with a whisper. With the agonies.

I daresay, my good man, do I repeat myself?
Indeed, I do repeat myself, but the agonies repeat,
So why should my words be any different?

The agonies! They hold me together on the way home.
I grow used to them: the agonies, my tea, the dust
On my bookshelves. We laugh so we don't cry,

You know how it is. The same old thing. Take one
In the evening, two in the morning, and here,
Here are the emergency ones. Got all that? Good.

There'll be a test in the morning. Recap, to the best
Of your knowledge, the poet's migraine medication.
Leave no stone unturned. Recap the poet's journey

Back to the screen. Recap the poet's journey out of bed
And back onto her feet to walk and to write about walking,
Which is to write about so many other things.

here among the flowers

abstract

aches

awaken me

mornings are morbid

it's not really the best time

words

fail

there's no making up

for the time

we've lost

along the way

there's no

reaching out

to mend

the burned bridges

you reach

and reach

you look for me

and you find

symbolic

utterances

of regret

outwards expressions

of ineptitude

there are no steps

there's no going back

there's no making up

there's no way back

there's no respite

there's only

the abstract ache

waking me up in the morbid mornings

and me, as always,

locating myself here

a garden of lost words

plucking at sounds

hoping for it all to feel right some day

and another thing:

the pebble that I kick out of my way
takes on the shape of my paltry verse

like the story of a blue god opening his mouth a
nd showing his mother the entire universe

so much contained in a second
the infinity of it all!

clichés are clichés but sometimes they ring true:
it's enough to make you feel disgustingly small

another story: my dusty hands
tippy tapping away at my keys

waiting to find something
waiting for the right similes

waiting for the seagulls
to come and join me

it's only a matter of time
before I run out of schoolyard rhymes

like the sound of a phone ringing
through the years into your ears

you can get used to a marvellous amount
if you endure and you endure

Consumption

It's strange, the ways we find to reach out.

It's strange, how your world grows slowly away from mine
how mine shrinks to my bed and my footsteps and my tea
and the recurring motifs, the ones I have held close since I was sixteen

And isn't it Romantic? Isn't it funny? How large the world seemed back then!
And now instead of growing to fit it, I have shrunk it down around myself

cling film shrink wrap safe for consumption
it has consumed me
and now here we are
consumed

So reach out! Reach out back to me, let's hold our hands out to each other,

Let's walk,
Let's talk,
Let's live,
Let's die,
Let's let our deaths

light the path back home
somehow.

February

What do I think? I think that I think
Too much about motion and I forget
How to still my restless bones; and now

The days, they grow longer. Winter is coming
To an end. A tired, unseemly end. A slow halt.
A laborious stutter: what awakens is not the plants,

Not the bluebells and the daisies peeking out
From beneath the frost, but something else,
Something that tells me that this, all of this,

Is coming to an end, too. The sound, the wind
Whispering in the trees as I walk back home
In the dark seems to say *you absolute idiot*,

Don't you know? Don't you? And I say *Know what?*
Know what? But then all subsides, and I walk
In silence, me and my bag thumping against my hip,

Me, alone in the Scottish air, musing about walks,
Musing about the world waking up as I think
Only, as I often do, about wanting to sleep.

Intermission

It all goes somewhere. It all goes
Somewhere. It all goes somewhere.
It all goes. River into an ocean.

Water finding its level. And so I found you,
So my hand reached out to you, so now I find
Salt water on my lips, so now my throat cracks.

It all goes somewhere. Footsteps in the night.
A hand reaching for the blue light of a phone in the dark.
A phone number. Dialed. Dialed. No answer.

I don't want to speak to people who knew you.
I don't want to speak to people who don't know of you.
If I'm being honest? I don't want to speak at all.

There's so much waiting these days. And so now I hold my tea,
Fingers shaking, waiting for steadiness, waiting for stability,
Waiting to find my level. Waiting for this day to pass.

A body in motion, staying in motion, acted upon,
Internal balanced forces. I don't want to talk about it.
It all goes somewhere. Bodies in motion.

