

## IF YOU REALLY LOVE A WRITER

“How vain it is to sit down to write  
when you have not stood up to live.”  
—Henry David Thoreau

Everyone wants to give a writer the perfect notebook. Over the years I've acquired stacks: one is leather, a rope of Rapunzel's hair braids its spine. Another is tree-friendly, its paper reincarnated from diaries of poets now graying in cubicles. One is small and black as a funeral dress, its pages lined like the hands of a widow. There's even a furry blue one that looks like a shag rug or a monster that would hide beneath it—and I wonder why? For every blown-out candle, every Mazel Tov, every turn of the tassel, we are handed what a writer dreads most: blank pages. It's never a notebook we need. If we have a story to tell, an idea carbonating past the brim of us, we will write it on our arms, thighs, any bare meadow of skin. In the absence of pens, we repeat our lines deliriously like the telephone number of a parting stranger until we become the craziest one on the subway. If you really love a writer, fuck her on a coffee table. Find a gravestone of someone who shares her name and take her to it. When her door is plastered with an eviction notice, do not offer your home. Say I Love You, then call her the wrong name. If you really love a writer, bury her in all your awful and watch as she scrawls her way out.

## DURING THE WEEK I THOUGHT

## I WAS CARRYING YOUR CHILD

I gutted the library, hunting  
for what happens when a coyote fucks  
a Labrador, if their pup can be trained  
to lick the mailman.

Counted all the stairs from my kitchen  
to the cellar, siled through the phonebook  
for a friend who loved me enough  
to push me down them.

Discovered my mother humming to the garden:  
voice fat with water, chrysanthemums  
swelling faster from the sound.

During the week I thought  
I was carrying your child,  
I did not sing.

## THE WORST THING I EVER TAUGHT MY GIRL

*from my mother's perspective, after Jeanann Verlee*

When my daughter came home from school, sorrow shrill  
as a recess bell, her story hop-scotching through hiccups  
to tell me that Bobby keeps yanking her pigtails  
like two ends of a jump rope, calling her  
*Stupid* so often she swears he thinks it's her name—  
I cupped her cheeks, shivering like the heart of a snowman,  
and said *My baby, my beautiful girl, don't you know? He's trying  
to get your attention. It probably means that he likes you.*