Space Pod

The morning my biology teacher lands the Space Pod
it’s impossible not to imagine tree rings –
wet black counters, or formaldehyde taste –
empty pigs with radial tongues stuck out as if to say
\textit{hold still, we’re expanding}.

My father stands motionless around backing vehicles
in orbit, and I’ve always meant to walk like that:
a wooden fragment of fence, slight leaning,
no longer trying to keep anything in.

When I was fifteen my father fixed the car
for me, so we named the Space Pod for its lights, shape.
Neon red in square radio digits, gas gauge flushing
a salvaged scrap of light and metal, maybe time.

As in melted candy, searing seatbelts, an era –
smell of trees and sleeping farm animals.
My father fixes cars, so customers launch the Space Pod
when their regular cars fail. A tradeoff:
single shed gum wrappers for my scraps.

A marker powders my teacher’s fingers grainy black
like cosmic dust. A real piece ‘a you-know-what
he winks, as if this joke could be shared like
a borrowed car, and from the back row
I consider somewhat privately
that we are not all cut out of wood.
A joke from our universe (which is really a microverse)

They laugh until laughing makes them kiss.  
They kiss until kissing makes them laugh.  

– Sarah Ruhl

Jokes

Q. What becomes of our skin after a day in the rain? Is this when we sink?

A. No one knows what becomes of us, except to say that soon science may control the weather and in that case the rain will fall at once, in flood. Our skin becomes glass.

Q. What are we to the ones who came before?

A. Giant

Q. I tripped while stepping down a log and rolled exactly sixty-two times. Which way is back?

A. The only way to prove direction is to trace your hand down the back of someone who reminds you of you and feel for truth to prickle. If there are fish, they may jump to tell you.

Jokes without punchlines

Q. We are delighted to find children naïve, but is the idea of a tooth fairy really stranger than the existence of dinosaurs?

Q. The time I wanted
to be a doctor

Q. Were people with near-death experiences once affected by the stories of near-death experiences? What of their mothers?

Q. Me
   a doctor

_Punchlines without jokes_

A. Snoring does not sound like the letter z. Marriage sounds hard.

A. Flooding – a familial storm how could you leave?

A. My mother takes care of the very old and very young, neither of whom can remember she does this.

A. Me
   giant
Potluck

My mother and I sit at the kitchen counter eating tomato sandwiches filled with dirt – silence – as though we are for the moment next-door neighbors, sharing a ten-minute lunch lull before returning to our sovereign driveways, the dry leaves in barrels to burn, acid-wash watering cans, sweet flavor of ash wafting through our crop top pine border, each kneeling in muddy pants and wishing as we work for thicker grass or sidewalks clean of orange chalk and power tools, separate lives merging from the same street sign. We are drinking tea now. From my side of the street I hear the swimming, the blow-up pool bodies aching to stretch like an indie song. A puddle of mascara forms a worm in my eye. In a minute, we will return to work dumping our crumbs in the yard, and what the birds don’t take will follow us home tonight. Some mothers sit in their kitchens with no past, no sounds, chests split like a broken drum. When I rock in my chair – refilling her glass and mine – our tongues become young trees. Our glasses feel like wet shovels.
Stage Directions for the Four Last Things

I. Death

Walking, she begins to write a letter. There is no paper. She is not confused but her eyes wish she could scrawl more faces than names. Her hair shines blue in the light.

II. Judgement

When she reads the letter aloud, it sounds more like a song. Her voice is pleased, then frustrated. She throws the letter into the sky, like a frantic dove. It floats there.

III. Hell

She does not know how to send it home.

IV. Heaven

She lies on the floor and blinks into the blue. Above, the letter flies. She begins to breathe.
The Doppler Effect

My buzz brother – his own head
  surgical scar above his ear
  Pigeon Creek calls for
newspaper rot, flat water
  other things we don’t want.
Once, I raked a disintegrate path like a bat
  through the woods
  where hair regenerates.

Brother, advise me: excellence is habit
  you say an R&B singer
which isn’t an R&B singer but Aristotle
cold feet – the basement at night – is everyone
  almost alone?

College notebooks wide-ruled freshman year
Talk to the phone
  or use my tongue if you need it,
drop of voice three minutes,
  buzzer pitching down
  a curved skull.

I wind the cord
  solid fingers tangle bound
tie it up and shut it down
dissonant song yanking its end
  which is a tree.

Three last name boys were a switch let’s
  gather wet slabs of wood
pound into a tree dial tone throb
  like a single bone
till something starts to sound.
  Can I crystallize
into a beat?

In high school, passing geometry
  whatever problems
I couldn’t understand but older now
  please grow it out.
Your little finger gnarled bump
curling years
Piano echo soft hammer even
  now uneven
clumps.
When the buzz bone broke      last names offered a trash bag
    of popcorn but
        I’m bothered by compromise
like a shaving neck
    exchange for being a brother.

There’s a point     when the world stops
    seeming symmetric
        even with a finger
to measure.
How to sing a dying song

If I show you the concrete where I broke my skin on a pickle jar, I’d rather show you a bone – intangibly inward – so thank you for seeing it that way. But how can we feel an old song before it’s forgotten, or how others drift into places other than mortality? With the advent of the gun, verbal combat replaced swords on the stage, shots too quick and sure for our lust. What does this say for Hedda’s pistols? The people who love me sometimes wish I would scream. I prefer swordplay. Every friend I have learned to know has opened for me a poster-plastered bedroom, tired curtains and tokens of childhood. A perfectly-balanced blend of nostalgia and despair. Is this how we want to see one another? One of my regrets is that I can’t hang up an undesired phone call. There’s no virtuosity in recalled voices, aimless shots. Can you entrust the perception without experience? It’s said that the swan sings a delicate song before dying, a final gesture of love suspended in the ear, but I always forget that I am singing.
Moon Floats

Your hand turned telescope catches the moon, laughs – the banality of the punch, hunched forward like a fishtail.

I forget the last time I felt truly anomalous except frisbee, so please stop trying to make me enjoy it.

Let’s be clear. What I want most out of this is an electric outlet.

The gnarled knot in the tree outside my building looks exactly like an old dog, and I can so easily imagine dancing with you.

This is what I mean by currents.

I overslept today and my impulse was to blame the window for not waiting for morning.

When we walk home you point to the moon so I pretend not to understand refractions of light.

I dread the time it takes for you to know that I never liked swimming.

In the driveway my father sits smoking how I first learned to breathe.

You dream casually of highways looming in air but how then can I look up, on Saturdays with grass, and sigh?

I’m not withholding, just letting you filter like cold fog, or smoke.

At night, I lie on my bed and repeat every word aloud, submerged as in water, and even then I can’t remember everything.