

# ***Everything's an Antecedent***

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## *Preface*

### **Poetry Deadline in My Living Room: 3:00am**

I watch a couple decide between three houses on the television across the room; they need to move and I can't handle silence late at night. I can tell you the outcome on this one: they'll pick the home with the biggest kitchen or the pool in the backyard because they love it. But they can't afford the mortgage and I can't seem to get my fingertips to click the right keys. Why doesn't HGTV have a show called *Consequences*? Commercial break: a cat knocks over a crystal bowl of dry-can food. Sometimes the heat radiating from a cup of tea makes me feel important enough to write. I ponder this on the way to the kitchen and wonder: will this be my most poetic moment of the night? The couple is back and the realtor is pointing out the built-in cabinets inside a colonial with green shutters. The couple fantasizes about throwing wine-tasting parties in the formal dining room while I delete and delete until all I have left are fourteen sinking syllables: *poetry is not always what we say it is, is it?* Watching steam rise off chamomile tea nearly puts me to sleep. I should have made a latte. Hell, I should have started this poem yesterday instead of playing a two-hour Facebook Scrabble game with my eleventh grade prom date. It looks like the couples have signed a lease for the classic tudor. I, conversely, am still uncertain. How long is chamomile tea supposed to steep for, anyway? A new realtor, a new city, a new couple grace the screen across the room. In front of me, the laptop battery light blinks: twenty minutes left.

## *Everything's an Antecedent*

### **Karma in the Maternity Ward**

In the moments before she becomes a mother,  
Karma longs for the instant before she first  
burned her hand on a stove; the precious years  
when she assumed that falling out of love  
wouldn't leave her broken; the fleeting calm  
of sitting on a velvet settee, not knowing  
her parents were about to say that Smokey  
was an angel-cat now, sipping milk in heaven.

When she sees her daughter, Karma weeps.  
Why must something so utterly pure be  
taken into the world and made to breathe and speak  
and make mistakes? Karma feels a pull  
to carry this flawless being above the troposphere  
so that no one can remove the cozy yellow swaddling.

One day, this girl will learn to stand in the shower  
so water warms every inch of skin;  
she will know the perfect angle to hold a brush  
to blush her cheekbones. Karma kisses her  
daughter's temple and smooths a wrinkle from the blanket.  
Karma names the baby Irony; trusts  
that Irony, too, will walk the tenuous path  
between what is real and what is ideal.

## First Snow of the Year, Age 6

*The-first-snow-of-the-year!*

Whispers twirl me forward—  
forward and forward.

I feel like the dancer  
in my jewelry box,  
with snowflakes falling  
and falling and  
kissing my eyelashes.

I am the giggling star  
of some romantic comedy  
and each flake  
is sparkling and perfect.

“Did you know,” someone tells me  
“They’re all different  
and they’re all beautiful.  
Just like people.”

I exhale, toss my arms  
into the frosted white,  
watch a flake  
escape from the sky;  
wide-eyed, charmed.  
The melting is too far  
away for me to see.

## **Karma goes out for Mexican**

Three women sit, sipping margaritas, summoning Karma with their crimson nails.

Karma overhears and tries to hide behind a tortilla chip; she is tired of granting favors. A month ago when they were here, that blonde ate the last burrito; now, she is claiming she's not very hungry. Karma peeks at the women from behind a piñata and wonders whether anyone else knows that the redhead lies about making homemade marinara sauce when she has dinner parties.

Karma squeezes a lime through the rim of a Corona bottle and wonders if she can escape unseen while the brunette flips her hair behind her shoulder. She used up all the hot water earlier because the pomegranate shower gel smelled delicious.

Karma sits down again, her back to the women and their secrets. She listens to them order enchiladas and giggle at some gossip. They toast Karma—the cosmic queen of justice—and a glass shatters. “My fault!” says the redhead, but Karma knows better.