Let's not talk about it. Let's not talk.
I find it harder these days. To talk about it.
To do my job. Everything goes somewhere.

Winter poem

O be still my beating heart
For I still hope to love, I still hope to love,
I still hope to walk through these paths again,

I still hope for more,

Against all the odds, I hope. Brambly thorns
And bushes – hardly an impediment against it,
If you think about it, if you really think–

And I still hope, I still walk these paths,

So be still, be still, look out for it
In the darkness. A sparrow flutters outside
My window, just for a second

And through the frost a garden blooms

Through the frost the world grows back anew
And still, we hope for an end to winter,
Still we walk and pray for peace.

hello, stranger.

here in the early morning's blue
light find what dawns on you find
what pulls you back home

here with your coat hung up
with your chest drawn tight with
your knees drawn up against the cold

do you think you mistake it
for something you thought
you saw once around these parts

here an unknown entity
here a passing presence
here a trick of a light here

where the sea meets your
house white walls blue skies
everything as it's meant to be

here where you have grown
estranged unravelled entangled
here where you have learned

how to fall apart have you found it
or do you find yourself here still
tracing the steps of your walk home

Jet lag

Twenty-hour days

Slow walks home

My chest draws tight

The world, a red-tinged blur
Benevolently out of focus

more about the rain

water seeks its own level
and this, the drip
 drip
 drip

of the raindrops
racing each other home

tells its own story

what it is we're all trying to find
when it comes down to it

saturday

finish reading a book
look in the library for another
swim among the words
hope for salvation
set fire to the days

everyone you know
will be dead
so very soon
oh well the wife's back up
so let's see to that

but you should really be reading more
and walking more
also exercising more
but it's important to get your rest in
and don't forget to check your email

and look into my eyes
right into them
and tell me if this is going to last
tell me if any of this is going to last
tell me if you can

tilt your head to the side
tell me how soon it will be
before all of this
comes to an end
tell me how much longer we can just

keep
going
on
like
this

Do pigeons go to heaven?

Is there a god for the winged rats of the sky?

Or an angel, maybe— do they look at one another, one feathered biped to another?

This is all to say— there's a dead pigeon on the road. I saw it yesterday and now, as I walk to the bus stop, I see it again.

I've trapped it

In the present tense

I'm always looking at it, always wondering about feathers, and life

And the other thing, the thing with feathers.

I don't think the nature poets ever wrote too much
about the dead pigeons that they found on the way.

Here I am, setting myself apart.

Do pigeons have last words? Was there one last plaintive call?

Tense is a funny thing.

I exist in this moment:

me, a dead pigeon, Harry Styles cooing softly at me through my headphones.

What a strange place for it all to come to an end.

duck

which is
all to
say that

the ducks,
they quack
out your name

as if they know

and I,
I hold
a place
for you

in the silence
between my words
between my days
it's easy to pretend

my
feet
they
step
new
ground
new
shoes

sparkly white
sparkly blue skies
sparkle in my eyes
sparkle as we die

perfect
places
to look at ducks
and think of death

Cove

(...) Why do I tell you these things?

You are not even here.

John Ashbery, 'The Room'

The world is waking up, bit by bit.

These years will dry into dusty words in between books.

The world is waking up. Can you feel it?

Somewhere in the distance, a temple bell sounds. Listen for it.

Jasmines have a distinctive scent.

You can't mistake it for anything else.

They don't grow in this part of the world.

Another thing you'll learn to do without.

You learn to ride your bicycle by the sea.

Coastal specialties. That was years ago.

Wheels, spokes, chains, salt air, warmth, peeling skin—

Why am I telling you this? You weren't there with me.

The world is waking up, bit by bit.

Like a crab, we scuttle out of our shells.

You can't lose yourself in the self anymore.

Whatever it was, it's gone now, you'll never find it.

Salt

I have forgotten the right way to know you.
It'd be beautiful in a movie: the rain, the beach, the waves.

Reality, a lukewarm cup of tea, bricks waiting to rupture,
A walk I will not take:

Some paths are best left unknown.
Do you know what I mean?

Home feels closer than it ever did before.
I'm forgetting what you would have said. How you would've
Answered me. Answer me now. Won't you tell me?

Don't leave me here. It's getting dark.
It's getting darker. Don't leave me.

My head hurts this time of year.
Abstract thoughts leave abstract answers.
I have forgotten the right way to know you.

It's on the tip of my tongue. Words are getting harder.
The waves of the ocean, salt-tipped, sound in my ears
Every night when I try to sleep, crash against me,
Again and again, and I am left thinking, don't go.

Everything, crashing against the shore,
As I walk home, as I wait.

After Purity

*Finally I remove each of my organs and arrange them
on a small table near the window.*

Billy Collins, 'Purity'

The traffic signal beeps. A woman with a cane crosses the road.
She's wearing a pink quilted jacket and a matching beanie. It must be
A cold day. Soon I'll eat my cereal, and drink another cup of tea
And then maybe I'll have a look at the work
I have to do. A to-do list, never-ending, stretches out,
From last January to here; I am just beginning to cross things off.

It's getting a little tiring to write poetry about walks and death
When I am so consumed in life, which is so consumed by staying still,
Which is so all-consuming. It's no wonder that the beep brings
Me back to life. Take me there, take me to a road crossing,
Take me to a place where a wait has a finity to it. I have a call soon.
And then I'll call my mother, because I like to bore her with this shit, too.

Billy Collins once said something about shedding his clothes,
And his organs, and writing poetry like that, a skeleton at a typewriter.
Something to that effect – I read it at the beach yesterday, and now,
I sit to write, he's infected me. I wish I could remove myself, I wish
I could take myself off, I wish I could be alone with my words.
No organs, no illnesses, no to-do lists. A skeleton with a typewriter.

I walked home in a rush yesterday: I worried that something was wrong
With something-or-the-other, we don't have to get into the details now,
I cut my walk short, and I had a long shower, and I took my phone out,
And I thought at least there's this. The traffic signal beeping. My organs,
Stubbornly in their skin. Stubbornly in my skin. All-consuming notions.
Take me to a finity, I beg you. Take me where my steps lead somewhere.

Ashes to ashes

Make a plan: make the gods laugh.
Maybe we'll meet again.

Maybe we'll all fall apart.

I lived, once, you'll say, and breathe out smoke.
A habit easy to break. I lived, once.
But that's a story for another day.
I lived, too, I think. It's hard to see through the grey.

Grey smoke. White smoke.
The sun's too bright.
Everything you'll ever love
Will disappear from your sight.

I lived, once. The words you never spoke.
Sometimes, I admit, it's best to leave things unsaid.
Sometimes, I admit, I imagine you in ash.

Bookshop Dogs

It's been a long few months. I'm trying to cut it down.
There's a dog at the bookshop. He settles between my knees
And begs for pets. It's a Wednesday, I have a dog at my feet,
And it is biting cold. It's been cold for a while now.

A metaphor for what came before. The cold, it bites.
I hate the rain when it's cold. It feels wrong. Something about it.
This has been the poet with the weather, my best friend says.
She adds some disco ball emojis, just for good measure.

I am falling out of form. I am touching my face. I am finding my
Sorrows. I am having a drink with my grief at the end of a long day.
This is not the song of everybody. I do not contain multitudes,
Not anymore. Something is clicking, but I've lost the sense of place.

I am beginning to fall into that age-old trap: I am beginning to think
The world exists for me to write about it. If I don't write it, then
It doesn't happen. Like some sick therapy. Speaking of which, I've decided
I don't want to talk about boundaries anymore. So let's leave off, yeah?