## The Great Gatsby

Gatsby's evening soirees are aglow with gilded cuff links. Ruby bracelets glitter; jazz orchestras chime under the plush moon. Guests whisper, "Where does Gatsby get all his money?" Speaking of money, Gatsby thinks Daisy's voice twinkles like money; he can't stop dreaming about it. Meanwhile, Daisy cries, "It's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool." Nick watches the romance simmer, wonders why Gatsby looks as though something was lost in Daisy's embrace. Perhaps this is the cost of living too long on the wings of a lonely dream. The green light flickers, fades to dusk. Nick lies on Gatsby's abandoned beach, overcome by the weight of desires stretched across the horizon—so feeble. A finger's touch turns gold to dust.

## **I am the boy holding Anxiety's hand**

Out of spite, I don't open the door for her.  
Immediately, I regret it. She used to  
nestle the pads of her feet between my calves  
and I'd rest my wrist on her knee's warm curve.  
But she is all hipbones and vertebrae and knuckles  
knocking together now without words.  
She is teeth that chew and chew and chew  
at a grape until it's pulped and sour.  
She swallows, tips her tongue to the  
spot on the roof of her mouth between tooth and gum  
"that's enough. I'm getting a stomachache."  
"Again? Why?"  
She looks away.  
We both  
sigh.



## Saint Anthony

Long ago, my Grandfather picked up shards of a violin and pieced them back together into an instrument. It went something like this: my mom, the perfectionist, played scale after scale because she wanted to learn how to vibrato. Her little sister reached across the gap between their beds and grabbed the violin. Brought it down like a gavel; shouted "THIS IS MY ROOM TOO!" Shards of maple crashed across the floor. I can imagine the aftermath: my mom petrified, the bow still poised in the air; chaos erupting in fractures and echoes. Thirty years later, my twin cousins and I played cards in my mom's old bedroom. Jeff nursed his infected pinkie, but when Chris won Uno he jumped up and accidentally sat on Jeff's hand. Jeff yowled, and all the bad blood bled on the carpet. On this same carpet, a few years later, my grandfather stepped on a needle while he was swallowing his Parkinson's pills. My grandmother lit candles and sprayed holy water and prayed to the patron saint of lost things and lost causes and miraculously, the needle edged its way out of my grandfather's foot the next day at breakfast. My grandmother saved the needle in a frame and hung it on the wall next to the poem about footprints. When I forget where I left my house keys or my favorite necklace, I close my eyes and recite the words my grandmother taught me one winter evening when my mitten vanished in a pile of snow on the driveway: *Saint Anthony, Saint Anthony, come around. Something is lost that must be found.*

**Swim Practice used to be every day from 6:30-9:00pm**

She pauses in the doorways of Laundromats; inhales the smell of fresh Clorox.

Disregarded muscles in her calves tense to a fraction of their former glory. Her fingers twitch. The eternity of each second ticks past. She peers at blinking decimals across the room and believes that a sliver of a moment could still make all the difference.

Water sloshes into someone's Colors cycle. Motors hum the song of a worn-out filter system.

Flip flops squish in a sudsy puddle on the tile floor; a far-off coach whistles, "Go!"

She ponders climbing into the machine to tumble with the socks.

*Wait!, she thinks, I am still*

*taking my mark. A buzzer makes her  
jump.*

## Ode to a Suburban Oak, Unadorned by a Yellow Ribbon

Oak's gnarled knobs are barkless—  
soft, even, to the touch.  
Gusts swell; autumn foliage wisps  
towards the ground.  
A child skips across the grass—  
rusty, rasping, the leaves crackle.

White pines surround the oak,  
balancing snowdrifts on needled boughs.  
Far below, brown leaves become a pulp  
of last year's radiance. Another searing ring  
etches an arc through Oak's core.  
Heavens howl and a gust splits an aching limb.  
The sound of the crack vibrates in the wind.

When winter has passed, the sun is tender.  
Green buds sprout—Oak's emerald halo.  
The breeze shifts; silken leaves swish against  
coarse new bark that has grown over winter's wound.

The child returns on sunny days, finds footholds  
in knots, and climbs. Up, up, up to the spot where  
bark, branches, and leaves sing together,  
reach into the wind and intertwine.