I am tripping on my way home. I'm a mess. I'm watching the sunset
Over the main street and wondering if it's too late to change my mind.
I'm lining my feet along the cobblestones and drawing patterns.
Look, Ma, no hands. I'm a real artist now. I can even cry on command!

spring cleaning

*(...) O you
were the best of all my days*
Frank O'Hara, 'Animals'

do you remember being eleven
sitting under the desk in your bedroom
huddled up with glasses of ice and diet coke
how we would swish it around
pretend it was something cooler

daily phone calls
from my pale pink nokia flip phone

I can still recite your number from memory

the first flowers of the year have started to bloom
my mind is occupied with thoughts of spring cleaning

I dust off the cobwebs in the corners of my mind
I don't know about the best of any days but we had our own tricks up our sleeves

we'd shelter from the summer
with just an air conditioner
and our endless imaginations

More of the same

I am pleading with the gods. I am brewing a cup of tea.
I am embracing the present continuous.
I am continuing down the course I set myself. I
am thinking about the power of a simile.

More of the same. I am holding your hand.
I am calling my father. I am listening to sounds.
I am wondering if I can fit everything I own into two suitcases.
I am thinking about when I will return.

The sun's peeking out. Dispatches from far away.
Postcards I try to fit my heart into.
I am tiptoeing onto the pier. I am finding new light.
I am walking. I am thinking about dogs.

I am dreaming about numbers on a machine.
I am thinking about you. The world is possible.
I am enraged at the sight of pigeons. I am this moment.
I am perfectly trite. I am willing to engage.

I am waiting on emails. I am refreshing webpages.
I am thinking longingly of my childhood bedroom.
I cannot find the perfectly sized gold hoop for my ears.
It's impossible to fit it all in these days.

steps

a step

 a step

 a step

we're getting closer

 I like to think about

 the comedic rule of three

 a perfectly brewed cup of tea

 the power of a recurring motif

 the wind rustling through the leaves

how the salt-capped waves seem to say hi

 the agony and I

 catching up for chai

 we like to confide

 I'm getting used to defying

we're getting closer

 to how I unmake myself

we're getting closer

Poem for a rainy day

Spill your metaphors. It's a rainy day:
Nothing to save for anymore. Touch your face.
Touch my face. Tell me what's different.
I'm saving up my punctuation.

I'm starting to worry about time.
I'm punctuating my sentences
As much as I need to. No more,
No less. I'm hoping for salvation.

I'm hoping to find reason in it all.
Aren't we all? Look: predictions
Of thunderstorms. Look: the clouds,
Rolling in, spelling out your name.

Look: nothing's the same. Look:
I'm hoping that we can go back home,
At the end of all of this, and maybe
I'll make us some tea, boiled on the stove,

Hot water and two spoons of tea leaves,
Cardamom and a splash of milk,
And I'll find the old mugs that we like,
And we'll take a long sip and pretend.

I learned to self-soothe at a young age.
Look: it's not all bad, is it? Not really.
I'm thinking about falling, right down,
Through the pavement cracks. Look:

It's here, splintered right down the middle.
I'm getting used to mining for gold.
I'm starting to worry about time, again.
I'm starting to think falling is the best option.

A walk poem

i.

A walk is a walk: a journey externalised,
Except that some folks grow fatigued
Externalising their fatigue. Day in,
Day out.

A walk is a walk.

But some folks have bad knees and twinging backs
Sometimes they just want to stay i
And stay still. A walk is a walk, even when it's not.

ii.

I was just on my way back from somewhere, walking to somewhere else, and I was thinking
about thinking about you, just like I always do.

iii.

I have been holding my breath in for so long, waiting to exhale,
Waiting to be given the sign to live again.

Your voice fills up these spaces: there's one less person to call now.

Sometimes I think the sound of the wind is the same as the sound of nothing at all. The world
is holding its breath along with me.

iv.

A walk is a walk— you get the drift.

Everyone asks me how I am. These generic placeholders ruin me;
I avoid them like the plague, like your name,
Like everything that was new and now has grown
Old and tired. The only person I wanted to tell isn't around anymore.

My tired old feet stumble to the same tired places
My thumb hovers over your name.

You wouldn't believe me if I told you how much I miss you.

You wouldn't believe me if I told you how much the world shifted to accommodate for your
presence, how nothing's returned to normal since.

v.

Some folks bleed. Some folks bleed into everything else. Some folks bleed and bleed until
they have nothing left to give anymore. Every few months, nurses tell me how stubborn my
veins are during blood tests. Clinically thin-skinned, that's me. A thin-skinned poet wanders
the streets, thinks of you, wants to go home. Rinse and repeat, an album on shuffle on
Spotify.

Fire

Here I am now, burning. I don't always know
How much I know. Whether I can trust what I know. I
t seems to flicker in and out of sight, and
I'm left here thinking about fires and ash,

As I always do.
My head hurts. But that's nothing new these days.
I think I have forgotten how to cling.
I have forgotten you

And now anyone trying to hold my hand
Feels like a chokehold. Is that normal? Is that alright?
I'm trying not to need validation,
But a little bit wouldn't hurt. I know you meant well,

By the way. I don't know how to tell you that.
I don't know how to tell you that I can't remember.
The way I used to. I know that I felt different,
Before everything turned to ash in my hands,

But who am I to speak of pre-ashen times?
It's not my prerogative. My emotions aren't my business
These days. They do their thing and I do mine.
Somewhere along the way

I think of fires and hands, as I always do,
And sometimes the rain, because that seeps in
As it always does. I clung on, as long as I could.
My hands grew tired.

Sadness Pearl

I don't care for conclusions.

But like an airplane rumbling over me
In the dead of the night
There are some things you can't avoid.

There are some things I can't. The truth,
Whatever it is, looms over me,
A malfunctioning engine,

Growing louder, louder. What went wrong?
When did it end? There's no reason,
No rhyme to tie it together.

Did you know pigeons aren't wild?
They're feral. Some of us can only exist
In cities. There are some muscles you need to strain.

There are some bones you need to break on your way home.
I don't like to read out loud. I'm worried about cadence.
I don't like to tell you what's wrong.

I'm worried about tone. Meanwhile, like a nocturnal
Airplane, you are kept awake in the dead of the night.
There's no trying to sleep.

I'll always be a city girl at heart. It shouldn't be this easy
To adjust to the quiet, to listen to the sound of the waves,
But you get used to it,

If you know what I mean. There are some aches
That have to be felt. It's starting to act up again.

I develop
Blisters
In new places

And I learn to break myself in.

Shades

Some smug son of a bitch would tell you that white isn't a colour:
It's a shade. It's a spectrum. It's not a colour, per se.
Physics and whatnot. Scientists save the world, and they're important
But they can be so fucking annoying, because I got in my own way
Before I could tell you what I want to tell you. I may as well now,
May as well spit it out. Alright. Here it goes:

I'm wearing a white turtleneck shirt today. It's the first time
In a while that I'm wearing this colour. (Shut up, imaginary scientist
In my head piping up about colour spectrums and shades.)
I've been sticking to the same colours recently: grey, black, red, blue.
My own personal flag of mourning. But I switched it up today.
It shouldn't make a difference. I wore a sweater on top of my shirt,

Anyway, and a coat on top of that, and what little peeked out
Was covered by a scarf wrapped several times about my throat,
Because I'm talking about going out in Scotland, of course there's a scarf.
Of course there's a coat and a beanie and a scarf, all black,
All monotone. Flag-bearing mourners, the lot of us. But the shirt,
It was white. It was new. It was important enough to tell you about it.

Put out your hand

The poets find beauty
in the end of an unfinished sentence.

So it is with you, and so I am here,
Trying to tell people that I miss you

Trying to make it seem less trite.
It's all very trying,

Being alive. I don't know
Whether I would recommend it.

And so I am here
Measuring out my moments,

Waiting for your laugh to fill
The gaps between my footsteps.

The god of death was overwhelmed,
So he sent illnesses to do his bidding.

The poets find beauty
In the end.